

It Still Isn't Over: *The Notebook* in the Perspective of Relational Communication

Marissa Jane Carr

Department of Communication, Messiah University

COMM 313: Relational Communication

Dr. Anthony Eseke

December 5, 2024

Nick Cassavetes' *The Notebook* is about the love story between Allie Hamilton and Noah Calhoun. They met at a carnival in the 1940's in Seabrook, South Carolina, where Noah lives and where Allie was visiting for the summer. This movie spans through the journey of a majority of their love story, from their initial meeting at the carnival to their final breaths in the hospital. This movie explores many concepts of relational communication, which is why I chose to write this paper as an analysis of the formation of Noah and Allie's relationship through the lens of relational communication.

As stated above, the movie opens with a scene of a carnival in which both Noah and Allie are in attendance. The moment Noah sees Allie, he is instantly drawn to her. This is an example of attraction, which is defined as feelings of pull or push towards someone who is appealing to you. The type of attraction that Noah experiences towards Allie is physical, because he took one look at her and, based on her physical appearance, decided that he needed to ask her out on a date. She rejected his persistent date offers, but they finally had an informal date when their friends set them up on a double date. This double date is set at the movie theater, and after the date the two decide to leave their friends and go on a walk together. On this walk, they have a lot of positive disclosure. This means that they were revealing a lot about themselves to each other in a way to get to know each other more. This can be explained by the social penetration theory, because as Noah and Allie got to know each other more during the movie date and during their walk, they disclosed even more information to each other. For example, Allie willingly tells Noah about what she wants to do with her future, and Noah asks about Allie's hobbies and she shares that she enjoys painting. After this evening, Noah and Allie formed such a bond that they became inseparable and they began dating.

One of the main plot lines of the movie is that Noah and Allie have an improbable romance. This is because of the fact that she is a city girl and he is a country boy. Allie comes from a very rich and pretentious family, while Noah doesn't even have two dimes to rub together. Allie's family very much values their identity in society, and they feel that Allie dating a poor country boy will drag them down in the rich societal views. This can be referred to as the social identity theory. This means that how people feel about themselves is linked to their membership in social groups, meaning that Allie's family feels good about themselves because of their social status. Their worries that Noah will weigh them down is related to the social identity theory because if they are no longer accepted in their social group due to their daughter dating a poor boy, then they will in turn lose their own identity, feel bad about themselves, and resent Noah and Allie for the rest of their relationship. An example of this is when Noah meets Allie's parents, at a brunch with Allie's family and friends. Allie's parents ask Noah how much money he makes and he responds by saying forty cents an hour. Allie's parents ignored this comment and just moved onto the next conversation because they did not like the idea of their daughter's boyfriend only making 40 cents an hour, and they were embarrassed that their friends found this out as well.

One night, Noah drives Allie to one of his favorite places; an old unfinished house. He brings Allie inside, and tells her that one day he is going to buy it and fix it up. During this discussion, Allie shares that she wants him to paint the house white, with blue shutters, with a wrap-around porch, and a room overlooking the water that she can paint in. After this positive disclosure about their future together, Allie and Noah decide that they want to have sexual intercourse. They begin to get undressed when Allie expresses that she is hesitant and nervous. Noah then tells Allie that he loves her and she returns that love, and they are ready to engage in

sexual intercourse. The sexual attitude that is shown through this encounter is relational, as Noah and Allie were intending to have sexual intercourse as a way to express their love and increase their intimacy with each other. This sexual encounter is also an example of a turning point in their relationship. A turning point is an event that happens in the relationship, either positive or negative, that affects the course of the relationship. This sexual encounter was a positive turning point, because they expressed that they deeply trusted one another and wanted to take the next step in their relationship due to the commitment they had with each other. Noah and Allie did not end up engaging in sexual intercourse because Noah's friend ran in the house and informed them that Allie's parents had sent cops all around the town to look for her because she was missing at two in the morning.

Allie and Noah's relationship experienced typical coming together stages. These are the stages that most couples experience as they are forming a relationship. These stages include initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. The relationship was initiated when Noah showed interest in Allie and he asked her out multiple times, then their friends ended up setting them up on a double date. They experimented with their relationship after the movie theater date, when they went on a walk and shared a lot of information about each other. Their relationship intensified as they began to see each other daily and disclose more information to each other. They were beginning the integration stages, as they were talking about their future together with the old house, they had introduced each other to their families, and they were considering becoming sexually intimate. At this point the relationship had not reached the bonding stage, as that means getting married or having a legal commitment to the other person in the relationship.

When Noah brings Allie back home, she gets in a lot of trouble. Her parents tell her that she is no longer allowed to see Noah. Her mom specifically calls Noah trash and says that he is not for her because he is a laborer and woodworker. This is another example of the social identity theory, because Allie's mom does not want Allie to be with him because of his occupation weighing down their social status as a family. When Allie runs out of the house to find Noah, he is about to leave. Noah tries to break up with Allie because he says that is what is best for her but Allie does not want to. They then fight about this, which leads to their break up and Noah angrily driving away. With Allie and Noah's breakup, they did not experience the typical coming apart stages. These are stages that couples typically experience before the termination of their relationship. The stages include differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating, avoiding, and terminating. Noah and Allie went from having a very intimate positive moment to breaking up in the span of an hour, therefore not experiencing any of the typical stages except for termination.

The morning after the breakup, Allie wakes up with a lot of regret. She wants to get back together with Noah, but her mom informs her they are going back to New York early. This leaves Allie distraught at the thought that she may never see Noah again. Allie tries to find Noah, but instead finds his friend and tells his friend that she is leaving and she wants Noah to know that she loves him. Noah is also having regrets, and after hearing what Allie had to say from his friend, he decided to write her letters. Noah mailed one letter a day to Allie's house for a year, 365 letters. Unfortunately, Allie's mom intercepted all of these letters before Allie got a hold of them, so she did not know they existed. This led Noah to assume that Allie was not interested in him, so he gave up on the idea of her and decided to enlist in the army.

Three years have now passed, and Noah returns home from the Army, and Allie becomes a nurse's aide in New York City. She treats a patient who asks her out, named Lon. She decides

to go out with him, and they fall in love. Lon was more appealing to Allie's family, because he came from old Southern money. This is another example of the social identity family, as Allie's family preferred the idea of their daughter with Lon versus Noah because Allie dating Lon made the family's image more appealing. Eventually, Lon proposes and Allie accepts. However, while engaged to Lon, Allie still can't help but think of Noah. Back in Seabrook, Noah's dad buys him the house he wanted to fix up and Noah dedicates all his time to making this house perfect; for Allie, that is. One day, Noah saw Allie in Charleston, ran after her, then discovered that she was engaged through seeing her in the window with Lon. It was after this when he convinced himself that if he restored the old house, then somehow, Allie would come back to him. Noah then builds Allie's dream house, all the way down to the blue shutters. When the house is concluded a few years later, the paper comes by to take a picture of Noah to put in the paper. When shopping for a wedding dress, Allie sees this newspaper, and feels an urge to go see Noah. Allie then tells Lon she needs to go on a vacation to take care of a few things, and she heads to Seabrook to see Noah and the house.

Allie shows up in Noah's driveway, which comes as a shock to Noah. She told him that she wanted to come and see if he was okay. She then tells him about Lon and they talk about their summer romance all those years ago while they are sharing dinner. They had a good day together catching up, and Noah expresses that she should come back in the morning because he has something to show her.

In the morning, Noah takes her out on his rowboat. On the rowboat, Allie tells Noah about how beautiful the house is, as it starts to downpour. When they get out of the boat, Allie starts to yell at Noah. She asks why he didn't write to her, and that it wasn't over for her, and she has been waiting for him all this time but now it's too late. Noah reveals that he wrote to her

everyday for a year. Allie is shocked by this information, as Noah continues to say that it wasn't over, and it still isn't over, as he grabs Allie and kisses her. They run back to the house and engage in sexual intercourse multiple times. This sexual encounter is an example of infidelity. Allie emotionally and sexually cheated on Lon with Noah, when she expressed to him that she still might love him, and when they proceeded to have sexual intercourse multiple times. Starting a relationship with someone else as you are committing infidelity is not the best way to start a relationship, and this is how Allie and Noah's second go at their relationship began, with Allie still having lingering feelings about another man. Her continuing lingering feelings about Lon will cause problems for them later in the relationship, but we aren't there yet. Allie spends the night with Noah, and in the morning she wakes up to directions showing her to the painting room Noah made for her. This gesture makes Allie happy, as she paints in bliss for some time until she sees her mom pull into Noah's driveway.

Allie and her mom go on a drive, where Allie expresses that she thinks her mom ruined her life. Her mom takes accountability for this, and gives Allie the pile of letters that Noah sent her all those years ago. Allie's mom drops Allie back off at Noah's, then they begin to have a heated discussion about their next steps that turns into a full blown fight. Allie doesn't know what she wants, as she calls the past few days that they had irresponsible. Noah then gets very upset, and claims that Allie only wants Lon for his money. This is an example of a hurtful message, specifically accusation because Noah is accusing Allie of only dating Lon because he has money. They then tell each other they hate each other. Allie responded to the hurtful statement by saying she hates Noah because he said that. This is an active verbal response, as she directly and aggressively confronted him because what he said was hurtful. This statement is an example of the tactic regarding bringing third parties into their argument, which is what Noah

does when he brings up Lon. Although Lon does play a role in this problem, Noah and Allie should be able to solve the problems based on their feelings, without bringing Lon into it.

Noah hollers out to Allie to just stay with him, and she doesn't understand why because they are already fighting. Noah replies by telling her that this is what they do, they fight, and that he is not afraid to hurt her feelings. He reveals that their relationship is not going to be easy, it is going to be very hard, and they will have to work at it everyday but he is willing to do that because he wants her. Noah tells Allie that she should only be focused on what she wants, and she replies by saying that she has to go. She goes back to the hotel to talk to Lon, but on the way there reads Noah's letters.

During this conflict, Noah takes on the collaborating conflict style. A collaborating conflict style occurs when someone wants to work directly and cooperatively to solve a problem. This type of conflict style usually results in negotiation and problem solving. Noah utilizes the collaborating conflict style because when fighting with Allie, he is being very direct with her and telling her how he feels and that he is not afraid to hurt her. However, he does want to cooperate with her and solve their problems together because all he wants is her. Noah's goal is to integrate what they both want and need in the relationship to make it last forever, which is what his aim is when he is using the collaborative conflict style.

Their relationship also brings up questions about who has more power in the relationship. Based on the six principles of power, it can be concluded that Allie has more power than Noah in the relationship. Principle 4 is "Power as having less to lose". This means that the person who has less to lose in the relationship has greater power. If Allie ended up losing Noah, then she wouldn't be completely alone because she still has Lon. This gives Allie a sense of power when trying to choose which man to spend her life with. There is also principle 6, which is "Power as a

prerogative”. This means that the partner with more power makes and breaks the rules in the relationship. One quote that Noah says in the movie that stood out to me supporting this is “So you’re gonna sleep with me then run back to your husband?”. This is an example of Allie having the power to make rules in the relationship, where she is allowed to sleep with Noah then leave him like it didn’t matter to go back to Lon.

Allie tells Lon everything, but Lon still loves her and wants her. This leads Allie to have to decide for herself; does she want Noah or Lon? Allie knows that she should be with Lon, but her heart makes another choice. The movie cuts to a scene with Allie showing up in Noah’s driveway, ready to start her life with him.

The Notebook is a great example of how concepts relating to relational communication are integrated into media. The movie explores multiple relational communication subjects, such as how Allie and Noah go through the coming together stages, how Noah and Allie handle disagreements, and how deeply they truly love each other. This movie is a great demonstration of what a realistic relationship may look like, which is why it aligns with so many of the topics discussed in relational communication.

References

Cassavetes, N. (Director). (2004). *The Notebook* [Film].

Guerrero, L. K., Andersen, P. A., & Afifi, W. A. (2017). *Close Encounters: Communication in Relationships*. SAGE Publications.