

When harry met sally: analysis of communication



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When Harry Met Sally... and Children of a Lesser God

When Harry Met Sally... (1989) is a romantic comedy that breaks out of the norm of the genre with some very real messages about interpersonal communication between both genders and how we handle different situations differently. According to IMDB the plot of the movie goes: in 1977, Harry Burns (Billy Crystal) and Sally Albright (Meg Ryan) graduate from the University of Chicago and share the drive to New York City, where Sally is beginning journalism school and Harry is starting a career. Harry is dating a friend of Sally's, Amanda (Michelle Nicastro). During the drive, they discuss their differing ideas about relationships between men and women. Harry says that "Men and women can't be friends because the sex part always gets in the way." Sally disagrees, claiming that men and women can be strictly friends without sex. During a stop in a diner, Sally is angered when Harry tells her she is attractive; she accuses him of making a pass at her. In New York, they part on unfriendly terms.

Five years later, Harry and Sally find themselves on the same flight. Sally has just started dating a man named Joe (Steven Ford) - who is a neighbor of Harry's - and Harry is engaged to a woman named Helen, which surprises Sally. Harry suggests they become friends, forcing him to qualify his previous "rule" about the impossibility of male-female friendships. Despite Harry's suggestions of exceptions to that rule, they separate, concluding that they will not be friends.

Harry and Sally run into each other again in a bookstore five years later. They have coffee and talk about their previous relationships; Sally and Joe

broke up because she wanted a family and he did not want to marry, and Harry's relationship ended when Helen fell in love with another man. They take a walk and decide to be friends. They have late-night phone conversations, go to dinner, and spend time together. Their dating experiences with others continue to inform their differing approaches to relationships and sex.

During a New Year's Eve party, Harry and Sally find themselves attracted to each other. Though they remain friends, they set each other up with their respective best friends, Marie (Carrie Fisher) and Jess (Bruno Kirby). When the four go to a restaurant, Marie and Jess hit it off; they later become engaged. One night, over the phone, Sally tearfully tells Harry that her ex is getting married. He rushes to her apartment to comfort her, and they unexpectedly have sex, resulting in an awkward moment the next morning as Harry leaves in a state of distress. This creates tension in their relationship. Their friendship cools for three weeks until the two have a heated argument during Jess and Marie's wedding dinner. Following this fight, Harry repeatedly attempts to mend his friendship with Sally, but she feels that they cannot be friends after what happened.

At a New Year's Eve party that year, Sally feels alone without Harry by her side. Harry spends New Year's alone, walking around the city. As Sally decides to leave the party early, Harry appears and declares his love for her. At first, she argues that the only reason he is there is because he is lonely, but he disagrees and lists the many things he realized he loves about her. They make up and kiss and marry three months later.

Harry and Sally communicate in very different ways which is evident from the beginning of their journey to New York. Right from the beginning of their journey, Harry and Sally start to try and get to know each other on their long drive. Sally is obviously a more positive, upbeat and open individual. She maintains this character throughout most of the film during her communications with her friends and with Harry. Her openness with others is very in line with how we view feminine communication. Harry, on the other hand, comes across more like a typical male. He is more closed off, seems detached when he talks about things that should be more emotional, and tries to make light when conversations turn more serious. He also focuses a lot on the more sexual aspect of his relationships than in really developing emotional attachments. Sally thinks of Harry as rude and insensitive while Harry thinks she is obsessive and very naive. When they try to talk to each other, he makes just about everything into a debate, doing report talk instead of rapport talk. He always has to have the last word and isn't afraid to crack jokes and hardly ask questions. After bumping into his ex wife, Harry gets frustrated and yells about the difficulties of divorce while at Jess and Marie's apartment. He then leaves the apartment, and Sally has to approach him to talk about it. When Sally learns that her ex boyfriend is getting married, she reacts with sadness instead of anger and calls Harry to talk about it. Differences can also be seen after Harry and Sally sleep together. The morning after, Sally is happy and approachable while Harry is uncomfortable and distant. This is because usually for women, intimacy leads to sex - and for men, sex leads to intimacy. As the movie goes on, the two start to become friends after each little meet up they have and they no longer resent each other like they did all those years ago. Harry opens up

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about Helen while Sally keeps the details about Joe to herself until the very end. Their communication skills cross due to Harry and Sally both talking to each other on the phone before going to bed. They even do activities together such as shopping or eating out together. By the end of the film, Harry is more descriptive when he talks to Sally such as why he enjoys being with and around her.

Interpersonal communication is seen throughout this film which is defined as interacting with others over the phone and face-to-face to build a relationship. Harry and Sally absolutely experience a relationship of this type. Harry and Sally really start exchanging feelings and personal things to each other after their first get together. Sally learns about Helen and Harry about Joe. They connect and decide to be friends and hang out and talk more often. They try to help each other get dates which leads to the double date with Jess and Marie. They spend a lot of time going out to eat, shopping together, and talking on the phone. They care about how the other is feeling and desire to keep the other happy. Their relationship became one of interpersonal communication after they learned of each other's recent heartbreak. They were both going through the same thing and wanted to spend more time with someone they could relate with.

3. Does S have a need to disclose herself in early confrontations with H? Is this appropriate/inappropriate for the relationship? Is this just a style of communicating? Is it gender based? Explain.

I believe that Sally does feel the need to disclose herself during her early encounters with Harry. She seems easily goaded into divulging intimate

details about her life. I don't think that it was necessarily appropriate or not, just her reaction to Harry's behavior and communication style. Perhaps it speaks of the feminine pressure to please others with whom we communicate with

Sally feels a need to disclose herself in early confrontations with Harry because he is making assumptions about her. When he says that she hasn't had good sex yet she feels a need to tell him that she has had plenty of good sex. This is inappropriate for the relationship because they have just met each other and Harry is dating Sally's friend. I think this style of communicating is gender based because men tend to disclose less in relationships, so the conversation is focused mostly on Sally's life.

Since Harry and Sally's first meeting was off to say the least, the two seemed very incompatible at the very beginning. Harry seemed very rude and blunt when asking such personal questions while Sally was very naive and kept to herself about such personal questions such as Harry asking her about having lots of good sex. With their two personalities clashing at almost all times, it was hard to hold a conversation that didn't end up as a debate or small argument. Hence when Harry told Sally that she was good looking. To Sally it was inappropriate because Harry was dating one of her friends at that time. I feel it was harmless to say the least, but I can understand both sides and why Sally didn't want him to say that she was attractive. Especially when Harry keeps insisting that a man and a woman can't be friends. Which is another reason why I think the two of them always seemed to debate and argue. So Harry could keep his point.

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1. From their very first meeting, there was obvious dialectical tension between Sarah and James. She being a former deaf student and James being a transferred teacher to help teach deaf students to speak. Since Sarah had a tough time growing up with her sister's friends making fun of her, she was afraid to speak and decided that she would surround herself in her own little world of silence. If no one could communicate with her through her world, she wouldn't make an effort to do the same. She was completely happy with this world she created herself...until she met James. He was determined to get to know her, intrigued immediately by her vow of silence and the way she refused to let anyone get close to her. Including her mother he later finds out. They agree to try and get to know one another, both seeming interested in each other's world. After simply their first dance together, you can see an obvious longing in the way Sarah seems to melt in James's embrace. Her happiness in her silence is a lie. Though she's still afraid of the unknown world James is providing for her. When he suggests she move in and let him take care of her, she panics; her deafness being her own personal shield to the outside world. Sarah even says that no one can understand her when James asks what she can hear. In the end, they agree to meet in the middle, not having a complete world of silence or vocally speaking. This dialectical tension connecting them in the end.

2. The pool for Sarah is her own personal haven. Underwater, you're completely submerged and can't hear a thing. Also, considering she swam naked, she is completely exposed and comfortable. She feels one with the pool because in the water, you don't have to speak. Underwater, everything

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is still. It's that silence she craves such as her job as a janitor. Sarah feels safe and herself in the pool. So when James falls into the pool after her, he enters her domain. That was her way of seeing he actually cares about her; that he would enter her safe haven, fully clothed, just to be with her and understand her sense of ease and stillness she loves so much. James also enters the pool again during their separation by himself, staying under the water and even reaching out towards where Sarah was before. The pool is the way James can connect with how Sarah hears and sees the world.

3. The social exchange theory states why people are drawn to each other through substantial benefits. For example, when James first sees Sarah, he is drawn in by her stubbornness and not to mention her beauty. He wants to teach her to speak and is so desperate in anyway to get her to conform. He makes a promise that she doesn't have to ever speak, but breaks it during a heated moment. He apologizes for it and I think that stayed with Sarah for a while. She kept backing away while he kept pressing forward. Eventually, during an argument Sarah finally speaks, letting him hear how awful she sounds when she's screaming that she's a freak before running out on him. Their relationship is very back and forth, fitting the social exchange theory to a T.

4. The social penetration theory is quite obvious the entirety of the film. Right from the get go, Sarah makes it almost impossible for James to even hold a conversation with him; she constantly walks away, sits when he stands up, and outright ignores him. When they finally start to talk it's very basic. They talk about school, work, etc. They don't talk about deeper topics until much later. After James meets Sarah's mother and talks about her past,

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there's a breakthrough. Sarah finally opens up a little to let him know about why she never speaks. They However by the end of the film, they both agree they need to still be their separate selves but meet somewhere in the middle. She admits that she doesn't want to be without him and that she even loves him. And that's a huge step for Sarah. The uncertainty reduction states that each person in a relationship wants and needs certainty. James gives Sarah that when he makes a promise that he won't ask her to speak. However, as I stated before, he asks her to say his name in a heated moment and breaks that certainty for Sarah. Lastly, the existential theory takes place throughout the entirety of the film from Sarah's perspective. She had grown up without anyone listening to her or even trying to understand her. She was made fun of for trying to be "normal" as a child by trying to talk. That scared her. The fact James keeps reminding her that he's there and wants to be with her and take care of her gives her the opportunity to finally open up to a new world. One that isn't so silent but one that's also not too loud.

1) Discuss the dialectical tension of autonomy and connection in James and Sarah's relationship?

There is a lot of tension of autonomy and connection in Sarah and James' relationship. Sarah doesn't have a fulfilling life of her own upon meeting James. She has not reached her potential and is working as a janitor at the school she has attended since the age of 5. James has done many things to build his career, impressing the head of the school with his resume during his job interview at the beginning of the film. This causes problems in their relationship because James wants to provide for Sarah (he gets her to quit <https://assignbuster.com/when-harry-met-sally-analysis-of-communication/>

her job and move in with him) but also wants her to be able to provide for herself (he wants her to learn to speak so she can “ get along in life”). Sarah wants to provide for herself, but fears that she can’t, saying that she is not trained for any job that will bring her fulfillment and security. Towards the end of the film, Sarah starts a new job and intends to go to college with her earnings so that she can reach her full potential. Only then, when they can both provide for themselves separately, will they reach a healthy autonomy and connection.

2) What does the “ pool” represent for Sarah?

I think the pool represents connection. When James asks Sarah what her experience of sound is like, she answers by saying that no one has been inside her head – she could answer his question, but that doesn’t mean he will understand. Underwater is somewhere where that question doesn’t matter. It is where James can have a shared sensory experience with Sarah. At the end of the film, the couple agree to find a place to connect that is between sound and silence, and the pool was the place where that first happened.

3) Now that you have read ch 9, what about this Social exchange theory? Do Sarah and James fit the theory? Explain.

The social exchange theory proposes that relationships are based on exchanges of give and take made to maximize benefits and minimize detriments. I think Sarah and James fit this theory. James is drawn to Sarah because she is unique, beautiful, and someone he sees as needing his help. James is a teacher, so he gets fulfillment from helping others. Sarah is drawn

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to James because he accepts her and can provide security for her. She quits her job and moves in with him so that they can try to have the traditional life he wants. They both experience give and take in the relationship, but because Sarah has not yet reached her full potential in life, the exchanges do not seem balanced. At the end of the film, when James lets go of trying to help Sarah and she chooses her own path in life, the relationship begins a new course of equilibrium.

4) Discuss how Social Penetration theory, uncertainty reduction, and existential theory is evident in the movie (look in the Baxter article).

In the Social Penetration Theory, people must share some of themselves for a relationship to grow while keeping some of themselves separate or the relationship will deteriorate. This is evident in the film after Sarah and James begin living together, because they start to lose their individuality. Sarah leaves a party she is enjoying because James is bored. James does not listen to music anymore because Sarah cannot enjoy it. At the end of the film, Sarah states that they must learn to be separate but equal. In the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, people have an equal desire for predictability and novelty in relationships. In the film, Sarah wants predictability. She lives at the same school she has for almost her entire life, knowing that the staff understand her ways and will not try to change her. When James arrives, he tries to get her to break down her walls and learn to speak. The Existential Theory states that a person's desire to be open with others is balanced with a desire for privacy. Sarah willingly tells James about her sexual encounters quickly after they meet, but she never wants to speak in front of him, even after they have become very close.

1. After watching the movie, it is clear there are many sources of tension on Sarah and James' relationship. The couple grows close intimately, but they are separated in many ways, some more obvious than others. The first and most obvious factor keeping the couple apart is speech. Sarah cannot speak, and while they are able to communicate through sign, she refuses to even attempt to read lips or produce noise. James says he is okay with this, but once or twice he begs her to try to make noise and say his name, which upsets Sarah so much it starts the end of their relationship. Sarah also has some issues of her own which are keeping the couple apart. Her fear of getting hurt like she did when she was younger have made her cold and angry, and it takes James a long time to even have a real conversation with her. When James finally does convince Sarah to go to dinner, and agrees and while dancing, she shows a tender side that lets James know she craves human connection. His persistent questions about her past and why she acts the way she does, why she refuses to admit she has been hurt, why she is "afraid" to speak" coupled with Sarah's complex and silent demeanor are enough to break the couple apart. Towards the end of the movie, Sarah admits she misses him, and the two agree to try again and come to a middle ground between silence and speech.

2. In my opinion, for Sarah, the pool represents solitude and equality. She can be totally by herself, and not have to worry about talking to anyone. Being submerged underwater is silent for anyone, not just her. For a moment, she can feel equal to everyone else. It is the one place where she is not being asked to speak, not being spoken to, and not missing out on noise. Anyone who goes underwater will hear silence, and I would imagine it is

comforting to her to know she is the same as anyone else, even if just for a moment. The pool is her escape.

3. Our book defines the social exchange theory as being drawn to those who are able to offer benefits to you without asking for much in return. This is an interesting idea, and while I think it can be applied to most relationships, I do not think James and Sarah fit in this theory. Sarah and James do not have much in common, and neither has anything very huge or substantial to offer (no great deal of money, no great power, no great control, etc). James does tell Sarah she is the most beautiful and mysterious girl he has ever met, and Sarah tells James he is the nicest man she has ever met. They do offer each other the benefit of compassion, love and companionship. But their relationship is far from perfect. James asks a lot from Sarah. He asks her personal questions she is not comfortable with answering and he asks her to let him help her speak, which she makes very clear is something she never intends to do. Sarah tries James' patience, saying he is only with her because he wants to "fix" her and just wants to be with a blind girl just to say he has like every other "hearing man". Their relationship is strained, and their expectations for each other are strong enough to end the relationship. I do not think the social exchange theory applies to them.

4. The certainty reduction theory says that people always look for what they know - what is certain - in themselves and others. Predictability is favored in relationships. This is true especially for Sarah. She admits she has never let anyone in, and says she has never been hurt by anyone. It is normal for her to have a wall up, and that is what is comfortable for her. She is constantly going back behind the wall and shutting down and shutting people out, like <https://assignbuster.com/when-harry-met-sally-analysis-of-communication/>

she did with James. Sarah does not like change; she would rather be in her silent world that she has known for her entire life. James tries to threaten that silence, and she reacts with anger and hostility. The social penetration theory can definitely be seen in their relationship. When Sarah and James first began to talk, they talked about school, mopping, and jobs. Sarah made it difficult for James to talk about anything “ deep”, and she often abruptly ended conversations. As they got closer and their relationship deepened, they talked about deeper topics, such as Sarah’s dark past and why she pushes people away. Sarah admits she loves James and needs him and feels lonely without him, which is a huge break through since she told him earlier she never lets anyone in.