The Tipping Point

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM GLADWELL

Malcolm Gladwell was born in England and grew up in Canada. He studied history at the University of Toronto, and afterwards went to work for the conservative magazine *The American Spectator* in Indiana. By the late 1980s, Gladwell had risen to begin covering science and business news for the *Washington Post*, and gradually found that he excelled at simplifying complex information for a lay-audience. Gladwell began writing for the *New Yorker* in 1996, and has stayed there ever since. He rose to success after penning a *New Yorker* article called "The Tipping Point," the basis for his first book. After publishing *The Tipping Point* in 2000, Gladwell became a popular guest speaker for businesses, think tanks, and universities. Since 2000, he's published four successful books, including *Outliers* (2008) and, mostly recently, *David and Goliath* (2013). He continues to write for the *New Yorker* and appear as a guest speaker around the world.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Gladwell's book discusses many important historical events, including the American Revolution of the mid-1770s, the North American HIV epidemic of the 1980s, and the shooting epidemic of the late 90s (which has continued into the 2010s). During the HIV epidemic, the HIV virus spread to millions of people, primarily due to sexual intercourse and intravenous needle use. As Gladwell demonstrates in his book, the epidemic was caused largely by a small but disproportionately influential group of people who shared a large number of needles or had a large number of sexual partners. The shooting epidemic in the United States, Gladwell argues, truly began with the infamous Columbine shooting of 1999. Two students at Columbine High School used guns and bombs to murder 13 other people. The brutal shooting, Gladwell argues, has inspired other people to use guns and other deadly weapons to kill people in public settings—a horrific problem that continues to claim innocent lives 17 years later.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Tipping Point has been compared to several other works of "pop sociology" published between the 90s and the 2010s—and as with the authors of these other books, Gladwell has been alternately praised for making complex sociology and psychology accessible to a lay audience and criticized for oversimplifying science. Books in a similar vein include *Freakanomics* by Steven Levitt (2005), *The Black Swan* by Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007), and *The Better Angels of Our Nature* by Steven Pinker (2011).

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference
- **When Written:** Originally a *New Yorker* article from 1996; expanded into a novel from 1997 to 2000
- **Where Written:** New York City and Toronto
- **When Published:** Fall 2000
- **Literary Period:** "Pop sociology"
- **Genre:** Sociology, psychology, non-fiction
- **Point of View:** Third person, with frequent first-person asides.

EXTRA CREDIT

Polarizing figure. Malcolm Gladwell has published five bestselling books, and he's become something of a "guru" for marketers, businessmen, and publicists. But there are some who've criticized Gladwell of "selling out"—using his reputation as a "hip" nonfiction author to repeat the same simplistic points and charge astronomically high speaking fees for doing so. Some figures, such as the Harvard professor Steven Pinker, have even argued that Gladwell has nothing original to say, and that his only talent is for oversimplifying other people's ideas. On the other hand, Gladwell has also been dubbed the world's "number-one public intellectual," and continues to impress professors and students at universities all over the world. You can't please everybody.

PLOT SUMMARY

At various points in modern history, ideas, products, messages, and other behaviors have suddenly and unexpectedly become very popular. Certain clothes become fashionable, crime rates go down at an unprecedented rate, and religions find millions of new worshippers. This phenomenon is called a social epidemic. Intuitively, most people would like to think that social epidemics happen slowly and gradually. But in fact, many changes in society are so sudden that they almost seem to happen overnight. The moment at which a social epidemic goes from invisible to seemingly ubiquitous is called a "Tipping Point." The book seeks to understand how social epidemics happen, and whether it's possible to start and control them.

There are three ways to understand social epidemics: in terms of the people who cause them; in terms of the content of the

epidemic (i.e., the product, message, idea, or behavior being spread); and in terms of the environment or context in which the epidemic takes place. Each way of understanding a social epidemic corresponds to a different rule or law of epidemics.

The first law of social epidemics is the Law of the Few. In all social epidemics, a small handful of people wield a disproportionate amount of power. All people are connected to other people through family, friendship, work, hobbies, etc. But some people have more connections than other people—these people are called "Connectors." Connectors have so many friends and acquaintances that when they hear an important piece of information, they're likely to spread that information to many other people. Another kind of person who's important to social epidemics is a "Maven." Mavens are important because they love to accumulate knowledge. When there's an exciting new product, a Maven will tell other people about the product, explaining why it's such a good bargain. If the Maven tells a Connector about his discovery, then news of the product will reach many people, helping the product to become a major trend. The third kind of person who's important to social epidemics is the Salesman. Salesmen are adept at persuading people to change their behavior. If a Salesman becomes aware of a new trend, then he will be likely to persuade many of his friends to "get in on" the trend. So when news of a trend passes from Mavens to Connectors to Salesmen, the trend will influence the behavior of many people, allowing the trend to reach its Tipping Point.

The second law of social epidemics is the concept of "stickiness." People are important in disseminating information and spreading word about trends, but that's not enough. The idea, product, or message being spread must be at least somewhat intriguing, memorable, or addictive—in a word, "sticky." Advertising agencies often spend millions of dollars to identify what is and isn't "sticky" for consumers. One of the best examples of stickiness is the TV show *Sesame Street*. The show's producers devoted an unprecedented amount of research to determining what attracts young children's attention. The producers tried to teach children about reading and math by first interesting them. Researchers for *Sesame Street* found that children enjoyed TV shows that blended "fantasy and reality," hence famous characters like Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch. Later on, children's shows like *Blue's Clues* improved on *Sesame Street* research by showing that children like shows with strong narrative and lots of repetition. *Sesame Street* and *Blue's Clues* have not only been very popular, but also educated millions of children about reading and counting—demonstrating how "stickiness" can be of great help to TV watchers.

The final rule for understanding epidemics is the principle of context. Intuitively, people believe that human beings behave a certain way because of their innate talents, personalities, or inclinations. But in reality, real-world human behavior is more often dictated by context—in other words, the physical environment in which humans live and move. A good example of the importance of context and environment in shaping human behavior is the Broken Window Hypothesis—the idea that cities can cut down in serious crime by preventing minor crimes like graffiti and public urination. Gladwell argues that the Broken Window Hypothesis proved to be successful in New York City in the 1980s and 90s: officials focused on fighting seemingly minor crimes, thereby making the overall environment, or "context," of the city safer. The people of New York City had the same personalities and abilities before and after officials enacted the Broken Window Hypothesis, but they were less likely to commit serious crimes, because their city's environment did not encourage these crimes.

Another important example of the importance of context is group size. Scientists have determined that groups of more than 150 people tend to be less cooperative and close than groups of 150 people or less—even an increase from 145 people to 185 people has big implications for the cooperativeness of the group. Businesses like Gore Associates have been successful in part because they keep their office sizes capped at 150 people. As a result, Gore employees know one another well, cooperate, and feel comfortable specializing in specific areas of the company.

There are many potential applications of the three laws of social epidemics. One potential application is marketing and advertising. In the 1990s, a shoe called Airwalk became very popular among young, "hip" people. Airwalk was successful in large part because it was able to stay informed about new trends and popular ideas, and then incorporate these ideas into its commercials and ads. In other words, Airwalk was able to reach a large number of Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen, who were inspired by the "stickiness" of Airwalk, and spread news of the product to their friends.

Another potential application of the discussion of social epidemics is the trend of teen smoking in the United States, which bears a lot of resemblance to the teen suicide epidemic in Micronesia. Even if a behavior like teenage suicide or smoking doesn't seem at all healthy or desirable, it can be both sticky and contagious. Studies suggest that many of the teenagers who began smoking were originally inspired by "cool" people who also smoked. In other words, the teenage smoking epidemic is partly the result of powerful Salesmen who persuade teenagers to smoke. Also, smoking is a sticky behavior in itself because it's chemically addictive. The question becomes, then, if the government wants to reduce teen smoking, should it try to reduce the stickiness of smoking or try to change Salesmen to persuade teenagers not to smoke? Gladwell argues that it would be highly difficult to change the power of Salesmen, since adults' attempts to persuade teenagers not to smoke often serve to make smoking seem "forbidden" and therefore more desirable. Gladwell suggests that instead, officials should try to make smoking itself less

addictive, either by mandating that tobacco companies reduce the amount of nicotine in their cigarettes or perhaps by trying to treat depression, which often acts as a chemical trigger for teenagers to become addicted to nicotine.

The book concludes that the world is not immoveable. In fact, the world is constantly “tipping” in different directions, because of the laws of social epidemics.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Gaetan Dugas – The supposed “Patient Zero” during the North American HIV epidemic—in other words, the first person known to have contracted HIV and brought it to Canada and America—and a classic example of how individual people play a disproportionate role in epidemics of all kinds. It’s worth noting, however, that Dugas’ role as “Patient Zero” has recently been disproved (after the writing of Gladwell’s book).

MINOR CHARACTERS

Kitty Genovese – A young woman who was infamously raped and murdered in 1970s New York City—and none of her observing neighbors tried to help her or even called the police. Genovese’s case has become synonymous with the supposed callousness of human nature, but this is a conclusion that Gladwell challenges.

Paul Revere – The famous American hero who allegedly rode across the state of Massachusetts in April of 1775 to warn his fellow citizens of the impending invasion of the British army (and, for Gladwell, a good example of how unique human beings can play a major role in starting social epidemics).

William Dawes – Little-known American who, like Paul Revere, rode across Massachusetts to warn people about the British invasion, but who lacked Revere’s impressive social skills.

Roger Horchow – Extraordinarily gregarious man who exemplifies the “Collector” personality type.

Lois Weisberg – The former Commissioner of Cultural Affairs for the City of Chicago, remarkable for the number of “connections” she developed with different sectors of Chicago city life, including business, music, government, and theater.

Rod Steiger – Famous Hollywood actor who, out of all actors in history, can be “linked” to any actor in the fewest number of steps.

Mark Alpert – A textbook example of Gladwell’s idea of a “market maven,” Alpert has spent the bulk of his life researching various prices, and loves to tell friends and associates about how to get the best deals.

Tom Gua – A successful, charismatic financial planner and a perfect example of the “Salesman” personality type.

Joan Cooney – An influential TV producer of the 1960s who proposed using the media to educate young children—an idea that resulted in the popular children’s show *Sesame Street*.

Lester Wunderman – Legendary market researcher who launched a highly successful ad campaign for the Columbia Record Club, the “Gold Box.”

Bernhard Goetz – New Yorker who shot four young black men at the height of the New York “crime wave” of the 1980s, and was later acquitted of the crime.

Rudolph Giuliani – Mayor of New York City during the 1990s, who enacted law enforcement policy based on the Broken Window Hypothesis and is often credited with “cleaning up” the city.

William Bratton – Head of the New York Police Department under Rudolph Giuliani, and another key supporter of the Broken Window Hypothesis.

Rebecca Wells – Successful author of *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*.

Wilbert Gore – Founder of Gore Associates, one of the rare businesses to take full advantage of the organizational “rule of 150.”

Sima – Micronesian teenager who hanged himself out of frustration with his family.

R. – Micronesian teenager who hanged himself, contributing to the teen suicide epidemic.

Georgia Sadler – San Diego nurse who launched a social epidemic of breast cancer awareness by holding meetings in beauty salons.

Jimmy Carter – The 39th President of the United States.

Ronald Reagan – The 40th President of the United States.

Peter Jennings – An ABC newscaster whose facial cues may have subtly biased ABC viewers toward Ronald Reagan during the 1980 president election.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TIPPING POINTS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL CHANGES

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell tries to explain why certain ideas, products, behaviors, and messages become popular while others do not. Although this is an extremely broad topic, the book argues that all successful

trends must reach a "tipping point": in other words, a point at which they move rapidly from being almost unheard of to being very popular. A successful trend reaches its tipping point; an unsuccessful trend does not. As the phrase "tipping point" would suggest, trends don't necessarily become successful because of large, conspicuous changes. Instead, a trend will often catch on because of a very small change in the content of the trend, the people who spread the trend, or the environment in which the trend is being spread. On the simplest level, then, *The Tipping Point* is about how small changes have enormous effects.

The book proposes three main ways to analyze a trend (also known as a "social epidemic"), and shows how, in each of these three ways, small changes can help an idea or product "tip" into popularity. First, ideas and products become popular because specific people become aware of them and spread the news to other people. But not all people are equally adept at spreading news. Indeed, a small, disproportionately influential number of people are responsible for doing the bulk of the work necessary to make a trend tip successfully (or so Gladwell argues). Second, ideas and products may also become popular because the ideas or products themselves are particularly enjoyable, memorable, catchy, or otherwise desirable. And yet, people don't always remember or enjoy all aspects of an idea or product equally. Often, a small, seemingly superficial portion of the thing being disseminated is what makes it so memorable or interesting, and therefore, what makes it so trendy. Finally, ideas and products become popular because the environment in which they're disseminated is particularly conducive. Again, the book shows how surprisingly small, and sometimes almost imperceptible changes in an environment, such as group size or the amount of graffiti on the walls, can have major effects on a person's behavior.

It's important to bear in mind that, for the most part, the book doesn't judge whether trends are good or bad (although toward the end of the book, Gladwell takes a morally unambiguous position against social epidemics such as smoking, shootings, and suicide). As a result, the book has come under some criticism for what has been viewed as its apolitical discussion of the AIDS crisis, policing techniques, and other events. Furthermore, some critics have argued that the book's thesis about the importance of small changes in major trends is overstated and oversimplified, or that the book proposes "Band-Aid" solutions for problems that require major, in-depth solutions. In response, however, Gladwell argues that big, societal problems don't always require sweeping political reforms—and indeed, his book aims to counter the belief that they do. *The Tipping Point* attempts to correct for people's natural bias toward large, observable events by arguing for the importance of small, often imperceptible changes—changes that, for better or worse, allow social epidemics to tip into popularity.

SOCIAL CLOUT AND "WORD-OF-MOUTH"

One useful way to think about social epidemics is to analyze them in terms of the kinds of people who enable them. It's commonly accepted that certain ideas and products become popular because information about them spreads by "word-of-mouth"; in other words, people tell other people about a trend. However, the process in which a trend spreads by word-of-mouth doesn't depend equally on all people; instead, certain kinds of people with a disproportionately large amount of "social clout" are usually responsible for making an idea or product popular (or so Gladwell argues in the book, at least—this conclusion has subsequently been heavily disputed).

Gladwell describes three specific kinds of people who allow for word-of-mouth trends, each with a distinct social function. First, there are "Mavens": people who spend a lot of time researching information, especially information about new kinds of products and ideas. Then, there are "Connectors": people who know a large number of other people, and have a large number of casual acquaintances. Finally, there are "Salesmen": people who naturally excel at persuading other people to follow a particular course of action. When new information arises, and a Maven is interested in the information, she is likely to spread the information to other people. If one of these people is a natural Connector, she is likely to pass on the information to a large number of other people. If many of these other people are Salesmen, they'll be able to persuade people to act on the information: by buying a new product, converting to a new religion, wearing a new kind of shoe, etc. In this way, individual people play a vital role in helping a trend tip into success.

Word-of-mouth is one of the most effective ways to analyze social epidemics, particularly because it helps explain why social epidemics have become more common and pervasive in the last hundred years. The power of Connectors and Mavens has expanded considerably in recent history, due to the invention of new technologies. Communications technologies allow Connectors to reach out to unprecedented numbers of new people, and travel around the world to meet new friends. Similarly, newspapers, magazines, and computers give Mavens the tools they need to investigate prices, products, and new devices, allowing them to stay abreast of as much new information as possible. It's commonly understood that technologies like the Internet allow for more trends, and that trends succeed because people tell other people about them (that is, in fact, the definition of a trend). Gladwell's goal, then, is to emphasize the role that Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen play in a trend's success. In the end, Gladwell recognizes the power of individual human beings to change the world, for better or worse. If ideas must "tip" into popularity, then it only takes a few special people to tip them.

STICKINESS

Another important way to analyze social epidemics is to discuss the content being disseminated. Although it's important for people to spread ideas and products, these people must first decide that the idea or product is worth spreading. Therefore, the idea or product needs to appeal to people it some way. Not only must it be likeable; it must also be memorable, so that it's easy to pass on to other people. Gladwell coins the term "stickiness" to refer to an idea or product's memorability, catchiness, and overall ability to hold a person's attention.

At times, stickiness can be harmful and even highly dangerous. For instance, a cigarette is an extremely sticky product: its "sticky" nicotine content can lead smokers to develop a chemical addiction to the product, leading to the risk of lung cancer. Even so, stickiness can be an important force for good, provided that the product or idea in question is positive. For example, the book describes how the children's show *Sesame Street* maximized its stickiness in order to teach children how to read and count. Researchers spent unprecedented amounts of time studying what children did and didn't find entertaining in a TV show. Their findings prompted them to design a TV show that would use funny characters like Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch to teach lessons about numbers and letters. The *Sesame Street* researchers distinguished between their show's stickiness (its humor and entertainment) and its content (the educational lessons that the show's producers had wanted to pass along to children in the first place). By presenting education in a sticky, memorable form, *Sesame Street* has succeeded in educating millions of children, demonstrating that the concept of stickiness can be used to transmit positive messages and ideas.

The research that went into *Sesame Street* also brings up an important point: the stickiness of an idea or product is different from the idea or product itself. In order to be truly successful, a trend's stickiness must strengthen a person's awareness of the trendy idea or product itself. Many trends are unsuccessful because the stickiness becomes better-known than the product it was intended to popularize—for example, people frequently remember jingles or funny commercials without remembering the product the commercials advertised. Similarly, the producers of *Sesame Street* sometimes failed to educate children because the humor of their show distracted young viewers from the educational content. In a sense, then, stickiness is an "uncontrollable" concept. Even when it's successful, stickiness doesn't necessarily enable the popularity of an idea or product. But although not all sticky ideas and products become successful, all successful ideas and products are sticky. A trend succeeds when the idea or product in question can be passed easily from one person to another. This process only works when the idea or product is clever, memorable, catchy—or, in a word, sticky.

The concept of stickiness, then, has major ramifications for our understanding of intelligence, education, and persuasion. Most human beings want to believe that they can only be swayed with strong, rational arguments, grounded in evidence and logic. But in fact, the phenomenon of "stickiness" suggests that humans are more often swayed by irrational stimuli like songs, jokes, or simple gimmicks. As Gladwell admits, most people would be disturbed and embarrassed to know how easily they can be controlled by stickiness. Furthermore, stickiness can be dangerous—something members of the anti-smoking movement know very well. Nevertheless, Gladwell doesn't necessarily see stickiness as a problem. Humans simply aren't as rational as they'd like to believe, and the first step toward helping and educating people—as the producers of *Sesame Street* proved—might be acknowledging the importance of stickiness.

CONTEXT VERSUS CHARACTER

Another way to think about social epidemics is to analyze them in terms of the context in which the epidemic is taking place. *The Tipping Point* shows how context—in other words, the environment or social situation in which people live and interact—can be an important determinant of social epidemics, and of people's behavior in general. In the process, the book introduces the idea that context actually plays a much larger role in determining people's behavior than people's innate character—their interests, emotions, ambitions, etc.

While the idea that people respond to their environments is neither original nor startling, Gladwell argues that small, almost imperceptible aspects of context often have more of an effect on people's behavior than the large, obvious aspects of an environment do. A classic example of this idea was the Broken Window Hypothesis, a sociological idea that was tested in New York in the 1980s and 90s. The Broken Window Hypothesis proposes that governments can fight serious crimes like murder and rape by cracking down on seemingly trivial crimes like graffiti and public urination. The idea is that potential criminals—i.e., people who might have some psychological propensity to be violent or deceptive—will be less likely to act on their instincts when they're in an environment where small crimes are always punished: almost subconsciously, they receive a message that crime will not be tolerated. When New York officials enacted the Broken Window Hypothesis, clamping down on graffiti and other minor crimes, the results were startling: the crime rate of New York "tipped," falling precipitously. (However, Gladwell has been widely criticized for simplifying the history of New York Crime in the 1980s. Some critics claim that Gladwell gives too much credit to reductions in graffiti, and too little to the increases in incarceration rates and drug arrests—for more information, see Summary/Analysis section.) Large changes in environment don't always cause

large changes in human behavior, because they're so obvious: humans consciously notice large changes and then choose to behave the same way. But small changes, like the ones seen in New York in the 1980s, influence behavior in a less conscious and therefore potentially more powerful way.

The book's emphasis on context seems counterintuitive in some way because it doesn't address the character of the people living in a certain environment; instead, it assumes that small changes in environment can influence people regardless of their character. Gladwell argues that a person's character plays a surprisingly marginal role in their real-life behavior. Character controls what people think, feel, and imagine, but doesn't play such a large role in how they behave in public. For example, in New York in the 1980s, removing graffiti from walls changed the way people behaved in public (i.e., whether or not they committed crimes), but it didn't change people's character. Furthermore, Gladwell suggests that his arguments only appear counterintuitive because people misunderstand what "character" really means. A person's character changes as she learns new ideas and comes into contact with new people. Additionally, people sometimes have different characters around different people: they take on different personalities when they're in public, when they're in private, when they're at parties, when they're in school, etc. Character is such an unstable, multifaceted concept that it's almost impossible to use it to predict how people will behave. And yet people continue to talk about character when analyzing trends and public policy—intuitively (but wrongly) assuming that character controls behavior.

The Tipping Point's discussion of the difference between character and context is among its most radical arguments, with major implications for public policy. In many disciplines, especially public policy, Gladwell argues, there continues to be an irrational bias in favor of the idea of "character." In the policy debate surrounding the teenage smoking epidemic, for example, many researchers suggest that the best way to solve the problem would be to educate children about the dangers of cigarettes and encourage them to avoid "peer pressure." Such a solution, the book argues, wrongly assumes that teenagers have stable personalities, which can be changed and restructured systematically. By contrast, Gladwell proposes that the most effective way to change people's behavior is to change their environments—i.e., the "context" in which they act. Overall, then, the importance of context over character is perhaps *The Tipping Point's* most far-reaching argument for how small "tips" have more influence then big, fundamental changes.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

HUSH PUPPIES

Malcolm Gladwell uses many concrete examples throughout his book, but arguably the most important example he uses is the Hush Puppy, a kind of shoe popular in the 1950s that briefly became "hip" again in the mid-1990s. For Gladwell, the Hush Puppy is an important symbol of how suddenly and unexpectedly a product, idea, or message can become popular in an open, contemporary society.

PAUL REVERE'S RIDE

Another symbol that Gladwell refers to again and again is Paul Revere's famous "midnight ride" of 1775, during which Revere was able to warn thousands of people throughout Massachusetts about the impending invasion of British troops. For Gladwell, Revere's ride is a particularly clear example, and arguably a symbol, of how individual people can start social epidemics. Using the book's terminology, it could be argued that Revere acted as a "Connector," a "Maven," and even a "Salesman," inspiring people throughout his state to fight against the British forces.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Back Bay Books edition of *The Tipping Point* published in 2002.

Introduction Quotes

❝❝ It might have been 34 degrees the previous evening, and now it was 31 degrees. Almost nothing had changed, in other words, yet—and this was the amazing thing—everything had changed. Rain had become something entirely different. Snow! We are all, at heart, gradualists, our expectations set by the steady passage of time. But the world of the Tipping Point is a place where the unexpected becomes expected, where radical change is more than possibility. It is—contrary to all our expectations—a certainty.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

In the introduction to his book, Gladwell offers an intuitive example of a highly unintuitive concept. The thesis of Gladwell's book is that small stimuli can have far-reaching effects, and the point at which these small changes begin to cause conspicuous results is called the "Tipping Point."

By default, Gladwell claims, most people would assume that

large phenomena must have similarly vast causes. Such an assumption governs many facets of human life—for example, in public policy, it's generally assumed that the only way to solve a major social problem is to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to get to the "root cause." Gladwell instead argues that it's often better to focus one's time and resources on making small changes that can "tip" the world in a new direction. Gladwell's simple example of such an idea is the phenomenon of snow. As the temperature drops from 34 degrees to 33 degrees, there are no visible changes in the rain. But when the temperature drops from 33 to 30 degrees, the change is immediately apparent: rain has transformed into snow. In the same way, major trends seem to emerge from thin air, catalyzed by a small but significant change.

Chapter One Quotes

❝ There is more than one way to tip an epidemic, in other words. Epidemics are a function of the people who transmit infectious agents, the infectious agent itself, and the environment in which the infectious agent is operating.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

Gladwell outlines three basic ways to understand a social epidemic: in terms of the people who start it; in terms of the environment in which it takes place; and in terms of the idea, behavior, product, or message being spread.

In a way, this short passage is an outline for the entire book. Each of the three ways of analyzing a social epidemic corresponds to a different section of the book, and in the final two chapters, Gladwell will apply his three methods of analysis to some real-life case studies.

It's important to note that Gladwell does not favor any one of his three methods of analysis. It's just as important to study a trend environmentally as it is to study it in terms of the people responsible for it. Indeed, Gladwell seems to argue that the only way to understand a trend completely is by analyzing it in all three of the ways he names. At times, one method of analyzing a trend seems to "push back" against another way—for example, the environmental method of analysis (which proposes that personality and character are relatively unreliable predictors of how people will behave) arguably clashes with the personal method of analysis (which argues that specific kinds of people, each with their own personality type, make social epidemics possible). In general, Gladwell is a moderate: instead of arguing for a strictly environmental or a strictly content-based approach, he posits that social epidemics are the products of personal, contextual, and substantive factors.

❝ When Winston filter-tip cigarettes were introduced in the spring of 1954, for example, the company came up with the slogan "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should." At the time, the ungrammatical and somehow provocative use of "like" instead of "as" created a minor sensation. It was the kind of phrase that people talked about, like the famous Wendy's tag line from 1984 "Where's the beef?"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Gladwell illustrates the concept of "stickiness" by discussing one of the most famous ad campaigns in history: "Winston tastes good, like a cigarette should." To use Gladwell's terminology, Winston's ad campaign was "sticky" in the sense that its tagline was simple, memorable, and easy to repeat. As a result of the catchy tagline, Winston was able to sell more cigarettes than ever before: people remembered the tagline, remembered the cigarettes themselves, and bought them in record numbers.

The Winston example illustrates an important point about stickiness, and about social epidemics in general—there's no fundamental difference between the way a "good" and a "bad" epidemic unfold. Whatever one thinks about the morality of selling cigarettes, the Winston ad campaign unfolded according to the three laws of social epidemics—in a manner consistent with the sale of Hush Puppies, Paul Revere's ride, or any of the other social epidemics Gladwell discusses. In short, Gladwell's primary purpose in his book is to describe how social epidemics work, not to judge which ones are positive and which ones are negative.

❝ In the case of Kitty Genovese, then ... the lesson is not that no one called despite the fact that thirty-eight people heard her scream. It's that no one called *because* thirty-eight people heard her scream. Ironically, had she been attacked on a lonely street with just one witness, she might have lived.

Related Characters: Kitty Genovese

Related Themes:

Page Number: 28

Explanation and Analysis

To illustrate the third law of social epidemics—the importance of context—Gladwell discusses Kitty Genovese, whose name has become synonymous with urban decay and human beings' indifference to suffering. Kitty Genovese was raped and killed in New York City in broad daylight—astonishingly, dozens of people watched the accident unfold in front of them, but didn't call the police or try to save Genovese. Sociologists, philosophers, and psychologists have proposed many explanations for why nobody called the police—some have even argued that the incident suggests that humans are largely indifferent to the suffering of other people.

Gladwell refuses to buy into the "human nature" explanation for Kitty Genovese's death—i.e., he refuses to believe that nobody called the police because humans are innately wicked or apathetic. Instead, he argues here that nobody called the police precisely because many other people were present—each person assumed that "somebody else" would call 911. In other words, context—that is to say, the physical, external environment in which a human being lives—played a crucial role in determining how the observers of Kitty Genovese's murder behaved. In general, context is often a more important determinant of behavior than so-called human nature.

Chapter Two Quotes

Six degrees of separation doesn't mean that everyone is linked to everyone else in just six steps. It means that a very small number of people are linked to everyone else in a few steps, and the rest of us are linked to the world through those special few.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Gladwell analyzes a famous social experiment, the conclusion of which is that people can be connected with one another in only six "degrees of separation" at most. The experiment has often been interpreted to mean that news spreads quickly from person to person—indeed, it might suggest that any human being on earth can pass a message to any other human being in only six steps: by calling a friend, telling that friend to pass the message on to someone else, and so on.

The further implication of this particular study, however, is that not all humans are equally communicative and well-connected. On the contrary, Gladwell shows that there are certain human beings—Connectors—whose social circles are far larger than average. As a result, Connectors "link together" a disproportionately large number of people in the world.

The "six degrees of separation" experiment is relevant to Gladwell's argument because it shows how important individual kinds of people are to starting a social trend. If a handful of Connectors learn about a new product, idea, or message, they could potentially pass the product, idea, or message on to thousands of friends, sometimes starting a full-scale social epidemic.

But William Dawes? Fischer finds it inconceivable that Dawes could have ridden all seventeen miles to Lexington and not spoken to anyone along the way. But he clearly had none of the social gifts of Revere, because there is almost no record of anyone who remembers him that night.

Related Characters: Paul Revere, William Dawes

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 58

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Gladwell turns his attention to Paul Revere's famous "midnight ride" of 1775. On this night, Revere received word that the British were coming to invade Massachusetts; in response, he rode his horse across the state, warning hundreds of people about the impending danger. Revere, Gladwell argues, was a textbook Connector: he had a huge number of friends, and he was a naturally gregarious person who enjoyed meeting new people.

Paul Revere's ride is a particularly clear example of the "Law of the Few" in social epidemics, because there were also other people, such as William Dawes, spreading the message that the British were coming. In this way, Paul Revere's ride is a kind of historical "experiment," in which Gladwell can test the relationship between an independent variable (personality type or gregariousness) and a

dependent variable (the speed at which information spreads). The fact that history remembers Paul Revere, not William Dawes, suggests that a few disproportionately social and gregarious people like Revere, rather than many ordinary people, are responsible for starting social trends.

❝ The subtle pro-Reagan bias in Jennings's face seems to have influenced the voting behavior of ABC viewers. As you can imagine, ABC News disputes this study vigorously.

Related Characters: Peter Jennings, Ronald Reagan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Gladwell discusses a famous study of newscasters' facial expressions. The study concluded that the facial expressions of Peter Jennings, the anchorman for ABC News, may have influenced ABC viewers to vote for Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election. Despite the fact that Jennings reported for a somewhat anti-Reagan TV station, the subtle (but predominantly positive) facial expressions that Jennings used while reading news stories about Ronald Reagan could have subconsciously influenced thousands of ABC voters to gravitate toward Reagan and away from his opponent, Jimmy Carter.

The passage is important for a couple reasons. First, it suggests that subconscious stimuli—something as trivial as a smile—can have a major effect on people's behavior, a perfect example of Gladwell's thesis that small changes can "tip" large trends. But second, it's worth keeping in mind that the study is still hotly disputed. ABC News disputes the results of the study (since the idea that one of its own newscasters influenced the results of an election, albeit accidentally, would discredit ABC's journalistic impartiality), and in fact, there are many other researchers who disagree with the study's results. Depending on your point of view, the controversial nature of the study could either demonstrate that 1) small changes aren't actually as influential as *The Tipping Point* would suggest (which is what some critics of Gladwell have argued); or 2) that people are so used to thinking in terms of rational causes and persuasive arguments that they can't stand to believe that Peter Jennings's smile could have convinced thousands of people to vote for Reagan.

❝ The ABC viewers who voted for Reagan would never, in a thousand years, tell you that they voted that way because Peter Jennings smiled every time he mentioned the President.

Related Characters: Peter Jennings, Ronald Reagan

Related Themes:

Page Number: 79

Explanation and Analysis

This section reinforces one of the key themes of the book: many people's persistent refusal to believe that small changes can have major effects. People are hard-wired to believe that major historical events (such as the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980) must have big, fundamental causes—not causes as superficial as Peter Jennings's smile.

There are many reasons for the bias against the "tipping point" way of thinking. One of the most important is that people don't want to believe that they're irrational creatures. As the passage suggests, voters would never "in a thousand years" admit that they voted for Reagan because of a smile. People want to believe that they're intelligent and logical; if pressed for a reason why they voted for Reagan, most people might mention his policies, his vision for the future, etc. But in fact, Gladwell argues, people are far less rational than they'd like to believe. Small, seemingly minor changes in environment, small mannerisms, and small changes in the presentation of an idea or product often lead to the beginning of a large social epidemic.

Chapter Three Quotes

❝ In 1978, with Gold Box television support, every magazine on the schedule made a profit, an unprecedented turnaround. What's interesting about this story is that by every normal expectation McCann should have won the test. The gold box idea sounds like a really cheesy idea.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 95

Explanation and Analysis

In the late 70s, advertisers proposed an ad campaign for the Columbia Record Club: on TV, Columbia ads would advertise about a "gold box" hidden in various Columbia magazines. Anyone who found the hidden gold box would win a free Columbia record. Reluctantly, Columbia agreed to try the ad campaign, and it worked brilliantly: Columbia

made a huge profit, and the magazines with a hidden gold box sold in record numbers.

As the passage notes, though, the idea was "really cheesy"—an incredibly obvious way to sell more magazines. In this way, Gladwell conveys some of the strengths and weaknesses of stickiness—his term for the catchiness and general memorability of an idea or product. Columbia's ad campaign was incredibly sticky: almost everyone who saw the Columbia TV commercials wanted to find a gold box. And yet stickiness doesn't necessarily have anything to do with creativity or inventiveness. The stickiest ideas aren't necessarily the most brilliant; indeed, they're often the most clichéd.

> What we now think of as the essence of Sesame Street—the artful blend of fluffy monsters and earnest adults—grew out of a desperate desire to be sticky.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 106

Explanation and Analysis

In the late 1960s, a group of TV producers had an idea to produce a TV show, *Sesame Street*, that would teach children how to read and count. The show would be scientifically designed to teach as many children as effectively as possible. For Gladwell's purposes, *Sesame Street* is interesting because it represents one of the first times that TV producers used the concept of stickiness for educational purposes. Every week, scientists and researchers would bring in children as a "test audience"—then, it would study the children as they watched episodes of *Sesame Street*, trying to figure out which parts of the show were stickiest. TV producers changed the entire format of *Sesame Street* in order to make it stickier—most importantly, they introduced characters like Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch in order to satisfy the children's desire for a mixture of fantasy and reality. By using science to make *Sesame Street* as entertaining and sticky as possible, the producers of the show were able to introduce educational content without boring their child audiences.

Many of the examples of stickiness that Gladwell uses in this chapter can be interpreted pessimistically—for example, the picture of humanity that emerges from the "gold box" campaign is a little embarrassing, since it suggests that most human beings can be duped into buying more magazines using a cheesy, clichéd ad campaign. By studying the history of *Sesame Street*, however, Gladwell shows that stickiness also has some unambiguously positive applications: stickiness can be used to teach children how to read and write.

> The pace is deliberate. The script is punctuated with excruciatingly long pauses. There is none of the humor or wordplay or cleverness that characterizes Sesame Street.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

The chapter contrasts two different children's TV shows: *Sesame Street* and *Blue's Clues*. *Sesame Street*, which was first aired in the late 1960s, was one of the first children's TV shows to use scientific research to optimize its stickiness. *Blue's Clues*, aired decades later, built upon *Sesame Street*'s research to make a show that was even stickier and more engrossing for young children. As the passage suggests, though, *Blue's Clues* is a far less entertaining show for adults than *Sesame Street*. Because scientists have found that young children like lots of repetition and a slow, deliberate pace, *Blue's Clues* can be boring for adults to watch—whereas *Sesame Street*, despite being a children's show, has lots of clever jokes designed to entertain parents watching the show with their children.

The passage emphasizes the fact that stickiness and cleverness aren't necessarily the same thing. *Blue's Clues* may not be a very inventive or original show, but children enjoy it. Put another way, different things are sticky for different people. Children might find *Blue's Clues* to be a very sticky show, while their parents don't at all.

> We all want to believe that the key to making an impact on someone lies with the inherent quality of the ideas we present. But in none of these cases did anyone substantially alter the content of what they were saying. Instead, they tipped the message by tinkering, on the margin, with the presentation of their ideas, by putting the Muppet behind the H-U-G, by mixing Big Bird with the adult.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

Gladwell reaches the conclusion that, surprisingly often, the presentation of an argument or idea is more persuasive than the argument or idea itself. Furthermore, a small, gimmicky aspect *of* the presentation is often the most persuasive part. For example, the "gold box" gimmick was the most persuasive part of Columbia's advertising campaign in the late 1970s. (See quotes above.) Humans want to think that they're swayed by logic and rationality alone, but in fact, they're more often swayed by irrational gimmicks—in short, by stickiness.

The passage reinforces one of Gladwell's key points: man is a largely irrational animal. Perhaps by understanding the degree to which stickiness influences their decisions, humans can be more honest with themselves, and even begin to develop defenses against stickiness at its most manipulative.

Chapter Four Quotes

This is an epidemic theory of crime. It says that crime is contagious - just as a fashion trend is contagious - that it can start with a broken window and spread to an entire community.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

The Broken Window Hypothesis is a theory of criminology that posits that people commit serious crimes, like murder and robbery, because they live in a physical environment where such crimes are subtly encouraged. Societies can thus reduce serious crimes by cracking down on seemingly minor crimes like graffiti and public urination. In doing so, they send a subtle, almost subconscious message that crime of any kind will not be tolerated—thereby creating an environment in which people are rarely "triggered" to break the law.

As Gladwell argues here, the Broken Window Hypothesis is an application of social epidemic theory: small crimes like a broken window can inspire a "wave" of other more dangerous forms of crime. Furthermore, the Broken Window Hypothesis illustrates the third of Gladwell's three laws of social epidemics: the importance of context. Broken Window theory doesn't necessarily assume the existence of innately violent, criminally minded people; rather, it assumes that small environmental cues, such as the presence of graffiti, can sometimes influence people to commit crimes. In this chapter, Gladwell will "test" the Broken Window Hypothesis—in the process, testing his own third law of social epidemics.

Giuliani and Bratton—far from being conservatives, as they are commonly identified—actually represent on the question of crime the most extreme liberal position imaginable, a position so extreme that it is almost impossible to accept. How can it be that what was going on in Bernie Goetz's head doesn't matter? And if it is really true that it doesn't matter, why is that fact so hard to believe?

Related Characters: William Bratton, Rudolph Giuliani, Bernhard Goetz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 151

Explanation and Analysis

Gladwell has been discussing the history of the Broken Window Hypothesis in New York City. In the 1990s, when Rudolph Giuliani was the mayor of New York and William Bratton was the head of the NYPD, police officers began prosecuting minor crimes much more seriously. Largely as a result of these measures, Gladwell argues, New York City crimes rates fell precipitously in just a few years. Gladwell acknowledges that Giuliani and Bratton's policies have come under a lot of criticism. For example, some critics of Giuliani have argued that the "minor crimes" that Giuliani prosecuted so harshly were crimes that poor people and minorities were particularly likely to be caught for, such as loitering, public urination, and consumption of cocaine and marijuana. Supposedly, the law applied to everyone equally, but in fact, certain demographics were targeted unfairly.

Gladwell's response to this criticism is that the Broken Window Hypothesis, as enacted under Giuliani and Bratton, is actually an extremely "liberal" (in the sense that it involves looking at larger social context rather than individual choice) way of looking at crime—"the most extreme liberal position imaginable." In theory, the Broken Window Hypothesis assumes that there are no innately criminal people; instead, it assumes that society can influence people to obey the law by controlling seemingly minor environmental details (such as graffiti). While many criminologists have argued that there are innately "bad" people—people who will commit crimes under any circumstances—the Broken Window Hypothesis offers up

an arguably more tolerant view: people will commit far fewer crimes as long as their streets are graffiti-free.

If I asked you to describe the personality of your best friends, you could do so easily, and you wouldn't say things like "My friend Howard is incredibly generous, but only when I ask him for things, not when his family asks him for things," or "My friend Alice is wonderfully honest when it comes to her personal life, but at work she can be very slippery." You would say, instead, that your friend Howard is generous and your friend Alice is honest.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Gladwell argues that environment and context play a decisive role in people's behavior. Intuitively, one might assume that the most important determinant of behavior is personality. Following such a line of thinking, one would assume that an innately honest person will always behave honestly; an innately kind person will always behave kindly, etc. But in fact, Gladwell argues, personality is rarely as stable as intuition would suggest. People behave differently depending on their environments, and depending on the kinds of people with which they're interacting. Thus, someone might be honest around certain people and dishonest around other people.

In effect, Gladwell is arguing that people's personalities are rarely as straightforward and monolithic as they appear. Instead, people might assume subtly (or even overtly) different personalities around different people—an important illustration of the power of context.

This does not mean that our inner psychological states and personal histories are not important in explaining our behavior. An enormous percentage of those who engage in violent acts, for example, have some kind of psychiatric disorder or come from deeply disturbed backgrounds. But there is a world of difference between being inclined toward violence and actually committing a violent act. A crime is a relatively rare and aberrant event. For a crime to be committed, something extra, something additional, has to happen to tip a troubled person toward violence.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 166

Explanation and Analysis

In this section, Gladwell clarifies the distinction he's drawn between context and character. Too often, Gladwell argues in this chapter, people assume that people behave a certain way because of their innate, unchanging character. In reality, he says, people behave in certain ways because of environmental stimuli. For example, students at a theological seminary behave kindly or callously, depending on a seemingly minor stimulus (the words, "Oh, you're late").

It's important to recognize that Gladwell isn't denying the importance of character and psychology in behavior (although he does question the existence of a single, unchanging character—see the quote above). Character plays a major role in what people think and feel, and how they're *predisposed* to behave. But in the real world, context and environmental clues often play a more decisive role in how people really *do* behave. For example, a sociopath might have brutal, violent thoughts (in other words, he might have a violent character), but he wouldn't necessarily act on those thoughts unless specific environmental clues inspired him to do so.

Chapter Five Quotes

The Rule of 150 says that congregants of a rapidly expanding church, or the members of a social club, or anyone in a group activity banking on the epidemic spread of shared ideals needs to be particularly cognizant of the perils of bigness. Crossing the 150 line is a small change that can make a big difference.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Gladwell proposes that 150 people is the largest group size in which members of the group can communicate with one another easily, know everyone's face and name, and feel a strong sense of community. As a result, the number 150 shows up in various surprising ways in history, sociology, and anthropology: it's the upper size limit for successful, close-knit groups of all kinds.

The "Rule of 150" that Gladwell proposes is a particularly

lucid example of how small changes can have major results. A seemingly minor change in the size of a group—be it a church congregation, a village, or a branch of a business—can have major ramifications for how the members of that group interact: the group may "tip" into disorganization or conflict.

❝❞ What Gore has created, in short, is an organized mechanism that makes it far easier for new ideas and information moving around the organization to tip - to go from one person or one part of the group to the entire group all at once. That's the advantage of adhering to the Rule of 150. You can exploit the bonds of memory and peer pressure.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

Gladwell shows that businesses have benefited from his "Rule of 150"—for example, Gore Associates uses the rule of 150 to determine the size of its multiple company branches. The 150 people who work at any branch of Gore, Gladwell finds, work together very closely, like and trust one another, and efficiently specialize in different aspects of their company's affairs.

One of the major advantages of a group of 150 is that people feel a stronger sense of pressure to work hard. In a group of more than 150 people, it would be easier for individual members to "slack off" and do no work—in a smaller group, however, everyone knows and interacts with everyone else, and it's difficult to remain anonymous. Furthermore, in a group of 150 each person remembers a different part of Gore's business, exemplifying a phenomenon that scientists have termed "transactive memory." At a larger company where people don't know one another as well, multiple people would inefficiently remember the same information.

In all, Gore is an excellent example of how knowledge of Gladwell's three laws of social epidemics can maximize efficiency and success—as a result, it's a good way to transition from the first five chapters of the book, in which Gladwell outlines the three laws of social epidemics, to the final three chapters, in which Gladwell goes over some case studies of epidemics.

Chapter Six Quotes

❝❞ At Lambesis, Gordon developed a network of young, savvy correspondents in New York and Los Angeles and Chicago and Dallas and Seattle and around the world in places like Tokyo and London. These were the kind of people who would have been wearing Hush Puppies in the East Village in the early 1990s. They all fit a particular personality type: they were Innovators.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 208

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, we see how an advertising agency called Lambesis was able to boost sales for the shoe company Airwalk by using an elaborate network of "Innovators"—young, hip people who were paid to tell Lambesis about hot new trends. Lambesis used its young correspondents' advice to make a series of commercials that repackaged various trends into an entertaining form. For example, when the music group The Beastie Boys brought their fans' attention to the "Free Tibet" movement, Lambesis made a series of commercials featuring a monk who looked like the Dalai Lama. Hip, young people saw the commercial, and—since they were already aware of the "Free Tibet" movement—they were more likely to buy Airwalks because of the association.

In a way, this chapter is a straightforward example of how a company can take advantage of the three laws of social epidemics, increasing the stickiness of their commercials by incorporating new trends. But at the same time, the passage makes another important point: sometimes, trends can "piggyback" off of one another. By associating their product with existing trends, such as the "Free Tibet" movement, Airwalk was able attract many of the same people who'd already been mobilized by this movement. (Gladwell doesn't address the ethical implications of using a serious political movement like "Free Tibet" to sell shoes—for the most part, his priority is describing how social epidemics work, not arguing whether they're good or bad.)

Chapter Seven Quotes

> Between 1955 and 1965, there wasn't a single case of suicide on the entire island. In May 1966, an eighteen-year-old boy hanged himself in his jail cell after being arrested for stealing a bicycle, but his case seemed to have little impact. Then, in November of 1966, came the death of R., the charismatic scion of one of the island's wealthiest families. R. had been seeing two women and had fathered a one-month-old child with each of them. Unable to make up his mind between them, he hanged himself in romantic despair.

Related Characters: R.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 226

Explanation and Analysis

The passage describes how the suicide epidemic in Micronesia began in the mid-1960s. After decades in which almost no suicides were reported, a few teenagers suddenly killed themselves. In Gladwell's opinion, this small number of teen suicides in Micronesia then started a wave of suicides in the country. In Gladwell's terms, people like R. (the teenager who hanged himself in 1966) acted as "Salesmen," persuading other Micronesian teenagers to kill themselves, too. Like any social epidemic, suicide was contagious, and it spread across the country.

It seems particularly odd to represent suicide as a social phenomenon, subject to the same laws as Paul Revere's ride or the sale of Hush Puppies. Suicide is a solitary act, and one of the most personal decisions a human being could possibly make. Yet Gladwell will also show how suicide is sometimes the product of a social epidemic: people choose to kill themselves not only because of depression or despair, but also because other teenagers have done the same thing—their environment makes them more likely to act.

> The children of smokers are more than twice as likely to smoke as the children of nonsmokers. That's a well-known fact. But ... that does not mean that parents who smoke around their children set an example that their kids follow. It simply means that smokers' children have inherited genes from their parents that predispose them toward nicotine addiction.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

This passage suggests that the influence of nurture on behavior is greatly misunderstood. When analyzing the teenage smoking epidemic in the United States, many critics and researchers have proposed that parents need to do a better job of educating their children about the dangers of smoking, modeling good habits for their offspring. The problem with such a view, Gladwell finds, is that it presupposes that parents' behavior has a major impact on their children's behavior. In reality (Gladwell argues), it's likely that teenagers are more profoundly influenced by the behavior of their peers—other teenagers, many of whom smoke—than by their parents. Parents' primary contribution to their children's likelihood of smoking, then, is genetic: if adults are genetically predisposed to become physically addicted to nicotine, their children are likely to as well.

The passage is a good example of how to apply the three laws of social epidemics to a real-world situation. While many government officials and opponents of teen smoking have argued that the "solution" to the epidemic involves parents modeling good behavior for their children—in other words, acting as Salesmen. Gladwell shows that parents aren't always the most persuasive Salesmen—other teenagers tend to outweigh their influence.

> It's not about mimicking adult behavior, which is why teenage smoking is rising at a time when adult smoking is falling. Teenage smoking is about being a teenager, about sharing in the emotional experience and expressive language and rituals of adolescence, which are as impenetrable and irrational to outsiders as the rituals of adolescent suicide in Micronesia.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

The most serious error of the anti-smoking movement, Gladwell argues, is that it drastically overestimates the influence that adult role models have on children and teenagers. Government officials have allocated tremendous sums of money to educate children about smoking, all based on the premise that teenagers will be receptive to strong adult role models. The sobering reality, however, is that teenagers are likely to imitate other teenagers—entering

into a "ritual of adolescence," as the passage phrases it. In Gladwell's terminology, attempts to interfere with the contagiousness of teen smoking (i.e., to change the "few" who inspire teenagers to try smoking) will probably be less successful than attempts to change the stickiness of smoking itself (i.e., to make cigarettes less chemically addictive).

❝ What these figures tell us is that experimentation and actual hard-core use are two entirely separate things—that for a drug to be contagious does not automatically mean that it is also sticky. In fact, the sheer number of people who appear to have tried cocaine at least once should tell us that the urge among teens to try something dangerous is pretty nearly universal. This is what teens do. This is how they learn about the world, and most of the time—in 99.1 percent of the cases with cocaine—that experimentation doesn't result in anything bad happening. We have to stop fighting this kind of experimentation.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 251

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Gladwell criticizes the anti-smoking movement in America for several reasons. This movement has wasted huge resources trying to convince teenagers to pay attention to adult role models—an endeavor that, according to *The Tipping Point*, is doomed to fail. Moreover, the anti-smoking movement has taken a hysterical approach to the very idea of trying cigarettes. Teenagers have been told that they're not allowed to experiment with smoking in any way whatsoever—to try even one cigarette is to "go down the road" toward addiction.

The problem with such a strategy is that it punishes teenagers for, in a word, being teenagers. Teenagers are always experimenting with new ideas, new products, and new "looks." Being a teenager, one could argue, is all about experimentation, with cigarettes and in general. Therefore, an anti-smoking campaign that orders teenagers not to try cigarettes even once is probably going to fail. Instead of targeting experimentation, Gladwell proposes government measures that would decrease the chemical addictiveness of cigarettes themselves.

Conclusion Quotes

❝ A critic looking at these tightly focused, targeted interventions might dismiss them as Band-Aid solutions. But that phrase should not be considered a term of disparagement. The Band-Aid is an inexpensive, convenient, and remarkably versatile solution to an astonishing array of problems. In their history Band-Aids have probably allowed millions of people to keep working or playing tennis or cooking or walking when they would otherwise have had to stop. The Band-Aid solution is actually the best kind of solution because it involves solving a problem with the minimum amount of effort and time and cost.

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

Gladwell takes a moment to respond to a major criticism of his book: namely, that he's advocating small-scale simplistic solutions to deep, fundamental problems with society. Solutions of this kind are sometimes termed "Band-Aid" solutions—the implication being that, in lieu of getting to the root of the problem, the solution is too superficial to do any lasting good.

In response to this potential criticism, Gladwell turns the criticism on its head, arguing—half-seriously, half-flippantly—that Band-Aids are extremely effective tools for improving people's health. More seriously, though, Gladwell proposes that so-called Band-Aid solutions are sometimes the best kinds of solutions: the best solution is one that gets the largest results with the minimum of time, money, and effort.

In short, Gladwell proposes that people are irrationally biased toward "fundamental," "comprehensive" solutions to problems. It's wrongly (Gladwell argues) assumed that the most effective solutions to problems cost the most money and address the root cause of the problem head-on. Sometime, however, the most successful policy measures and business reforms succeed because they ignore the "root cause" of the problem, identify the precise point at which the problem "tips" into a trend, and stop it there.

❝ Look at the world around you. It may seem like an immovable, implacable place. It is not. With the slightest push—in just the right place—it can be tipped.

Related Themes:

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Page Number: 259

Explanation and Analysis

In the end, Gladwell offers a message that's both inspirational and cautionary. Throughout his book, he's described how it's possible to change the world profoundly by making small, almost imperceptible changes. For the most part, Gladwell doesn't say that these changes are either good or bad: his role as the author of the book is to describe how trends work and leave his readers to decide how virtuous these trends are.

At times, Gladwell's findings could be interpreted negatively; for example, his analysis of TV advertisements and voting habits suggest that humans are gullible creatures who make major decisions for the most arbitrary reasons—reasons which advertising agencies and presidential candidates alike try to exploit. But at other points, Gladwell's findings are profoundly optimistic: they suggest that the world's most serious-seeming problems can be fixed by "tipping" these problems into success. Ultimately, Gladwell leaves it up to us to decide how to use the knowledge he's given us: we could "tip" the world in any direction, and it's up to us to decide what direction that will be.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

INTRODUCTION

In the mid 1990s, **Hush Puppies**—an old-fashioned kind of shoe—became suddenly, unexpectedly popular. Fashion photographers in New York City were talking about how Hush Puppies were becoming "hip" again; supposedly, young people were going to stores and buying Hush Puppies in bulk. By 1995, a handful of key fashion designers had included Hush Puppies in their work, and a handful of celebrities wore Hush Puppies to fashion and film premiers. Hush Puppies quadrupled their sales in less than a year; then, they quadrupled again in the next year. How did Hush Puppies become so popular, so quickly?

Hush Puppies are an important example of the Tipping Point phenomenon for Gladwell, because, on, the surface, it seems so unlikely that they could suddenly become popular. Hush Puppies were a product of the 1950s, a decade often associated with "square-ness" and conventionality; therefore, it seems unlikely that such a shoe would become popular among young, hip people in the 1990s. The fact that the shoes did, in fact, soar to popularity is a mystery in need of a solution—and in his book, Gladwell will try to provide one.

Gladwell gives another example of sudden, unexpected changes: the New York neighborhood of Brownvsille. At late as the 90s, there were staggering numbers of murders in Brownsville, and children grew up learning not to ride their bikes through Brownsville—there were gangs and drug dealers everywhere. Then, suddenly, crime started going down. Some experts say this is because policing became more efficient and effective in Brownsville—but changes in policing can't entirely explain how Brownsville changed so rapidly. The murder rate in Brownsville fell by 66% in less than 5 years.

The second phenomenon the book describes, crime rates in Brownsville, is wildly different from the first (the popularity of the Hush Puppy), and yet they have a couple features in common. The crime rates in Brownsville didn't just decrease; they fell extremely rapidly, to the point where traditional criminological explanations, such as improvements in policing technique, failed to explain the changes.

This book, *The Tipping Point*, will study how ideas, products, messages, and behaviors spread throughout society. There are three aspects of the spread of ideas that the book will focus on. First, ideas are contagious, almost like a viral epidemic—people imitate an idea, other people imitate those people, and so on. Second, ideas seem to spread because small changes can have big effects—for example, the handful of Manhattan hipsters who wore **Hush Puppies** started a trend that eventually influenced millions of American consumers. Finally, the spread of ideas is quick— Hush Puppies quadrupled sales in one year, for example. So the book will focus on the contagiousness of ideas, the fact that small changes in ideas can have major effects, and the speed with which ideas spread.

The topic of The Tipping Point *is very broad and somewhat difficult to describe, so Gladwell offers a convenient outline here. The book will study many different kinds of trends: trends in products, trends in ideas, trends in behaviors, etc. But what is a trend? As Gladwell sees it, a trend is a sudden, large-scale increase in the popularity and pervasiveness of an idea or product. The book compares trends to outbreaks of disease (an analogy it will use again and again), but the fact that Gladwell compares trends to viruses doesn't mean that he's criticizing them. He isn't primarily concerned with the ethics or moral implications of trends: he wants to describe why trends do or don't happen.*

One term for a sudden change in ideas, products, messages, and behaviors is a "Tipping Point." The Tipping Point is a counterintuitive phenomenon, for a couple reasons. Most people think that life is full of steady progressions. But in fact, many of the most important events in life happen suddenly and unexpectedly, so that there's no way to predict them in advance. The phenomenon of snow is a great example of a Tipping Point that everybody knows: water gets colder and colder without changing visibly—but then, when it cools to below 32 degrees, it suddenly changes in very obvious ways.

In this important section, Gladwell coins the phrase "Tipping Point" to refer to small changes that nonetheless trigger major trends. In the years since Gladwell's book, "tipping point" has become a common phrase in business science, sociology, and dozens of other fields. The passage is also interesting because it tries to correct for people's intuitive understanding of how the world works. While many might think that major events in life take place either because of large changes or slow, accumulating changes, Gladwell argues that tiny, inconspicuous changes often trigger the longest lasting effects.

Gladwell's book will study many different people and places, in order to answer two major questions about Tipping Points: 1) why do some ideas, behaviors, and products start "epidemics" while others don't? and 2) How we can deliberately start and control epidemics?

Gladwell outlines the structure of his book: the first five chapters study different rules for social epidemics, while the final three chapters look at specific attempts to control epidemics.

CHAPTER ONE: THE THREE RULES OF EPIDEMICS

In the city of Baltimore, there was a syphilis epidemic in the mid-90s. For decades, a couple people got syphilis every year—but something happened in the 90s that caused hundreds of people to get the disease. Many researchers blame the epidemic on the city's crack cocaine problems—because of people's drug addictions, they were more likely to go to impoverished parts of the city to buy drugs, during which time they might contract the disease in various ways. Another theory for the epidemic is that medical services in Baltimore declined in the 90s—there were fewer doctors per person in the 90s than in almost any earlier decade, suggesting that doctors failed to address the syphilis problem before it became an epidemic. Finally, some theorists argue that the epidemic started because of the destruction of a set of housing projects. People who lived in the projects moved to different parts of Baltimore, spreading syphilis with them.

The chapter begins with another description of a sudden, unexpected social epidemic. In this case, the phenomenon was a literal epidemic: a sudden increase in syphilis, a serious venereal disease, in the city of Baltimore. Interestingly, there are at least three major explanations for why syphilis cases shot up in Baltimore. No single one of these three explanations can completely explain the phenomenon, but—as Gladwell will show—the three explanations put together reflect three different elements of any "successful" social epidemic.

The three explanations for the syphilis epidemic all propose that there was a subtle change in life in Baltimore—a small, steady decline in doctors, the destruction of a couple projects, etc. But the three explanations also show that there are at least three different ways to "frame" an epidemic: in terms of environment (explanation one); in terms of the disease itself (explanation two) and in terms of people who have the disease (explanation three). To generalize: every "Tipping Point" is caused when there is a change in a) the "infectious agent" (the idea, behavior, product, or message being spread), b) the environment, or c) the people who transmit the infectious agent.

Contrary to intuition, social epidemics aren't necessarily triggered by major, overt changes of any kind. Rather, Gladwell argues that social epidemics tend to be triggered by very small, almost invisible changes in the status quo. These changes fall into three main categories: changes in the product, idea, or "infectious agent" being spread; changes in the people who spread it; changes in environment or "context." As we'll see, these three categories define the structure of The Tipping Point.

Gladwell proposes three laws for studying Tipping Points. The first is called the Law of the Few. It's an accepted idea in economics that often, the majority of work will be done by a minority of people, no matter what the work is. In epidemics, the "work" of spreading an infectious agent is in the hands of a particularly small group. In a study of a gonorrhea epidemic in Colorado, it was discovered that 168 people, out of the tens of thousands who'd contracted the disease, had infected the vast majority of gonorrhea patients in Colorado. These 168 people had staggering numbers of sexual partners, went out every night, and were generally unlike the average adult. Yet they had a huge influence on Colorado. Gaetan Dugas, often called "Patient Zero" for the North American AIDS epidemic (i.e., the first person known to have AIDS) had sex with more than 2,500 people—had it not been for Dugas, it's entirely possible that AIDS would not have "tipped" to become an epidemic at all. Whether in social epidemics or viral epidemics, a small group of people plays a disproportionally large part in starting a trend—hence the Law of the Few.

The following chapter of the book will concern the Law of the Few; the principle that a few disproportionately influential individuals have a large role in social epidemics of all kinds. To illustrate his point briefly, Gladwell again brings up literal epidemics. The passage is a good example of Gladwell's dispassionate, analytical approach to studying tipping points: Gladwell doesn't seem to be passing strong moral judgments on the people who spread gonorrhea and AIDS. At the same time, the passage is a good example of why The Tipping Point *angered some readers. Certain critics faulted Gladwell for seeming to "blame" Dugas for the AIDS crisis, arguing that Gladwell was scapegoating, or even demonizing, the homosexual community. (It's also worth noting that Dugas's role as "Patient Zero" has since been largely disproven.)*

The second law is the Law of Stickiness. Sometimes, disease epidemics begin because of sudden changes in the deadliness of the disease. The Spanish flu epidemic of 1917, which killed millions of people, began because the influenza virus itself became more deadly, not because of any new patterns in how the disease spread. Similarly, the HIV epidemic of the 1980s emerged not because people were behaving very differently from how they'd behaved in the 70s, but because the HIV virus itself became significantly more lethal. What's true of viruses is true of ideas as well—the idea itself has to be memorable in order for there to be a social epidemic. Advertisers spend millions of dollars ensuring that slogans and brand names are as catchy as possible—if not, people will never remember the brand in the first place, and therefore won't spread it to other people. Gladwell calls this principle the Stickiness Factor—the memorability or reproducibility of an idea, product, or behavior.

Gladwell illustrates the second rule of social epidemics by citing the Spanish flu epidemic of the early 20th century, an epidemic that killed millions of people because of the "success" of the mutated influenza virus. In this section, the juxtaposition of a discussion of the Spanish flu and advertising techniques is disorienting and even shocking—but Gladwell's purpose is to describe social epidemics of all kinds. While an ad campaign and an outbreak of the flu seem to have very little in common, the book will demonstrate that they obey the same underlying rules.

The third law is the Law of Context. During the famous Kitty Genovese incident in New York City, 38 people watched and did nothing while Kitty Genovese, a young woman, was raped and killed on the street. This incident was so infamous that Genovese has become a symbol for the "bystander problem," the problem whereby, when an individual is in danger, a large crowd will remain inactive. Sociologists have argued that the 38 people did nothing to help a woman in danger because, as big city dwellers, they were used to ignoring thousands of people every day—beggars, solicitors, salesmen, etc. Others have pointed out that individual people will usually help other individuals—but a large crowd will often hesitate to help an individual, since people will assume that "someone else" will solve the problem. So the third law, the Law of Context, says that people often change their behavior because of environmental factors, such as the size of a crowd, the density of a city, etc. Armed with his three laws—the Law of the Few, the Stickiness Factor, and the Power of Context—Gladwell will try to understand why and how Tipping Points occur.

The third law of social epidemics implies that it's not enough to analyze epidemics in terms of individual people, or in terms of the infectious agent being spread. Even with a strong infectious agent and lots of people available to spread it, an idea or product will not "tip" into a trend unless it exists in the proper environment; an environment that is conducive to the trend's success. As the Kitty Genovese incident would suggest, "human nature" is an insufficient explanation for social phenomena. Humans behave differently in different environments, regardless of their underlying "nature." Altogether, Gladwell's three laws suggest a balanced approach to sociological analysis. Neither individuals nor environments nor infectious agents by themselves can cause a trend to "tip"—only a combination of all three factors can do so.

CHAPTER TWO: THE LAW OF THE FEW

On April 18th, 1775, a young boy living in Boston overheard a British officer stationed in the city talking about "hell tomorrow." Frightened, the boy ran to Paul Revere, a silversmith, and repeated what he'd heard. Revere had already heard rumors of an impending invasion, but the boy's story finally inspired him to begin his famous "**midnight ride**." Revere rode a horse through Lexington and Arlington, warning of the British invasion. The news spread like an epidemic, as other Americans repeated Revere's message to their families, and horsemen rode to other towns.

The chapter begins with an example that American readers will probably find very familiar: the midnight ride of Paul Revere. During this event, Revere rode through Lexington and other Massachusetts towns to warn American colonists of the British invasion; in turn, American colonists warned other colonists of the danger, so that the news spread like a virus.

Paul Revere's **ride** is one of the most famous examples of "word-of-mouth" in history. But why is it that certain ideas spread via word-of-mouth faster than others? One might think that Revere's message spread so quickly because his news was so important, but that's not the case. There were other people, including a man named William Dawes, who also spread a message about the British invasion in other parts of Massachusetts that night. But only Paul Revere's message "tipped" to cause an information epidemic. This chapter will try to answer the question, What is the difference between Revere and Dawes? Why do certain kinds of people play such a big role in the spread of ideas?

By focusing on two individuals, Revere and Dawes, the chapter will attempt an "experiment" in which the independent variable is the personality of the people spreading the message, and the dependent variable is the success of the social epidemic. Thus, the chapter will study how specific personality types are often conducive to social epidemics.

In the 60s, there was a famous psychological experiment in which scientists mailed packets, each one intended for a stockbroker living in Massachusetts, to 160 people living in Nebraska. Each Nebraska resident was given the same instructions: find a way to get the packet to the stockbroker in Massachusetts. People were supposed to send their packets to acquaintances who lived close to the stockbroker, and those acquaintances in turn were supposed to send the packet to someone even closer to the stockbroker's address. The idea was that the experiment could measure the number of "connections" or "degrees of separation" between people in the U.S. The experiment concluded that, on average, people in Nebraska could get the package to the stockbroker in five or six steps—hence the famous concept of "six degrees of separation."

The famous "six degrees of separation" idea (popularized by a famous play, and later a Will Smith movie) suggests that human beings are linked to one another by a "chain" of only six people. One implication of this idea, as it's usually understood, is that information travels from person to person much faster than it's generally believed. If a person has some interesting news, that news could pass by word-of-mouth to anyone else on the planet in a mere six steps.

One aspect of the experiment that most people don't know about is that the packets were eventually mailed to the stockbroker in Massachusetts because of only three different people, named Jacobs, Jones, and Brown. People from Nebraska sent their packets to many different people—and yet, amazingly, the packets ended up in the hands of these three people who knew the stockbroker. Gladwell uses the word "Connectors" for people like Jacobs, Jones, and Brown—"people with a special gift for bringing the world together."

The "six degrees of separation" theory is usually interpreted to mean that human beings have a lot of power to spread information via word-of-mouth. But in reality, the experiment that inspired the phrase, "six degrees of separation" suggests a slightly different conclusion: certain *people, Connectors, have much more power to spread information than others. (Note, however, that this experiment has since been retested with a larger sample size, and found little evidence of "Connectors.")*

Why do certain people become Connectors? First, Connectors know lots of people. For the most part, older people know more people than younger people, as they've accumulated more acquaintances (not necessarily friends) over the course of their lives. But even within a certain age range, there are huge disparities between the sizes of people's social circles. For example, at City College in New York, tests have shown that there are some students who know four or five times as many people as other students.

Connectors are gregarious, friendly, and make friends effortlessly because they genuinely enjoy the process. Intuitively, one might think that all people have social circles of approximately the same size—or at least in the same order of magnitude. The existence of Connectors, however, suggests that certain people have social circles that are many times larger than others.

Gladwell discusses a man named Roger Horchow, whom he met in the course of writing his book. Roger is an extraordinarily social man, who's worked in theater, business, and many other avenues. Roger, Gladwell writes, "collects people"—he loves talking about his acquaintances. But Roger genuinely enjoys his friendships with others—he's not just "hoarding" friends. Most remarkably, Roger differs from most people in that he seems to value acquaintances as much as most people value friendships. For most, an acquaintance is a potential friend: we make acquaintances thinking that they may or may not become our close friends. Then, these acquaintances either become our friends, or they remain just acquaintances. Roger, however, finds great pleasure in just making casual acquaintances—a personality trait that few people have, but that might be essential to being a Connector.

This passage, in which Gladwell describes his acquaintance with Roger Horchow, a textbook Connector, is a good example of Gladwell's journalistic approach to studying social epidemics. In the book, he often begins with a specific, personal example—his discussions with a specific person, or his visit to a specific place—and then uses the anecdotes to generalize to a law or rule. Gladwell's interactions with Roger suggest that Connectors' real power isn't making lots of close friends, but rather knowing lots of acquaintances.

Consider the popular game, "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon," which is based on the idea that all actors either appeared in a movie with the actor Kevin Bacon, or appeared in a movie with someone who appeared in a movie with Kevin Bacon, and so on. On average, all actors in Hollywood can be "linked" to Kevin Bacon in this way in only 2.8 steps. The most "connected" actor in Hollywood history—i.e., the actor who, on average, can be linked to other actors in the smallest number of steps—is Rod Steiger. Steiger has been in more than 100 films, of many different kinds—period piece, drama, comedy, etc. Steiger's connectedness to other actors is a product of his versatility as a performer. By analogy, the same is true of Connectors in real life—they have friends in many different "genres" or avenues.

A social epidemic is most "successful" when the information spreads to people from many different walks of life: ideas and products are only "trendy" if they expand from a particular niche to reach everyone in society. Therefore, Connectors play the biggest role in a social epidemic when they have acquaintances in many different "genres" of life: in this case, the Connectors spread information in many different directions, maximizing the pervasiveness of the information.

Gladwell remembers meeting a woman in Chicago, Lois Weisberg. Weisberg worked at the Commission of Cultural Affairs for the City of Chicago, and she was one of the friendliest, most social people Gladwell ever met. At various points in her life, she ran a flea market, worked for a railroad, practiced law, composed music, and worked for the municipal government. To use the Rod Steiger analogy again, Lois acted in many different "genres" throughout her life—business, art, government, etc.

Lois Weisberg is another good example of a Connector, and in particular, a Connector whose friends hail from many different walks of life. In a social epidemic, Lois could potentially play a pivotal role, because she can spread awareness of the information, idea, or product to many people—and, crucially, many different kinds of people.

Another important fact about Lois: in the 1950s, she hosted Friday night salons in which she invited talented authors, singers, poets, etc. Her salons were famous in Chicago, not only because of the talent of the guests but because they were open to both black and white performers—a rarity at the time. Gladwell speculates that black and white people have begun socializing with one another more and more, due to people like Lois—gregarious, open-minded people who, as Connectors, naturally bring different kinds of people together under one roof.

Gladwell posits that the process of racial integration in the U.S. occurred partly because of a few gregarious people like Lois (minimizing, as some frustrated critics have pointed out, the political victories of civil rights activists, government officials, city planners, etc.).

In the 1970s, there was a study of professionals in Boston. Of people in Boston who were trying to find a job, the majority found their job through a personal connection. Somewhat surprisingly, most of the people in the study who got jobs through a personal connection said that the personal connection was "weak" in the sense that they didn't know the connection particularly well; more often, the connection was a "friend of a friend." The study concluded with an interesting point: when it comes to getting a job, finding new information, or generally getting ahead in life, "weak ties" are more important than "close ties." A person who has few friends, but lots of "friends of friends" may be more likely to find an interesting new job opportunity than a person with many friends but few friends of friends.

The study of professionals in Boston suggests the exponential nature of the word-of-mouth phenomenon. While two people may have vastly different numbers of close friends, there will be an even bigger difference between their number of friends of friends, friends of friends of friends, and so on. This helps to explain why people like Roger Horchow, who have huge numbers of acquaintances, have so much social clout: their "friends of friends" probably number in the hundreds of thousands.

Let's return to the concept of "word-of-mouth." When it comes to the spreading of information, not all "mouths" are created equal. Gladwell guesses that one of the reasons that trends like **Hush Puppies** reach their Tipping Point is that they're discovered by someone like Lois Weisberg or Roger Horchow—someone who has friends in many different areas of society and, just as importantly, many friends of friends. So ultimately, when a trend spreads successfully by word-of-mouth, that means that the trend spreads thanks to a small but powerful number of Connectors.

One potential explanation for the Hush Puppy phenomenon—the phenomenon with which Gladwell began his book—is that a few disproportionately influential people caused Hush Puppies to become popular by spreading word of the product to their friends and their friends' friends.

Gladwell returns to Paul Revere, whose **midnight ride** started what could be termed a "word-of-mouth" epidemic in 1775. Paul Revere was a natural Connector—he was extremely popular in his community, belonged to many elite societies, was an active member of his local government, belonged to many different areas of society, and had a huge number of acquaintances. So when the time came for Revere to spread an important message across Lexington, Revere knew which houses belonged to important people, and made sure to ride by all of them. He also knew when it was important to stop, get off his horse, and talk to people face-to-face. Thanks to his social skills and connections, Revere was extremely effective in spreading the message, "The British are coming!" across Massachusetts—he told all of his connections, and they passed on the message to their own connections. By contrast, William Dawes was a pretty ordinary man—he didn't have lots of connections, and therefore didn't spread the message very successfully.

The evidence (at least that which Gladwell presents here) seems to support Gladwell's contention that Connectors play a vital role in social epidemics: Paul Revere was indeed a highly gregariousness, well-connected person, and therefore the ideal man for the famous midnight ride. Dawes, by contrast, didn't have an enormous social circle, and therefore, he wasn't able to transfer his message to a large number of people. The results of Gladwell's "historical experiment" support the hypothesis that the personalities of individual people (i.e., Connectors like Revere) play a pivotal role in the success of social epidemics.

Connectors aren't the only people who matter in a social epidemic; even Connectors need to get their information from somewhere. So social epidemics require some different kinds of people: people who specialize in obtaining information, and people who specialize in spreading information to other people. So far, Gladwell has been talking about the latter. He will now discuss "Mavens"—people who accumulate knowledge.

Connectors, one could say, are a necessary but insufficient part of a social epidemic. Social epidemics require Connectors to spread the word, but they also require Mavens, who know what the "word" is.

One important kind of maven is a "market maven." Market mavens are the kinds of people who research prices in order to kind the best deal. Market mavens play a crucial role in the economy: they keep businesses honest. Every day, stores hang signs saying, "Everyday Low Price!" Signs of this kind increase sales, even though the price isn't any different than it would otherwise be. The reason that stores don't pull this trick more often is that market mavens keep them from doing so. If a store were to put deceptive signs on its products, market mavens would complain about the store and tell their friends not to shop there.

Gladwell argues that in an open, free market economy like that of the United States, businesses can't always get away with lying about prices. If a business were to do so, then a market maven would find out about the trick and tell everyone not to patronize the business anymore (or, more likely, the maven would tell a Connector, and the Connector would tell all of her friends not to shop there).

Gladwell describes one market maven he knows, Mark Alpert. Alpert has an encyclopedic knowledge of prices—he can even remember prices he read about ten years ago. He knows how to use coupons to get the best deal and—crucially—he loves to share his knowledge with other people. Alpert's friends have saved huge sums of money taking his advice. People like Mark Alpert are very important to epidemics because they share information openly and honestly. Perhaps someone like Alpert was instrumental in starting the **Hush Puppy** trend; he found a good deal in shoes that weren't yet trendy, and told his friends where to buy these shoes.

When news of an exciting, relatively cheap product like the Hush Puppy becomes available to the public, people like Alpert pass news of the product to other people. Notice that, even in this chapter on individual people, Gladwell acknowledges that the actual quality of the infectious agent plays a role in the social epidemic: in other words, the Hush Puppies wouldn't have become a social phenomenon if they weren't reasonably priced.

The third kind of people who are important to a social epidemic are Salesmen: people who persuade others to adopt new points of view, or points of view that aren't yet common knowledge. Gladwell brings up a man named Tom Gua, a financial planner. Tom is brilliant at selling his services to new clients. He can read people's expressions and mannerisms and gauge their state of mind, adjusting his sales pitches accordingly. He's also a genuinely enthusiastic, friendly person, who obviously gets great pleasure from talking to people. Tom is a natural Salesman.

It's not enough for a person to hear about a social trend; for the trend to tip into success, people must also act on the information. People like Tom Gua are crucial to this final step in the social epidemic; they know how to get people to take action, both because they have lots of experience with persuasion and because they're naturally charismatic.

It's almost impossible to judge what factors make certain people, like Tom Gua, so persuasive. But in the 1980s, a study was conducted about the role of newscasting in presidential elections. A randomly chosen group of TV viewers were asked to rate the facial expressions of the three most famous newscasters of the era, broadcasting in ABC, NBC, and CBS, according to perceived "positivity" or "negativity" of their expressions while discussing the two presidential candidates in 1980, Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter. The study found that Peter Jennings from ABC news had a "facial bias" when discussing Ronald Reagan—he seemed slightly happier when discussing Reagan than he did when discussing Carter on the news. The study further argues that Jennings's facial bias subtly influenced ABC viewers to vote for Reagan. Many statisticians dispute this conclusion, arguing that ABC viewers who already supported Reagan watched ABC in part because of Jennings's bias. But in fact, ABC was probably the TV network most hostile to Reagan in 1980—if anything, ABC viewers should have been *less* likely to vote for Reagan.

In this section, Gladwell argues that newscasters' expressions potentially play a major role in convincing people how to vote. Supposedly, Peter Jennings' facial expressions swayed ABC viewers into thinking about Ronald Reagan more positively, and, eventually, voting for Reagan in the general election. In Gladwell's terminology, Jennings qualifies as a Salesman (even if he wasn't deliberately trying to "sell" Reagan to his viewers). The Jennings study is the first of many examples of how people aren't as rational and logical as they'd like to think—while ABC viewers would surely claim that they voted for Reagan because of his policies, it's likely that many thousands of them voted for Reagan because of subconscious persuasion.

Another example of the subtleties of persuasion came with an experiment about the relationship between physical movement and agreement. A group of students was told to wear headphones while listening to an editorial about raising college tuitions. The students were directed to move their heads in different directions—up and down, side to side, or not at all. Then, the students were asked to take a short poll about the editorial they'd listened to: they were asked what an appropriate level of tuition for college would be. The students didn't realize that the focus of the study was the relationship between head movement and psychology. The students who moved their heads up and down were most likely to agree with an increase in tuition, while the students who shook their heads were most likely to disagree.

The college tuition study is another example of how smart, rational people can be swayed using subconscious persuasion techniques. This example is potentially disturbing, because it suggests that people can be "swindled" into believing things, just as the college students in the study may have been swindled into supporting increases in college tuition. Advertising agencies spend millions of dollars to study these techniques of subconscious persuasion so that they can convince consumers to buy their products.

These two studies—the 1980 election study and the study about college tuition—suggest that persuasion is often most effective when it consists of "little things" such as nonverbal facial movements. A person who voted for Reagan would never admit that she did so because Peter Jennings smiled, but it's possible that her decision was partly influenced by her exposure to tiny visual cues in Peter Jennings's face.

Gladwell's analysis of Salesmen and persuasion techniques reiterates the importance of the small in starting social trends. Tiny, subconscious attempts to persuade people are often successful, because people don't realize that they're being persuaded at all.

When Gladwell met with Tom Gua, he felt that they were both engaging in a kind of "dance." When two people talk, their body language often plays a major role in the direction of the conversation. In the 60s, scientists conducted a study of families' mannerisms while eating dinner. The study found that people synchronize their physical movements with their words in small, almost imperceptible ways. Much the same is true of Gladwell's interactions with Tom Gua. Like many good salesmen, Tom knows how to synchronize his motions with those of his customers and clients. Similarly, he's adept at mirroring the facial expressions of people with whom he's talking.

While journalists like Peter Jennings may not have been aware that they were persuading ABC viewers to vote for Ronald Reagan, a successful businessman like Tom Gua is highly aware of his own powers of persuasion; he's had decades to perfect his technique. His mannerisms, expressions, and gestures are designed to both empathize and persuade.

There are certain kinds of people, whom Gladwell describes as "senders," who are highly adept at communicating their emotions nonverbally. Senders have a measurable impact on the moods of other people, because they're so preternaturally talented at transmitting emotions. Tom Gua is probably one of these people.

The passage suggests that being a "Sender" is probably an important aspect of being a Salesman, since charisma and persuasion often entail conveying one's emotions nonverbally.

To return to 1775 one more time: we can now see that Paul Revere's **ride** was a success for three different reasons. First, Paul Revere was a talented Maven, who gathered important information about the British coming to Massachusetts. Second, Paul Revere was also a great Connector—just as many of the best Connectors are also the best mavens. Finally, Revere's ride would not have succeeded without the help of many Salesmen—people who decided to get up in the middle of the night and defend themselves from the British, and who were naturally able to persuade their peers to join them in doing so.

Like many of the chapters in The Tipping Point, *this one ends by coming full circle. Gladwell began by discussing the midnight ride of Paul Revere, and, now that we've studied the role of Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen, we can better understand why Revere was so successful in getting the message out. While individual people aren't always enough to make a social epidemic successful, they often play a key role in doing so.*

CHAPTER THREE: THE STICKINESS FACTOR

In the late 60s, a TV producer named Joan Cooney decided to produce a children's TV show that would influence children across America to learn to read. She called her show *Sesame Street*. Cooney researched her idea extensively, consulting with sociologists and scientists for the best ways to pass on messages to children via television. *Sesame Street* has been widely praised for finding a way to make television "sticky"—it uses television to lodge important ideas (like the alphabet) in the minds of children.

Television is a great example of a "sticky" medium. When we watch TV, we remember it well: we can recall jingles from commercials, sing along with the theme music from our favorite TV shows, etc. Cooney's insight was that TV's stickiness can be an important tool for education.

So far, we've been talking about the importance of the messenger in a social epidemic (the Law of the Few). In order for a message to spread throughout society, it has to have the right people carrying it. But the message itself must also be "sticky"—people must, on some level, like the message, or be able to remember it easily. So what makes a message sticky?

This passage reminds us that no single one of the three laws of social epidemics can sufficiently explain a social epidemic: only the combination of people, a sticky product, and the right environment can start a trend.

Ad agencies have spent millions of dollars trying to find what makes a message sticky. One interesting finding is that people need to see an ad about six times before they really remember it. Then there are other ways to make the ad more memorable: using humor, getting a famous celebrity to endorse a product, etc.

Stickiness can be a highly profitable quality, because when people remember a product, they're more likely to buy it in the future.

One of the most informative stories from the history of advertising came in the 1970s, when there was a competition between the ad agency McCann Erickson and the famous marketer Lester Wunderman. For years, Wunderman had been handling ads for the Columbia Record Club, a huge mail order club. Now, Columbia wanted to employ McCann Erickson to handle its advertising. Wunderman proposed a competition: he would design magazine ads for Columbia, to compete with those designed by McCann Erickson. Columbia agreed, and in the end, Wunderman's ads were considerably more successful in attracting new customers to Columbia. Wunderman designed TV ads about the "secret of the Gold Box." If viewers could find the hidden gold box in their issues of TV Guide, they would get a free Columbia record. The ad campaign was hugely successful, even though executives were highly skeptical that it would work when Wunderman first proposed it. In many ways, the Gold box was a cheesy idea—but it was undeniably memorable and "sticky," which is why it worked.

The Wunderman "gold box" anecdote is a good example of how a small, seemingly cheesy gimmick can lodge itself in people's memories and make a product or idea highly popular. The gold box ad campaign was successful because it made TV viewers and magazine readers more likely to remember the Columbia Record Club itself. One interesting point here is that the gold box, by almost any measure, is a really bad idea—it's cheesy and far too simplistic. This would suggest that stickiness often has very little to with cleverness or inventiveness. While people might like to believe that they remember the best, most interesting ideas, they're often likely to remember the simplest and stickiest.

Another significant example of "stickiness" came in the 60s, when a study was conducted about the importance of fear in learning. Subjects were divided into two groups: one group was given a booklet about the importance of tetanus inoculation; the other was given a booklet about the grotesque dangers of getting tetanus. Afterwards, it was found that people in the latter group were much more likely to say they were going to get their tetanus shots. But surprisingly, in the weeks following the experiment, almost none of the subjects actually got their tetanus shots—the fear and education wore off. Then, when the scientists tried the experiment again, they gave all subjects a map of the local area, showing where one could get tetanus shots. This time, a large portion of people from both control groups eventually got their tetanus shots. The interesting thing about the experiment is that the differences in persuasive techniques ultimately had little effect on the subjects' likelihood of getting a tetanus shot. What finally encouraged the subjects to get a shot was a simple map.

The tetanus study is another good example of how sticky information can be more persuasive than logically convincing information—in this way, the study echoes the findings of the Peter Jennings study from the previous chapter. In both cases, a logically sound argument in favor of a certain point of view (voting for Reagan, getting a tetanus shot) was found to be less effective and less persuasive than an irrational, almost subconsciously effective behavior or technique (such as Jennings's facial expression or the map).

Stickiness has become particularly important in advertising in the 21st century, because there is so much advertising in general, and it's hard for any single ad to stand out when there are hundreds of others. It thus becomes especially important to discover techniques for holding people's attention. One of the major pioneers of these attention-grabbing techniques was *Sesame Street*. The show was built around the idea that, by getting children's attention, one could then educate them about reading, writing, and math.

So far, Gladwell's examples have implied that stickiness and intellectual content are almost mutually exclusive. The success of Sesame Street, *however, suggests that the two concepts can reinforce one another. In effect, the TV show's young audiences "came for the stickiness and stayed for the education."*

While making *Sesame Street*, scientists studied children to understand how they watched TV, and what portions of a TV show were most interesting to children. Producers showed "rough" episodes of *Sesame Street* to test audiences of children in order to decide what parts of the episode should be shortened or cut out altogether. Test audiences revealed that children preferred the parts of the show that blended "fantasy and reality"—i.e., the parts where real actors interacted with puppets like Big Bird and Oscar the Grouch. So test audiences helped to shape *Sesame Street* into the famous TV show it became. Furthermore, producers used test audiences in an effort to make *Sesame Street* as sticky as possible.

The history of Sesame Street *is a great example of how TV producers used sticky advertising techniques to make their "product" (the TV show itself) more successful. Surprisingly, the quintessential* Sesame Street *scene—in which a live human being interacts with a giant puppet like Oscar or Big Bird—was the result of a research group, not just the showrunners' original ideas.*

The idea behind *Sesame Street* is that when children watch fun, sticky content, they'll be more likely to pay attention to educational lessons imbedded in the TV show. But the producers considered a possible objection: what if the children watching *Sesame Street* were just enjoying the sticky content and ignoring the educational lessons? After conducting a series of experiments with children's test groups, the producers learned some important lessons about educating children. They learned that they had to put educational content in the center of the TV screen, where TV viewers are most likely to look. They also learned that they shouldn't feature *Sesame Street* characters and educational content, such as letters or numbers, in the same shot, since children would just watch the characters and not the words or letters.

There's no rule that says that rational content and stickiness must be either mutually exclusive or mutually reinforcing. Sometimes stickiness distracts from the "message" of the product, and sometimes it enhances this message. In the case of Sesame Street, *the show's producers had to be careful that their show's stickiness didn't hinder its young viewers' attempts to learn about numbers and letters.*

Years after *Sesame Street*, TV producers tried to produce another children's show using the same educational techniques *Sesame Street* had pioneered. The show was called *Blue's Clues*, and it was deliberately simpler and more straightforward than *Sesame Street*. There were fewer characters, and none of the clever wordplay of *Sesame Street*. And yet *Blues Clues* is the much stickier show: tests showed that children paid closer attention to *Blues Clues* and learned more from it, too. In general, *Sesame Street* was a "magazine show"—it was made up of forty or fifty one-minute segments without much of a common story. In the 60s, it was believed that short segments were the best way to hold children's attention. But in fact, it was later theorized that children prefer a strong narrative, which means that usually, different segments of a children's TV show should be longer.

The differences between the two TV shows, Sesame Street *and* Blue's Clues *demonstrate some important points about stickiness. First, stickiness varies from one age group to another. For the parents watching* Sesame Street *with their children, "stickiness" meant shorter segments and amusing adult jokes. But for the children, "stickiness" meant repetition and simplicity. That's why* Blue's Clues *became more successful among children than* Sesame Street*—the show's producers used more research to show that children preferred strong narrative.*

Blue's Clues was designed to entertain children by providing the humor and fantasy of *Sesame Street*, but with longer segments, a more obvious narrative, and fewer jokes intended for adults (which had been a staple of *Sesame Street* for a long time). The show revolves around solving riddles (the children on the show are given clues, which they must solve). *Blue's Clues* borrowed the sticky techniques of *Sesame Street*: the producers used test audiences to measure the segments of the show that interested children most, and used strategies like keeping the educational content in the center of the screen. The show also used lots of repetition. While repetition is often thought of as boring and annoying, it's an important feature of children's shows, since children tend to enjoy repeating new information, "celebrating" what they've just learned.

Stickiness and entertainment aren't necessarily one and the same. A catchy jingle might be extremely annoying, but it's also very sticky—it gets "stuck" in viewers' heads. Watching Blue's Clues, *the difference between stickiness and entertainment becomes clear: in the interest of being sticky, the show uses an amount of repetition that, by most adult standards, would be pretty boring. But what might seem dull for adults is actually very entertaining for younger children; in other words, different groups of people have different definitions of stickiness.*

Gladwell attended a research meeting for *Blue's Clues*. During the meeting, scientists and researchers met with preschoolers and gave them fun puzzles in order to identify what children would and wouldn't like in a TV show episode. The researchers gave the children a riddle, to which the answer was "penguins." Step by step, the researchers gave clues to the children, so that by the end, all the children could guess the correct answer. The researchers spent huge amounts of time researching the best way to structure these riddles for TV, so that the children watching will figure out the answer, but not too early.

According to the format of Blue's Clues, *the show's characters give children riddles (such as "penguin"). The show must be carefully tested to ensure that the riddles are suspenseful—and therefore sticky for their viewers. To an even greater degree than* Sesame Street, *Gladwell argues, the success of* Blue's Clues *depended on research teams maximizing their show's stickiness.*

In general, stickiness can be counterintuitive. One would think that people respond to witty, clever advertisements and TV messages. But in fact, the stickiest information is often simple and unoriginal. That's why the "Gold Box" campaign, despite seeming cheesy and unoriginal, was so successful. It's also why *Blue's Clues* is a more popular children's show than *Sesame Street*, in spite of its simpler, more repetitive format. While there is no simple formula for stickiness, "there is always a simple way to package information that, under the right circumstances, can make it irresistible."

Whatever people might think about themselves, in reality it's often the simplest, cheesiest, least original ads and TV shows that become the most popular. One could interpret this fact positively (since it allows TV producers to make a TV show that teaches children how to read and count) or negatively (since it suggests that human beings aren't as clever or tasteful as they'd like to think, and that they can be manipulated with simple gimmicks). For the time being, Gladwell doesn't editorialize excessively: he shows how, for better or worse, stickiness is important to trends.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE POWER OF CONTEXT (PART ONE)

In 1984, a man named Bernhard Goetz was walking to the subway in New York City. On the subway, a group of four young black men approached Goetz and asked him for five dollars. In response, Goetz revealed his gun and shot the four black men, killing three of them and paralyzing the fourth. In the aftermath of the shooting, Goetz became something of a hero: at a time when crime rates in New York City were skyrocketing, Goetz was perceived as a brave man who "stood up" to dangerous criminals.

As with his earlier chapters, Gladwell begins with a specific example—here, the life of Bernhard Goetz—then doubles back to explain the relevant sociological principles, and finally returns to apply these principles to his original example.

Goetz's shooting (for which he was ultimately exonerated) occurred in the 1980s, when New York City had a tremendous problem with crime. Yet after 1990, the crime rate went down in New York at a surprising rate. In 1996, Goetz went to trial in civil court. By then, many had forgotten how dangerous New York once was—Goetz had once been a symbol for vigilante heroism, but now, people "seemed to remember precisely what it was that Goetz had once symbolized." Goetz was widely considered a murderer and a racist.

That Goetz could, at different points in the 80s and 90s, be celebrated as a hero and demonized as a racist murderer is an excellent, if disturbing, example of the importance of context, especially historical context. (Gladwell was criticized for his analysis of the Goetz affair—his lack of political editorializing has been interpreted as tacit support or sympathy for Goetz's actions.)

It's hard to pinpoint what, precisely caused the decline in crime in New York between the 80s and the 90s. Gladwell proposes that we can understand the decline in crime by citing the Power of Context: the importance of environmental factors in determining the Tipping Point.

The third rule of social epidemics is environmental in nature: while specific people and products can cause major trends, no trend can "flourish" without the right context.

One reason why the decline in New York City crime is such a mystery is that is happened so quickly. At a time when crime in the U.S. as a whole was declining slowly and steadily, crime in New York declined rapidly and decisively. Some sociologists have attributed the decline in crime to new policing techniques, based in a theory called the "Broken Window Hypothesis"—the idea that major crimes (murder, rape, robbery) are encouraged by seemingly trivial crimes (graffiti, public urination, and broken windows), meaning that cities can reduce serious crimes by clamping down in minor crimes. In the mid-1990s, two important New York City leaders, Rudolph Giuliani, the mayor, and William Bratton, the head of the New York City Police Department, worked together to apply the Broken Window Hypothesis to their city. They clamped down on minor crimes like graffiti, turnstile-jumping, and public urination. Within a few years, crime in New York City—including serious crimes like rape and murder—had plummeted.

The Broken Window Hypothesis is one of the most influential theories in the history of criminology, and it's been enacted in many different cities, not just New York City. Some have argued that the Broken Window Hypothesis was a runaway success because it "cleaned up" urban decay and paved the way for lower crime rates. Others have argued that the Broken Window Hypothesis was an excuse to excessively persecute black and Latino people under the guise of "cleaning up the city," and that Giuliani's policies were only "successful" because tens of thousands of people were being incarcerated for possessing small quantities of cocaine and marijuana. (For further reference, the argument that the Broken Window policies unfairly target minorities and the poor is sometimes called the "sleeping under a bridge" theory.)

The Broken Window Hypothesis and the Power of Context are two versions of the same argument: small environmental details can have major effects on public behavior. In the 80s, Goetz had a reputation among his friends as a short-tempered, often explicitly racist man: he would say that the city needed to "get rid of the spics and niggers." Three months before he murdered the men on the subway, Goetz had been mugged by three black youths. So in retrospect, it seems easy to "predict" that Goetz would have shot the four black men on the subway. And yet, according to the Broken Window theory, it wasn't just Goetz's psychology that led him to shoot; it was the environment he was in at the time. The graffiti on the subway and the general decay of the train put Goetz on edge and made him more likely to "snap" by shooting. This idea, Gladwell argues, is actually politically Liberal (since it presents human beings as the product of their environment), not Conservative, as it's often said to be.

The Power of Context is a radical idea because it posits that people's environments are more influential in determining their actions than people's personalities or innate psychologies. While it's true that Goetz was a racist and a moody, angry man, it was (Gladwell argues) Goetz's environment that finally triggered him to shoot at the fatal moment. Gladwell acknowledges that the Broken Window Hypothesis has faced some harsh criticisms (though he doesn't address the possibility that it unfairly persecutes minorities and the poor), but argues that the hypothesis was ultimately "Liberal." In interviews, Gladwell has expanded on this point: a "liberal" view of crime, as Gladwell sees it, is that people are products of their environment; in other words, people commit crimes because their environments compel them to do so, not because they're innately bad people. Therefore, the Broken Window Hypothesis could be said to take a sympathetic view of crime and criminals: rather than implying that criminals are just "bad guys," it suggests that bad guys do bad things because of external factors.

As we saw in the discussion of "word-of-mouth," small, almost imperceptible actions and gestures can have a strong influence on people's behaviors. The same is true of environment: small, almost unnoticeable stimuli can lead to major effects. During the infamous Stanford Prison Experiment of the 1970s, volunteers were divided into prisoners and guards in a mock-prison. Disturbingly quickly, the fake "guards" began to treat their fake prisoners cruelly, seemingly forgetting that the experiment was an experiment at all. The experiment became so violent and sadistic that it had to be called off after only six days, though it was originally supposed to go on for two weeks. One of the major conclusions of the experiment was that physical environment can have an almost overpowering influence on human behavior—the prison environment changed the subjects' behavior very quickly.

The infamous Stanford Prison Experiment is a strong example of how environment can change a person's behavior in surprisingly major ways. It would be easy to conclude, as some have done, that the Stanford Prison Experiment proves that people are innately wicked. But in fact, Gladwell suggests, environment can influence people to behave in any number of different ways.

Another important experiment for understanding the role of environment on behavior is the Hartshorne/May experiment from the 1920s. In this experiment, students were given a difficult test: half the students were graded objectively, while the other half of the students were instructed to grade their own papers (it was assumed that this second group would cheat on the grading). The goal of the experiment was to measure how students cheat. The results of the experiment were surprising: students would cheat under certain circumstances (the presence of an adult in the room, the subject being tested, the size of the classroom), but not others. There were almost no students who were honest all of the time, or who cheated all of the time—whether or not the students cheated depended on environmental factors.

The Hartshorne/May experiment suggests that children don't cheat because they're innately honest or dishonest. Instead, children cheat for a variety of different reasons, depending on what subject they're being tested on, how many other students are cheating, etc. Intuitively, one might think that honesty is a stable, innate character trait. But as this experiment implies, honesty is subject to environmental influences: people will act with varying degrees of honesty in different contexts.

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Humans have a bad habit of attributing human behavior to innate causes (i.e., personality, intelligence, free will, etc.). In fact, environment plays an enormous role in human behavior. Similarly, humans tend to think of one another in terms of sweeping categories like "smart," "honest," "hardworking," etc. In reality, there's no such thing as a person who's honest at all times, or a person who's intelligent in all the many possible senses of intelligence. Different environmental stimuli will reveal different aspects of a person's honesty, intelligence, etc. Psychologists call this mistake the "Fundamental Attribution Error"; the tendency to "overestimate the importance of fundamental character traits and underestimating the importance of situation and context."

In this section, Gladwell suggests that the concept of personality is nowhere near as stable as it's often assumed to be. People may be predisposed to behave in certain ways, but this doesn't mean that they'll behave a certain way at all times. The Fundamental Attribution Error also has potential implications for Gladwell's theories about social epidemics. Gladwell's arguments about Connectors assume that certain kinds of people naturally enjoy spreading information to their friends, but retrospectively, Gladwell's arguments about the role of environment could suggest that even the most enthusiastic Connectors are subject to contextual changes; there may be certain situations in which a Connector is more likely *to pass on information.*

There was an experiment conducted at Princeton University in which Princeton theological students were asked to make a brief presentation on a biblical parable. The students were given some time to prepare their presentations, and then a lab assistant escorted them across the campus to a new building. During this walk, the assistant made sure to lead the students past a groaning, coughing man crawling on the ground (in reality, just an actor). One might assume that almost all the theological students stopped to help the man, especially since the situation was based on one of the most famous biblical parables, the parable of the Good Samaritan. But in fact, the students' behavior changed greatly, depending on *how* they were escorted to the other building. When the assistant told the students they were pressed for time, the students almost never stopped to help the man; on the other hand, when the assistant mentioned that there was plenty of the time, the students were much more likely help the man. The point of the experiment is that conviction, personality, and other "fundamental" qualities are often less important than environmental factors (i.e., what the assistant told them about how much time was left) in determining behavior. The simple words "Oh, you're late," had the effect of changing otherwise compassionate theological students into oblivious, callous-seeming people.

The Princeton theological seminary experiment is a particularly striking example of the role of environment on behavior because it concerns theological students—in other words, people that would seem to have a particularly stable, clear-cut personality-type (honest, loyal, moral, etc.). If even theological students are subject to subtle contextual changes (they ignored people in need because of a simple phrase, "Oh, you're late"), then perhaps all human beings are subject to such changes. As with the Kitty Genovese incident, it would be easy to conclude from the experiment that human beings are innately cold and callous. But in fact, humans aren't innately callous or loving; their behavior can be "tipped" in either direction by a handful of small environmental cues.

Gladwell is not saying that personality and psychology are *unimportant* in determining behavior. However, measures of psychological health and personality measure a person's *inclination* to behave a certain way. In the real world, whether or not a person in fact *does* behave a certain way is subject to environmental stimuli. The distinction between inclination and action is at the heart of the Power of Context, and the Broken Window Hypothesis. Even if criminal psychology cannot be cured, society can reduce crime by controlling the environments and spaces that often encourage crime.

Gladwell adds an important qualifier to his chapter: personality plays a very important role in shaping behavior (if it didn't, then there wouldn't be Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen). However, there are times when context can tip human behavior in a certain direction, regardless of personality. So perhaps even Connectors, despite being naturally predisposed to making friends, must live in an environment that encourages them to do so.

To return to Goetz one more time—it's important to remember how Goetz described his own crime. He said that, in the ugly, graffiti-ridden subway, it was difficult to be sane, and added that he behaved "like a rat." Gladwell notes, "Of course he did. He was in a rat hole."

Political activists have criticized Gladwell for his depiction of Bernhard Goetz: even though Gladwell notes Goetz's racist behavior, he ultimately characterizes Goetz as a product of his "rat hole" environment: an assessment that some have interpreted as overly sympathetic. Gladwell's theory of tipping points doesn't fit perfectly with either Liberal or Conservative politics, since it suggests that people's actions are subject to contextual triggers, and are, in a sense, irrational.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE POWER OF CONTEXT (PART TWO)

In 1996, a writer and actress named Rebecca Wells published a book, *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. The book sold modestly at first. But slowly, the book developed a cult following, until eventually, it became one of the best-selling books of the 1990s. Why did this book eventually become so popular?

Wells's literary career fits the same format as the earlier anecdotes about Hush Puppies or syphilis: a sudden, unexpected upshot in popularity and pervasiveness of the "infectious agent," in this case Wells's book.

The size of a group plays a huge role in social epidemics. For example, a comedy playing in a large movie theater will often get more laughs (both overall, and per person) than the same film playing in someone's home—the "peer pressure" of other people laughing inspires extra laughter, as if laughter is contagious. Rebecca Wells's book became a hit in part because she toured through San Francisco, where book club groups were especially popular. In book clubs, certain readers bonded over Wells's book, and wanted to share their experience with other people—so they bought more copies of the book. Love for the book was contagious in the same way that laughter can be contagious in a large movie theater. So groups can be hugely important in starting social epidemics: when a group likes a product or idea, the members of the group will often spread the product or idea to other people.

Wells's success as an author isn't only the result of her literary talent; her book's success was also a product of numerous book clubs' enthusiasm. The people in book clubs were likely to enjoy Wells's book, it's suggested, because they were surrounded by other people who enjoyed it. In the previous chapter, Gladwell showed how small details of an environment, such as the amount of graffiti on the walls, can influence a person's behavior. In this chapter, Gladwell will show that other people, particularly groups of people, can similarly influence behavior in subtle, unexpected ways.

Numerous studies of human cognition have come to parallel conclusions: the human brain can divide random stimuli into about six or seven different categories. For example, the average person can distinguish between about six different musical notes before getting confused. Similarly, most phone numbers are seven digits, since the average person can remember about seven digits before starting to forget them all.

The human brain's propensity for remembering combinations of six or seven is a good example of how the mind can be "hard-wired" to think in terms of specific numbers.

Much as the numbers six and seven represent a limit on how many stimuli the human brain can keep separate on average, the number 150 represents a limit on how many social relationships the brain can usually keep straight. Evolutionary psychologists have noticed that the size of different primates' brains correlates closely with the average group size for that species. Species of primate that cluster in larger groups almost always have the largest cortexes and the greatest cerebral power. Psychologists have even extrapolated from the data to suggest that 150 is, on average, "the maximum number of individuals with whom we can have a genuinely social relationship." The number 150 pops up frequently in anthropology and history. In many different societies across the world, the average village size is about 150, and historically, generals have organized their fighting forces into units of about 150-200. Various religious congregations have also organized into groups of 150.

While the evidence is incomplete, evolutionary psychologists (i.e., people who study the ways the mind has changed over millennia in response to natural selection) theorize that the mind changes with respect to increasing group size. Thus, the average community size of a proto-human species correlates closely with brainpower. The same is true of human beings: specifically, the number 150 seems to be an upper limit on the size of a close-knit, communicative group.

Gladwell proposes a "Rule of 150"—a group with 150 members or less is often able to organize itself, make decisions, and avoid serious arguments, while a group with more than 150 members is often unable to do the same. Moving from 140 members to 170 members might seem like a small change, but in fact the change can have huge consequences.

Gladwell isn't saying that the number 150 is an absolute—there may be groups of 160 that function better than other groups of 140. Nevertheless, 150 is a useful benchmark, rather than a hard limit, for analyzing successful and unsuccessful groups.

Consider Gore Associates, a billion-dollar tech firm. Gore is an unusual company because it has no job titles. Employees have no specific bosses, and salaries are determined collectively. All employee offices are the same size. In short, Gore is organized like a small company, despite the fact that it's worth a billion dollars and has hundreds of employees. Wilbert Gore, the founder of the company, explains that he was able to keep the company "small-feeling" by using the rule of 150: he ensured that no branch of the company would have more than 150 employees.

Gore uses sociological techniques to maximize its productivity: by capping the number of employees per branch at 150, Gore ensures that its employees are more likely to trust one another, cooperate well, and generally perform successfully as a business community.

Other associates of Gore explain that "peer pressure" plays a vital role in the company's success. Gore employees claim that when an employee is surrounded by a small number of peers and coworkers who all know him well, the employee will be more incentivized to succeed than he would be if working under a boss.

One reason that the rule of 150 is so useful is that groups of 150 or fewer people will be more likely to know one another closely—they'll personally be acquainted with everyone at the company, arguably increasing productivity.

One advantage to working at a company like Gore is that the "transactive memory" of the employees is much larger than it would be at a regular company. Transactive memory is a form of memory in which two or more people are responsible for remembering a set of information. When the two or more people involved in this endeavor know one another well, they'll organize themselves intuitively, so that certain people remember certain pieces of information. Transactive memory is highly efficient. Most close families have a very high transactive memory—different family members remember specific aspects of the family's experience; furthermore, certain family members might specialize in remembering certain kinds of information. The 150 employees at any given Gore branch have an enormous transactive memory, because they've organized themselves to remember different parts of the business.

Another major advantage of the rule of 150 is that groups of 150 people or fewer naturally divide up into different tasks or business sectors: for example, some people will naturally specialize in customer service, production, etc. In most ordinary companies, employees specialize based on their job descriptions: an employee focuses on his sector of the business because that's his job. Gladwell suggests that Gore's self-organization is more efficient because there will be fewer redundancies: at an ordinary company, people's responsibilities might overlap, whereas at Gore, 150 people cover every aspect of the business comprehensively and efficiently.

CHAPTER SIX: CASE STUDY (RUMORS, SNEAKERS, AND THE POWER OF TRANSLATION)

In the early 1990s, a company called Airwalk became wildly successful. The company began selling shoes marketed to skateboarders, but gradually expanded to sell hiking boots, snowboots, and other shoes. Airwalk targeted young buyers, and paid popular musicians large sums to wear Airwalk shoes while performing. Why, exactly, did Airwalk tip? One hypothesis for why Airwalk became a huge success is that its ad agency, Lambesis, came up with a brilliant ad campaign that quickly became recognizably on TV. In order to understand why the ad campaign was so successful, we can look to the different stages in a social epidemic.

The book began with a description of how a certain kind of shoe became successful; here in Chapter Six, Gladwell again returns to shoes. For the remainder of his book, however, Gladwell will study how specific companies and groups tip into popularity, using the three laws he's described so far.

Studies have analyzed the process of a social epidemic in terms of the different audiences for such an epidemic. There are the Innovators and Early Adopters—the people who are first to try a new idea or product. Then there's the Early Majority, often consisting of the businesses and establishment groups that try to adopt an idea early on, but without taking a substantial risk. The hipsters who wore **Hush Puppies** in the mid-90s would constitute the Early Adopters, while the fashion designers who then used Hush Puppies in their ads would represent an Early Majority. The transition from Early Adoption to Early Majority represents the point where most ideas and products fail, and also the point where Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen play their biggest role.

In order to study Airwalk in more detail, Gladwell adds three new terms to the three laws he's already outlined: Innovators, Early Adopters, and the Early Majority. These three terms reflect the Law of the Few, because they reiterate the point that a few disproportionately influential people can cause a social epidemic. In this case, it is the task of Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen to learn of a new trend from Innovators and Early Adopters, and pass on the information to form an Early Majority. Furthermore, Connectors, Mavens and Salesmen are by definition Early Adopters, since they must first adopt an idea or product before passing it along.

One interesting version of a social epidemic is rumor: a story that gets repeated by many different people. Psychologists have shown that rumors spread by becoming "sticky." At first, a rumor might contain many pieces of information, but as the story gets spread, it simplifies. Furthermore, the story often "adapts" to the lives of the people who are telling it, so that it makes sense in the context of their own community. In general, the process by which a rumor is spread is similar to the process by which Mavens, Salesmen, and Connectors make an idea popular, and the process by which an idea diffuses from the Early Innovators to the Early Majority. Gladwell calls this process "Translation."

Gladwell has the three laws, which can be used to analyze social epidemics in three distinct ways. But now that he's moved on to case studies, he's studying the process of a social epidemic holistically. In practice, an idea or product must pass from Innovation to Majority in a process called Translation. Gladwell's point is that Translation doesn't simply "pass on" an idea or product to other people, as the earlier chapters had suggested: Translation often changes the idea or product, too, in order to make it stickier and more infectious.

A good example of translation came to Baltimore in the 80s, with the introduction of the needle exchange program. At the height of the AIDS crisis, officials proposed that a truck would travel around the city, offering drug addicts clean needles in exchange for dirty ones, no questions asked. After the program was installed, officials realized that a few addicts were bringing in hundreds of needles, exchanging them for clean needles, and then selling the needles on their own. Eventually, officials decided that this was a much better solution to the problem of dirty needles than the government itself could provide: the addicts who were selling clean needles, in Gladwell's terminology, were Connectors, spreading the new "product" across Baltimore.

This passage is a good example of how ideas and products of all kinds sweep through a community because of the actions of a few influential Connectors. The passage has also prompted disagreement, since it seems to imply that letting drug addicts profit off of other people's addiction is a "successful" strategy (one could argue that such a program just encourages further drug use and therefore prolongs the drug epidemic).

In a way, Lambesis (the ad agency marketing Airwalk) was trying to perform the same service for American shoe customers that the Baltimore officials were trying to perform for addicts: transmit a new product as quickly and efficiently as possible. Lambesis began researching the shoe market for Airwalk. The company spent a lot of time and money researching new trends around the world, striking up relationships with young "correspondents" in major world cities like New York, London, and Tokyo. These young correspondents were textbook Innovators, and they played a major role in dictating the style and tone of Lambesis's ad campaign for Airwalk.

Lambesis seems to have used precisely the techniques and rules that Gladwell writes about in this book. Just as Gladwell emphasizes the importance of Innovators and Salesmen in social epidemics, Lambesis tried to "tap into" its innovative correspondents' tastes and styles in order to persuade customers to buy shoes, effectively trying to "sell" the Salesmen.

Lambesis had a clear strategy while marketing Airwalk shoes: in commercials, the company tried to evoke as many "hot trends" as possible, in the hopes that people who enjoyed those trends would associate Airwalk shoes with the trends. But Lambesis didn't just repeat these trends—it reshaped, simplified, and "sweetened" the trends in commercial form. For example, Lambesis picked up on a wave of support for Tibet and the Dalai Lama among its young correspondents, so it "translated" the trend into a 30-second commercial about a Tibetan monk wearing Airwalk shoes.

The process by which Lambesis marketed the Airwalk shoe is a little different from some of the other social epidemics Gladwell has discussed. As advertisers, Lambesis executives were trying to start a social epidemic in which Airwalk shoes were the product, but they were also trying to "piggyback" off of other social epidemics—for example, the "trend" of supporting the Dalai Lama. This illustrates an important point: sometimes, one social epidemic can successfully imitate another social epidemic, "infecting" the people who've already been infected by another social epidemic. (Characteristically, Gladwell doesn't talk about the ethics of twisting a political cause like the Tibetan liberation movement into a campaign to sell shoes.)

By 1997, Airwalk sales were faltering, in part because the company failed to keep up with its own Innovators and correspondents. The company was highly popular among "young, cool" people, but gradually, the shoes became so ubiquitous that it was difficult for an Airwalk customer to distinguish herself from the mainstream. Without a steady supply of new Innovators, the company lost its momentum, and sales gradually decreased. In short, the epidemic was over.

Just as Airwalk attained success because it was able to mirror Innovator trends in its ads, it eventually failed because it lost touch with its Innovators. By definition, trends are successful because the idea or product is "trendy"; in other words, because it's original or unexpected in some way. When a product stops being so original, the trend tends to subside (although, as we saw with Hush Puppies, the trend may reappear years later).

CHAPTER SEVEN: CASE STUDY (SUICIDE, SMOKING, AND THE SEARCH FOR THE UNSTICKY CIGARETTE)

In the South Pacific islands of Micronesia, there was a teenager named Sima. Sima's father woke up him one morning and ordered him to find a pole knife in town. Sima was unable to find such a knife, and his father was so furious that he kicked Sima out of the house and told him to never come back. Shortly afterwards, Sima hanged himself. At the time, suicide was almost unheard of in Micronesia. But within the intervening four decades, suicide has become hugely common in Micronesia—roughly eight times the suicide rate of the United States. The prevalence of suicide in Micronesia is particularly unusual because almost all of the suicide cases are teenaged boys who experience arguments with their families or lovers. Anthropologists have even argued that suicide is a established part of Micronesian culture, expressed and even celebrated in music, literature, and film.

In the final case study in the book, Gladwell discusses a few different forms of teenaged epidemics: suicide in Micronesia and smoking in the United States. Suicide is a social epidemic in the same way that Hush Puppies or Airwalks were social epidemics: when certain people committed suicide in Micronesia, other people wanted to do so, too. Previously, Gladwell has mostly withheld moral judgment from the trends and social epidemics he's discussing (which has caused him to be criticized by some), but in this chapter Gladwell takes a stronger stance against suicide and smoking.

Suicide in Micronesia is strikingly similar to the teenage smoking epidemic in the United States. Teenagers smoke in the U.S. despite being fairly aware of the health risks of doing so. Furthermore, the large anti-smoking movement in the U.S. in the 90s seemingly had little effect on teen smoking—in fact, smoking among students and teenagers increased during the 90s. Gladwell proposes that teen smoking, like Micronesian suicide, can't be combatted with education or any other methods of rational persuasion. Instead, teen smoking is a form of "complex ritual," governed by irrational psychological factors.

When analyzing suicide in Micronesia and smoking in the U.S., Gladwell applies the same laws he's already discussed. In particular, he argues that human beings are more easily swayed by irrational, sometimes subconscious changes in their environments, peers, and products. Therefore, the best way to change teenagers' destructive behavior is to use the laws Gladwell has described, rather than explicit, rational appeals.

It is a well-established fact that suicide can inspire other suicides. When a prominent person commits suicide, there is usually a wave of copycat suicides soon afterwards (for example, after Marilyn Monroe killed herself, the national suicide rate increased by 12 percent). Indeed, it's possible to interpret a suicide wave as a form of social epidemic. In Micronesia, there was a suicide epidemic that began when R., the son of a famous family, hanged himself because he couldn't decide between his two lovers. In Gladwell's terminology, the son who hanged himself is a Salesman, persuading other Micronesian people to kill themselves in the same way.

While it may be disturbing to think that suicide is just a "trend," not so different from a trend in shoes, Gladwell convincingly shows that suicides often inspire a "wave" of copycats. The epidemic nature of suicide is particularly striking and counterintuitive because suicide would appear to be an extremely personal decision, on which other people's actions have no bearing. But in fact, teenagers who commit suicide act like Salesmen, "persuading" others to commit suicide as well.

In order to test his hypothesis that teen smoking is a social epidemic that follows the characteristics he's discussed in his book, Gladwell conducted a survey in which he asked people to describe their earliest experiences with cigarettes. The vast majority of the responders gave a version of the same answer: their earliest memories associate smoking with maturity and sophistication, usually embodied by a "cool friend" or older sibling. Smoking, one could say, becomes an epidemic when Salesmen (friends, older siblings, or movie stars) persuade people to try smoking. Gladwell posits that there is a "smoking personality"—the kind of person who is charismatic, sexually precocious, confident, and extroverted, and who smokes. People with a smoking personality will be likely to inspire many others to smoke, beginning an epidemic. In all, the key similarity between smoking and suicide is that in both cases, a small but influential group inspires a wave of copycats.

The Salesmen that Gladwell identifies in his informal survey have many things in common: they're charismatic, and seem to take keen pleasure in influencing other people's behavior. As the Law of the Few would suggest, a small group of charismatic, influential smokers inspired a large group of other people to take up smoking as well.

As we have seen, the teen smoking epidemic is a good example of the Law of the Few—the few charismatic smoking personalities who inspire a lot of other smokers. But the smoking epidemic also an interesting case of the Stickiness Factor. Smoking itself can be an addictive habit. But it's not equally addictive for everyone. There are people who smoke, but not regularly—indeed, 20% of all American smokers do *not* smoke every day. This suggests that for some smokers, smoking is contagious (i.e., it's a glamorous behavior that people want to imitate) but not sticky (i.e., it's not addictive). Studies show that mammals can ingest nicotine periodically without developing a chemical addiction to it; these studies might suggest how certain human beings can smoke occasionally without becoming addicted to nicotine.

Perhaps the most obvious and literal way to apply the three laws of social epidemics to the teenaged smoking epidemic is by using the Stickiness Factor—cigarettes are, after all, "sticky" in the sense that they can be highly addictive. Interestingly, Gladwell shows that cigarettes aren't equally sticky for everyone (echoing his observation in Chapter Three about how TV shows have different degrees of stickiness for adults and children).

A question then arises: how best to fight the teen smoking epidemic? Should officials concentrate on limiting the contagiousness of smoking, or reducing the stickiness of smoking?

Out of this discussion of teenaged smoking, two possibilities seem to emerge.

Beginning with contagion, Gladwell considers the possibility of convincing teenagers to ignore smoking personalities and "look elsewhere, to get their cues as to what is cool, in this instance, from adults." The problem with such a strategy is that parents don't wield much influence over their children's personalities, or the kinds of role models that children respect. In general, scientific studies have called into question whether parents ultimately play much role in shaping their children's personalities at all. Examining adopted children over time, numerous studies suggest that an adopted child's personality barely correlates with the personality of the child's adopted parents. This would suggest that genetics play a far greater role in shaping a child's behavior than nurture, contrary to what almost all parents believe. The point of these studies isn't that environment plays no role in children's development; it's that parents are a surprisingly minor part of a child's environment.

Gladwell argues that it would be extremely difficult to interfere with the contagiousness of cigarettes. One reason for this is that parents—in theory, a child's most important role models—are less influential in a child's personal development than they would appear. Numerous studies suggest that a parent's primary contribution to a child's behavior is genetic. Therefore, it follows that changes in parents' behavior with regard to smoking (for example, the parent telling the child not to smoke, or, if the parent herself smokes, not smoking in front of the child) will be relatively unlikely to change the child's behavior.

Gladwell acknowledges that the idea that parents are a relatively unimportant part of a child's environment is controversial. Nevertheless, the idea can be applied to the teen smoking epidemic very easily. Children of smokers are more likely to become smokers than children of nonsmokers. But this is largely genetic, not environmental. Teenagers imitate other people—but they're most likely to imitate their peers, not their parents.

Attempts to undermine the contagiousness of cigarettes run into the problem that teenagers don't always imitate their parents—teenagers are more likely to imitate other teenagers, instead. Previous attempts to change contagiousness have focused on celebrities and parents—two groups whose behavior, according to Gladwell, is far less contagious than the behavior of other teenagers.

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Following the social epidemic terminology, one way to fight the teen smoking epidemic would be to limit the power of Salesmen—the people who persuade teens to smoke. But unfortunately, attempts to do so often end up strengthening the Salesmen's power by making their product seem more glamorous and alluring.

Another problem with interfering with the contagiousness of smoking is that attempts at interference just make teens more likely to smoke—if ordered not to smoke, the proverbial "rebellious teenager" will just smoke more.

Is there any way to reduce the stickiness of smoking? In a perfect world, it would be possible to give people pills to reduce their tolerances to nicotine, meaning that people would smoke less. Some ways of reducing the stickiness of cigarettes have been attempted, such as the nicotine patch. The nicotine patch reduces the "comparative stickiness" of cigarettes by providing an alternative to a cigarette. However, it's clear that smokers prefer cigarettes because of the high intensity of nicotine in a single puff.

A second strategy for reducing the teen smoking epidemic is to reduce the stickiness of the cigarette itself; i.e., to make the cigarette less chemically addictive. One way of competing with the stickiness of the cigarette is to popularize the nicotine patch. Yet the nicotine patch has mostly failed to compete with the stickiness of the cigarette.

Gladwell proposes two possibilities for fighting the teen smoking epidemic through stickiness. First, he notes the correlation between smoking and depression—smokers are much more likely to report depression than the average American. There are many possible explanations for this correlation. It could be that the social factors that push people to become smokers—susceptibility to contagion—also push people to become depressed. It's also possible that depression and addictiveness have the same genetic root; in other words, nicotine is more addictive when the smoker is depressed. Thus, it's possible that one could improve the smoking epidemic by treating depression more carefully. Indeed, there is a drug called Zyban that increases dopamine levels in the brain in order to fight depression. The drug has been shown to be effective in fighting nicotine addiction since, in increasing dopamine levels in the brain, it provides a substitute for the "rush" of a cigarette.

While it's true that cigarettes are sticky because nicotine is chemically addictive, it's also true that nicotine can be especially chemically addictive when the smoker suffers from depression. Therefore, it might be possible to reduce the stickiness and addictiveness of cigarettes by treating teenagers for depression. Gladwell acknowledges that the scientific evidence on addictiveness and depression is far from conclusive; he's simply offering a suggestion for how we might go about fighting the teenage smoking epidemic.

Another potential way to fight the teen smoking epidemic would be to mandate that tobacco companies have to reduce the quantity of nicotine in a cigarette. In this way, smoking a cigarette wouldn't be as sticky as it is now (though it would still be somewhat sticky). Teens would continue smoking cigarettes, since smoking is a contagious habit. But they wouldn't develop a chemical addiction, or at least they wouldn't be as likely to develop such an addiction.

A more straightforward way to reduce the addictiveness of cigarettes is to pass a law mandating that tobacco companies put less nicotine in their products. In this way, teenagers would ingest less nicotine per cigarette, and perhaps become less addicted to cigarettes. (One potential objection to this idea: wouldn't teenagers just smoke extra cigarettes to compensate for the reduced nicotine?)

For the most part, the war on teen smoking has focused on fighting the contagiousness of the habit—the government has tried to reduce tobacco companies' broadcasting time and replace pro-smoking messages with anti-smoking messages. The problem is that contagiousness is difficult, if not impossible, to fight—Salesmen are too powerful and persuasive. A better strategy for those who would seek to curb teen smoking might be to focus on the stickiness of smoking itself.

Ultimately, Gladwell's ideas about the teen smoking epidemic are useful because of the way they frame the problem, not the specific solutions they detail. Government officials have spent huge sums on reducing the contagiousness of cigarettes—it might be time for the government to switch its strategy to reducing the stickiness of cigarettes.

One advantage of the focus on stickiness is that it would allow for a more reasonable approach to teenagers experimenting with cigarettes. Often, opponents of teen smoking speak as if trying one cigarette is the same as becoming addicted to nicotine. This isn't remotely close to the truth, either with cigarettes or with hard drugs. Teenagers will inevitably experiment with smoking cigarettes or other comparably rebellious behaviors—and perhaps they shouldn't be punished too harshly for doing so. Experimentation is not addiction.

A final problem with the anti-smoking movement's emphasis on contagion is that the only good way to reduce the contagiousness of smoking would be to prevent teenagers from being teenagers: i.e. to prevent them from trying ideas and products, looking for new role models, and experimenting in general.

To return to the Micronesian suicide epidemic: many of the teenagers who killed themselves first found out about suicide as younger children. They thought of suicide as a game to play, not a life-ending experience. The danger with this behavior, of course, is that suicide shouldn't be experimented with. In the case of cigarettes, however, it might make more sense to allow teenagers to experiment with tobacco and concentrate instead on controlling the Tipping Points of the addiction process, reducing the stickiness of nicotine.

In the final case studies in his book, Gladwell adopts a more explicitly moral stance on the social epidemic he describes. The suicide and smoking epidemics, he argues, must be stopped in order to save lives. Using the lessons of social epidemics he's detailed in his book, Gladwell tries to provide some potential solutions for these serious problems.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

In San Diego, there was a nurse named Georgia Sadler who tried to educate people about breast cancer and diabetes. She would set up meetings at local churches, but found that the same 200 people kept coming to hear her speak; she wasn't "tipping" to attract a bigger group. But then, Georgia had a bright idea—host the meetings at beauty salons, and let the stylists broadcast the information. At beauty salons, women might sit for up to eight hours (if they're getting their hair braided), and often, they trust their stylists deeply. The idea worked brilliantly; Sadler was able to disseminate her useful information to thousands of women, because she found a way to use people who were Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen—beauty stylists. Also, the stylists presented the information in a sticky, memorable format.

In the final chapter of the book, Gladwell opens with a positive example of how tipping point ideas can be used to change society. Georgia was able to use a network of Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen to persuade women to learn more about breast cancer and keep themselves safe. While a trend isn't necessarily good or bad in itself, Georgia's example proves that the laws of social epidemics can be a powerful force for good.

The first major lesson of the Tipping Point is that in order to start a social epidemic, one must concentrate resources on a couple areas: find a way to employ talented Connectors, Mavens, and Salesmen to start word-of-mouth epidemics. A critic might say that spending so much time on a small handful of people would be a waste of resources; it would be better to try a "comprehensive" solution to the problem, educating each person thoroughly. He might even dismiss Gladwell's proposals as "Band-Aid solutions" that don't really get to the heart of the problem. But, as this book has tried to show, "Band-Aid" solutions are often extremely effective. There is always a "convenient shortcut" to starting social epidemics; focusing on disproportionately influential people.

Gladwell uses this passage to address a potential criticism of his book: that he's relying too extensively on simple, superficial solutions to major problems. At first glance, for example, it seems bizarre to respond to the escalating murder rate of New York City by calling for all graffiti to be removed. However, Gladwell again argues that small, seemingly superficial reforms often end up having a bigger impact than bigger, more comprehensive changes. Even though it would be easy to criticize the "gold box" or the Broken Window Hypothesis as mere Band-Aid solutions to serious problems, history has proven that many so-called Band-Aid solutions can change the world.

The second major lesson of the Tipping Point is that "the world does not accord with our intuition." For example, we might assume that Kitty Genovese's murder proves that the average human being is cold and insensitive; but in reality, environment and context are the primary determinants of human behavior—human nature had little to do with Genovese's death. Moreover, humans are powerfully influenced by their surroundings—for example, taking the graffiti off the walls in New York City drastically improved the crime rate in the city.

Throughout his book, Gladwell has contrasted truth with intuition. Intuitively, it seems impossible that such tiny changes in people, places, and content could have such major effects on the world—and yet, as the book has shown, they do. Understanding this could have major effects on almost avenue of life, from government funding to business to making friends. Instead of spending lots of time and money trying to address the root of the problem, people could potentially use their time and money more efficiently by focusing on the tipping point.

The biggest lesson of all about the Tipping Point is simply that the world is not immovable. Tiny "pushes," if done the right way, can change the world.

In the end, Gladwell's message is neither entirely optimistic nor pessimistic. For better or worse, small changes can have a major influence on the world.

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