

# Essay on no strings attached communication breakdown

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



## **Self-concept**

Self-concept can be defined as the way in which we perceive our selves, or identities. Adam's father, Alvin is obsessed with the idea that he is still a young, virile man, as he constantly dates younger women and embraces attention for the long-past television show that made him a minor celebrity. He also works out constantly in order to maintain this perception of youth. He does all of these things to further his self-concept, which is that of the kind of popular, womanizing star he presumably was in his youth. He is the recipient of conditioning surrounded by his environment (Hollywood) that states he must remain youthful, in shape, and good-looking, and must entertain younger women.

## **Self-esteem**

Self-esteem revolves around a person's perception of themselves or their worth. Adam directly ties his self-esteem to the idea of getting regular sex; he is constantly down on himself because he perceives his inability to get a girlfriend, or to get Emma to commit to him, as a failing on his part. He often perceives himself as an inadequate lover, due to his ex-girlfriend dating his father, and fears that he is not worth starting a relationship with. All of these factors contribute to his poor self-esteem, which carries through the film. It is interesting that he never learns to necessarily love himself for himself, but instead continues to define his self-esteem and self-worth by reciprocation of love for him by Emma.

## **We like people who like us (reciprocal liking)**

With reciprocal liking, people tend to like people on the basis of those people liking them back. This phenomenon is part of what fuels the initial attraction and sexual relationship that Adam and Emma embark upon. Adam likes Emma and vice versa because of their own liking of each other, not necessarily because they have a lot in common. While Adam and Emma have a good time together, it is always indicated that they are from different worlds - Emma is a fast-paced, career-oriented medical student and Adam works in television, hoping to be a writer. Though they do tend to vaguely like spending time together, this affection does not come about through similarities but through the act of liking each others' company.

## **Personal space**

The concept of personal space deals directly with our need to keep unfamiliar people or strangers at various levels of physical distance from ourselves. Emma has a problem with personal space in the beginning of their affair, as she is reticent to snuggle or show casual displays of affection in public. Over the course of the film, she slowly starts to allow Adam further into her personal space, indicating her gradual romantic feelings for him. However, at one point Emma recognizes the cuddling as an indicator of her feelings and considers it a violation of personal space once more. Emma's perception of her personal space indicates to the audience just how far she is falling for Adam, despite her conscious decision to not make their relationship emotional.

## **Chronemics (communicative significance of time)**

Chronemics is defined as the consideration or significance of time indicated by a person through their actions. This particular method of nonverbal communication is used as a significant barrier for Adam and Emma as they progress through their relationship in the film. Emma, as a medical student, places a premium on free time (45 seconds for sex, etc.), and is very monochronic (accustomed to short-term relationships, must do one thing at a time). Adam has a much more lax consideration of time, but strengthens it to suit Emma's more scheduled lifestyle - this is indicated by when he creates an itinerary for fun on their first date. By making these changes to suit greater responsibility and structure, he makes himself more accommodating to her and appears more charming.

## **Conflict (i. e., incompatible goals)**

Conflict in communication is the confluence and interaction of people with incompatible goals; conflict arises when these goals are not sympathetic with each other. Adam has a much greater need to be in a relationship, while Emma simply wants to be able to have casual sex. Emma's aloofness toward Adam perplexes him and throws him in conflict, as he wants to woo her and engage in a romantic relationship. Emma, with her constant deflecting and questioning of Adam's motives, reveals that she really wants to maintain her emotional distance. The conducting of this relationship despite different goals is what creates conflict both between them and within the film.

## **Contempt**

The emotion of contempt is exemplified as a distinct anger and disgust for a person, object or idea. This is shown in the film through the character of Sam, Emma's friend at the hospital, who confronts Adam about his awkwardness about their flirting. During this conversation, Sam stereotypes Emma as a woman who needs someone to "take care of her," and stereotypes Adam as an irresponsible slacker who will not be chosen by Emma. Because of this simplification of guys like Adam and women like Emma, he displays contempt for both of them, as he sees himself as above them in status and personhood. Sam believes he is better than Adam because he is richer and more self-made, and better than Emma because he is meant to be the one to "take care of" her.

## **Stereotyping**

Stereotyping is the concept of making generalizations about certain types of people, based on gender, race, economic status, and overall personality, and characterizing everyone like that to have certain characteristics. This is done, as previously mentioned, with Sam towards Adam and Emma, but happens elsewhere in the film as well. Adam, after bringing over cupcakes and noticing that Emma and her roommates are all moody, correctly assumes that they are all on the same cycle. This is a stereotype of women that stipulates that when they are on their period, they are all extremely irritable and moody, and that all women get in the same cycle when they are in close proximity. Stereotypes are used in the film to make assumptions

about people in order to gain access into routes of communication, while still being somewhat offensive.

## **Disconfirming message**

Disconfirming messages are methods of verbal and nonverbal communication in which people show a distaste or lack of respect for the other person talking to them. After Adam and Emma cuddle with clothes on and Emma realizes this, Emma is dispassionate and disconfirming to Adam, feeling that their relationship is getting far too close. She turns away from him and displays nonverbal indifference when she talks to him. By maintaining a stony expression and looking straight ahead and not at him, she is indicating with her language and physicality that she is displeased with what is going on, and conflicted. She also attempts to deflect his attempts at speaking about emotional issues frequently by changing the subject, in instances of other disconfirming messages.

## **Social penetration theory**

According to social penetration theory, as a relationship develops, individuals increase their interactions and communication from a more shallow perspective to more intimate levels. This is, effectively, the narrative crux of the film - Adam and Emma start out the film as friends who have sex, and slowly grow towards a more mutual, reciprocating kind of respect. They are very casual to each other at first, considering their interactions very shallow and without meaning, but as Adam falls for Emma and vice versa, their meetings take on more meaning. They start to self-disclose a bit more, and

their increased closeness on both physical and emotional levels indicate greater social penetration.

## **Computer-mediated communication**

Computer-mediated communication deals greatly with the communication of thoughts and feelings through the use of networked computers; in this film set in the modern day, smartphones are used as an analogue for computers. Frequent calls and text messages are the subject of other conversations and plot points, as well as an important way to further their relationship. Adam talks to his friends after his first sexual encounter with Emma about what to text back after she just texts " Hi." Adam and Emma's persistent messaging to each other soliciting sex or insulting Emma's other sexual prospects are also part of this computer-mediated communication; their inability to answer their phones when they are fighting also shows their desire to be away from the other person - as shown when Adam renames Emma's contact to " Do Not Call Her."

## **Media richness**

Similar to computer-mediated communication, media richness discusses the capability of a medium to imbue all the nuances of communication to its target. In the case of cell phones, this is shown to be frequently not the case. Before he starts sleeping with Emma, Adam attempts to call all of the girls in his phone to solicit sex; it does not work, in part due to the decidedly limited means by which he can actually flirt with these girls given that he can only use his voice and his words. It is implied in this montage scene that, if he were actively flirting with them, he would have much better luck. The phone

is shown to be inadequate at conveying the richness of his comeons to the girls he is soliciting.

### **Helpers help by getting the upset person to tell his/her story**

Communication helpers are other people who facilitate communication about innermost feelings and anxieties, which is evidenced by the many "best friend" characters that appear in the film. Eli and Wallace, Adam's friends, constantly talk to him to get him to confide in them. He tells them about his problems with Emma and they help by offering him advice, though often not objectively helpful in the process. Eli and Wallace constantly tell him to either let Emma go if she is not willing to commit, and help Adam articulate what he is feeling about his own situation. Emma's own best friends, Shira and Patrice, also have the same effect, as they provide sounding boards for her to actively go over her thoughts.

### **Low person-centered messages are invalidating and do not consider the thoughts/feelings of the target**

Person-centered messages have varying degrees of effectiveness in validating someone's thoughts or feelings; low person-centered messages, in particular, work to discourage the other person from thinking their perspective has validity. This is exemplified in the scene in the beginning, with Adam and Emma as kids, when Emma invalidates Adam's statement that he is "pretty good at archery," by implying it is useless through her statement that it is only useful if he had a time machine. This shows just how much effort she is taking to be distant from him and not engage, mostly due to the pressure surrounding them at camp to make out and have sex.



## **Hostile work environment**

A hostile work environment is one that expressly devalues and dehumanizes a person, which can be accomplished in many ways. Adam's job as an assistant could be considered hostile, as he is constantly belittled and made to feel invalidated, though he is much stronger as a writer. During the one scene in the film where his coworkers (at a Glee-like show) show affection for him, it is only because his famous father shows up and sings a song for him. Ostensibly, this makes the birthday surprise all about his father and not him, leaving him frustrated enough that he punches a wall. This hostile work environment is not nearly as severe as many others, but it still provides a stressful, negative impact on his life (at least until he becomes a staff writer, changing to a more favorable and more rewarding job).

## **Works Cited**

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