

# Social isolation and breakdown in communication

Sociology



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Social isolation and the breakdown of communication are themes that are evident throughout the story, 'Mr. Proudham and Mr. Sleight'. The author portrays them right from the beginning by deliberately setting the story in a village along the coast which would generally be isolated in the harsh, chilling weather. 'I had chosen to come here at the bleakest time of year... mainly because nobody would trouble me.' The narrator intentionally seeks this isolation to get some work done, but as we will see later with Mr. Proudham and Mr. Sleight this social isolation is not a good thing.

And although the narrator may be seeking this now it is in contrast of the longing of London she will feel later. In the same way, 'Indian Camp', is set in an Indian village which is cut away from the outside world. People need to use boats in order to get there. The Indian village is cut away from doctors and any medical help. This breakdown in communication due to the isolation the Indians live in, results in a great deal of physical pain when someone needs medical attention.

In 'Mr. Proudham and Mr Sleight' the bleak language used to describe the weather and everything else in the story sets into motion the sad story it is going to be. The sky was gunmetal grey. ' The adjective used is rather a violent one to associate the sky with a gun. It creates the impression that people have fled from the violent weather and left the place in isolation. It casts a shadow on the picture created in the mind of the reader to prepare them for a disturbed story. In 'Mr. Proudham and Mr Sleight' the narrator herself 'had no telephone,' to deliberately cut herself off from her friends and family, unaware at this moment of the loneliness she is going to feel later.

It seems that even having something as little as a telephone repairs communication and social isolation where one can hear and talk to other people. It seems that Mr. Proudham and Sleight also deliberately cut themselves off from the outside world for they do not have a 'television or wireless set'. This indicates that they do not know what is happening around the world. They do not have the comfort of listening or watching other people communicating to them. They are ignorant of what is going on around them, again showing their isolation and breakdown of communication as if they are on another planet.

When the narrator is first introduced to Mr. Proudham and Mr. Sleight the lack of communication on Mr. Sleight's part is revealed when the narrator tells us he 'rarely spoke'. There are further references to his lack of communication, and at one point in the story the narrator tells us that his 'mouth indicated that he might wish to' talk. This suggests that he has lived in social isolation with Mr. Proudham for so long that he has lost the need for speech, but nodding and gesturing instead. However later on in the story both Mr.

Proudham and Sleight are heard arguing, so maybe it is just that he does not know how to address strangers or other people. The narrator comments on how 'there might have been no one at all in the flat below. ' This suggests that Mr. Proudham and Sleight did not even talk among themselves as friends or people who live together. It seems that both men, although having lived together for 20 years still hold a barrier to socialising even among themselves. The narrator assumes that Mr. Sleight is: 'Unable to cope with the outside world by himself'.

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This stresses the social isolation and the breakdown of communication of Mr. Sleight. He never goes out by himself and Mr Proudham even has to go to the shops for him, maybe indicating that he cannot even shop for simple groceries by himself. He is too dependant on Mr. Proudham. In 'Gala Land' Mr. Proudham on two occasions says he goes there to 'pass the time' when Mr. Sleight is at the clinic. This suggests that Mr. Proudham does not have any other friends or family that he can spend his time with and instead has to spend his time in that 'sad, shabby place'.

This creates a sense of sympathy for this old man who has no one apart from Mr. Sleight. Similarly Mr. Proudham tells us that Mr Sleight 'knows no one here', and that he has no friends or relatives, 'He has none. There is no one. ' The short sentence structure and the way he repeats the same sentence in a different way emphasises how abandoned and isolated the pair are. The bluntness of the sentences shows that Mr. Proudham is not too bothered at not having friends or family, but his repetition may suggest that deeply he does actually care. The narrator goes on to say how lonely the men are 'who never had a visitor'.

Again showing how isolated and lonely they are. For the first time since she came to the village the narrator realises how much she misses London, '... I felt lonely here, I missed London... always someone to call on... full of people. ' This demonstrates how much we really need people and how we feel lonely and depressed without them to talk to. Communicating and socialising is a big thing of every day life, and without it we would go crazy. Maybe both men want these things, but unlike the narrator they have no one to turn to. In the end Mr. Proudham and Mr.

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Sleights social isolation and breakdown in communication leads to their deaths. '... , whose bodies were found in a gas-filled room. ' This is because as the narrator says they were 'so isolated and dependent. ' Mr Proudham tried to care for the mad Mr. Sleight by himself without any help so that they ended up being gassed to death. In the same way we could say that in, 'Indian Camp', the breakdown of communication leads to the death of the Indian father. He may have killed himself thinking from his wife's screams that she and the baby were dying, and rather than live without them he would rather die.