He’s Just Not That Into You: Interpersonal Communication Review

SPEECH 228

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*He’s Just Not That Into You*, released early 2009, follows nine people trying to overcome the challenges of reading human behavior while in relationships. The movie is based off the book of articles, *He’s Just Not That Into You* by Greg Behrendt and Liz Tuccillo. Real women sent in letters asking for relational advice about their situation in the book. The movie combines the major themes of men to avoid and women you do not want to be in the nine characters. All nine people’s lives intertwine with one another either by being a couple, friend, or friend of a friend.

Gigi cannot read signals from any of the men she dates, in her pursuit to find Mr. Right and a happy ending, but finally gets advice from Alex is a bar owner who is sweet but cynical of love. Janine and Ben are the loving married couple, until Ben meets Anna in a check out line. Anna and Ben have an affair while Connor Barry is still trying to pursue her. Neil has been dating Beth for seven years when she finally dumps him because she knows that he will never want to be married. Mary is an advertising agent, trying to find love on line.

*He’s Just Not That Into You* (*HJNTIY*) portrays the story of nine people seeking true love, and in their search they demonstrate the different stages of building and maintaining a relationship. I will be specifically talking about Gigi and her movement up and down the Model of Relational Development from the class textbook (Beebe & Beebe, p. 291 Fig. 10.1). The Social Exchange theory can be applied to Gigi’s movement up and down the Relational Development scale. I will also talk about some of the communication skills Gigi learns and how she applies that to communicate in her relationships better while she searches for a happy
ending. Finally, there are two lessons learned from the movie when it comes to using communication in relationships.

“Relational development occurs in stages, but is affected by and affects our interpersonal communication” (Beebe & Beebe, p. 290). In order for me to explain how the Gigi moves through the stages, a little background information is needed. The escalation stages include: preinteraction awareness (stranger), acquaintance, exploration (friend), intensification (close friend), and intimacy (best friend/lover/spouse). The de-escalation stages include: turmoil or stagnation (best friend/lover/spouse), deintensification (close friend), individualization (friend), separation (acquaintance) and post-separation effects (stranger). Each time you move progress from a stage, you have a turning point, which are, “specific events or interactions that that are associated with positive or negative changes in a relationship” (Beebe & Beebe, p. 290). Every time your relationship escalates, more intimate information is shared, time spent together, and the physical contact increases. The same things happen when de-escalating, except the amount time, contact and information shared decrease. Throughout the movie these stages can be seen in the different relationships Gigi has.

Gigi, a hopeless romantic in search of Mr. Right, has a problem with effectively using interpersonal communication to escalate on the Relational Development model. She normally skips the preinteraction stage and enters the acquaintance stage by being set up on blind dates. The blind dates do not allow her to, “form an initial impression through passive strategy” (Beebe & Beebe, p. 292.)
She also breezes through the introductory and casual banter sub-stages, by sharing personal information normally included in the next stage, exploration. In one scene, she is about to go on a blind date and mentions to her friend Alex, “I like a little time before a blind date. Prepare myself mentally, remind myself to not tell the story about my molars.” Social norm is to not share stories about your teeth on the first date, especially if you have never met the person. Gigi can only reach the top level, intimacy, with friends.

Gigi reaches and maintains the intimacy level with her friend Janine. Janine and Gigi work together at a spice company, and talk to each other about everything. Gigi even trusts Janine enough to be set up on a blind date. There is a free flow of information between them about their relationships with their husband or current interest. Janine goes with Gigi to a bar for a speed date event and feels comfortable enough to say, “please do not cyber stalk him.” Only friends with an understanding of one another can give out harsh advice and have the other friend not take offense. Gigi is there for Janine in return, when Janine shares that her husband had an affair and admits that they never have sex anymore. Both pieces of information are very personal, but Janine trusts Gigi enough to disclose that. A rare friend is there in times of triumph and crisis, which is the type of relationship, the two have.

Gigi goes through multiple stages of escalation and de-escalation with Alex. Now, Alex is a new friend to Gigi, but she goes to him for almost all her relationship advice and trusts him enough to actually follow it. Before Gigi met Alex, she never followed anyone’s advice, so it shows the amount of trust that she places in his
guidance. At first, Gigi and Alex are only friends because she wants advice, which is considered to be in the acquaintance stage, but they quickly move to the exploration stage when they meet for drinks. Their conversations are brutally honest and they spend a lot of time together either calling or at the bar. When Alex invites Gigi to a party of his, she jumps to conclusions about him liking her, because of signs that she’s seen. “Like it was good to hear from me, you talked to me even when you were with a girl, and I felt something,” Gigi tells Alex were some of the signs. Gigi misreads those as an invitation to proceed to a romantic intimate level. Their friendship therefore, goes from intensification to post-separation effects stage in a matter of minutes. Alex denies any feelings and they non-verbally agree to just cut off the relationship when Gigi storms out, which is part of the separation stage. Alex later realizes that she is the one for him and shows up at her door, and her response to his apologies, is “...If a guy really like you he will make it happen, no matter what. ... I am the rule. I have to stop thinking that every guy will change.” Gigi sees that in order to be in a relationship there has to be an understanding of that person. You have to get to know that person, if you want to maintain a relationship.

Gigi struggles with her interpersonal communication not only in the escalation stages but also in the de-escalation stages, especially in post-separation. A week after a date with Connor, she stops by this bar only to see if she can “accidentally” run into him. She befriends the bartender Alex, and gets some of the best advice she can about relationships like, “You are the rule, not the exception.” He meant, she may hear stories from her friends about how they knew someone who dated an idiot guy just like hers, and ended up happily ever after, but they were the
exception and she is the rule. Gigi then goes through some of her past relationships with her friends, like Chad, the drummer who lived in a storage space and only used her for rides, yet she continued to stalk him for a whole year. And then there was Don, who used to break up with her every Friday, so he could have his weekends free, but she continued to take him back because she was convinced that he was the one and even referred to him as her husband to strangers. Gigi has trouble letting go of the guys she dates, because she feels like she is close with them, sharing too much information to quickly. And she has this idea that he might be Mr. Right, which she desperately wants to find.

The social exchange theory helps explain why Gigi moves up and down the Relational Development model. Gigi has managed to think that every guy she meets might be Mr. Right, and she does not want to give up on him, just because he did not call. The Social Exchange theory according to the book states that, “people seek the greatest amount of reward with the least amount of cost” (Beebe & Beebe, p. 296). So Gigi does not follow the social exchange exactly, because she has a lot more emotional costs than rewards when it comes to dating. She lives more by the forecasted rewards and costs, thinking that by waiting for the guy to call, and obsessing over the relationship and dating idiot men it will eventually pay off and lead her to Mr. Right. In her relationship with Alex, she sees immediate rewards from the friendship though the brutally honest dating advice he gives her. Alex yells at Gigi for dissecting every detail and jumping to conclusions about stuff that men do, but she responds with, “You my not get hurt or make an ass of yourself… but you don’t fall in love that way either.” To Gigi, falling in love is worth any heartache,
dating a guy who will not call back, or getting turned down when you are looking for your happy ending. She moves around on the Relational Development scale because she thinks that putting herself out there a lot will help her find love. Comparing the rewards and costs of a relationship, the very definition of the Social Exchange theory, is what Gigi does when analyzing and attempting different relationships to find the love of her life and live happily ever after.

Throughout *HJNTIY*, there are important lessons learned about how to use interpersonal communication effectively in romantic relationships. Gigi is talking to Janine and Beth about being the rule, she mentions, “That most men who cheat on you, don’t really care about you.” Deception within a relationship can come in many different forms. A baldfaced lie, “outright falsification of information intended to deceive the listener,” is like when your significant other lies about cheating on you (Beebe & Beebe, p. 326). The reason behind the lies could a number of reasons like avoid loss of resource, the resource being you or just to protect their self-image. The movie shows the importance of using truthful communication, for it could harm or lead to de-escalation of a relationship.

Another important communication lesson learned is through the relationship between Beth and Neil, which is to effectively express your wants to your significant other. Beth wants to get married, but does not bring it up because she says; “I didn’t want to seem demanding or seem clingy or psycho. So I haven’t asked you.” She did not want Neil to reject her because of her self-disclosure of wanting to be married. You have to use words to clearly communicate with your
significant other. “We literally talk a relationship into being. It is through our talk that we establish our relationships with other people” (Beebe & Beebe, p. 166). If we create relationships through talk, then we must continue to effectively use words to maintain that relationship.

Gigi learns and applies different communication skills throughout the movie. One thing Gigi learns, is to listen and use that information when pursuing a relationship. Alex tries to teach her that if a guy is not calling then he never will call, and you should move on. The silence from the other person is an indicator of disinterest in pursuing a relationship with her. In one scene where she met a guy at the bar, she applies the listening skill when he is leaving. He says he is going to call, but after giving her his card, he says look forward to hearing from you. Gigi confronts him and says let's leave it as you will call me. She applied Alex's advice that if he wants to date her, he'll call. Gigi also learns that when a guy says he'll be out of town and therefore out of reach for a few days, he is not interested. Unless the guy is going to the Amazon forest, there are plenty of ways to communicate, whether it is via phone, text, or email. While on a date she gets told this and so she hangs out in the bathroom for a while to make the guy sweat. At the end of the date she'll be able to walk away with out any expectations. One of the last lessons Gigi learns is the importance of signals both verbal and non-verbal. Just because a guy calls you or says it was nice talking to you, does not mean he is in love or wants to date you. Different non-verbal signals that she has trouble with are buying another round of drinks to keep the date going longer, corny pick-up lines, and eye contact. When at Alex’s party she keeps making eye contact with him and she takes it as an ‘I am into
you signal’ from Alex. While Gigi learns a lot of different advice for dating, she continues to be willing to be hurt and put herself out there so she can find her happy ending.

In conclusion, Gigi demonstrates the different stages of the Relational Development model through her dating adventures. Along the way she learns some different lessons from Alex and the people around her on how to communicate in your relationships. Gigi defies the Social Exchange theory, by being willing to put her self out there and get hurt in order to find true love. From the final words of Gigi herself,

Sometimes we’re so focused on finding our happy ending, we don’t learn how to read the signs, how to tell the ones who want us from the ones who don’t. ... Or maybe the happy ending is this, knowing that through all the unreturned phone calls and broken hearts, through the blunders and broken hearts, and through all the pain and embarrassment you never ever gave up hope.