

I. The AIDS Epidemic

Instead of focusing on huge campaigns in an attempt to knock out the AIDS epidemic, society should be focusing on the smaller ideas that can have larger underlying impacts as illustrated by Malcolm Gladwell's Power of Context Theory. For nearly a decade, New York City officials tried to attack the crime epidemic by trying to eliminate the crisis by dealing with the larger crimes, and as a result, "New York City in the 1980s," was, "A city in the grip of one of the worst crime epidemics in its history" (Gladwell 288). It was only when newly appointed subway director David Gunn began focusing on smaller problems such as the elimination of graffiti on trains and the cracking down on fare-beating that the epidemic began to turn a corner. The process that authorities are taking to subdue the AIDS epidemic is much like New York's approach in the 1980s that only led to further severity of crime. What they should be doing is focusing on smaller-scale issues such as promoting individual positive self-esteem, as exhibited by AIDS Prevention Workshops conducted and brought about by Daniel J. Bloom. Participants of these workshops "regularly reported that attending them has been helpful in their adopting and maintaining safer sexual practices" (As published in AIDS Education and Prevention in 1991). The results of these different approaches would suggest that only through focusing on the many minor details of a larger-scale situation can resolution be attained.

By utilizing the ideas apparent in Malcolm Gladwell's, *The Power of Context*, the global issue of HIV/AIDS can be broken down into smaller, more manageable pieces allowing for greater contribution to the widespread prevention of the virus. The issue of the disease exists in two forms; that of the existence in developed countries and of that in lesser, undeveloped countries. To effectively address the problem at hand, separate strategies in dealing with HIV/AIDS must be applied to each appropriate situation.

As Gladwell states, "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. The Tipping Point in this epidemic, though, isn't a particular kind of person...It's something physical like graffiti" (289). Just as the Tipping Point is the descent from an isolated incident to something of epidemic proportions, the same Tipping Point can bring a crippled community back into a state of stability. "Broken Windows theory and the Power of Context", Gladwell believes, "are one and the same. They are both based on the premise that an epidemic can be reversed, can be tipped, by tinkering with the smallest details of the immediate environment" (292). By addressing these small details of the community the overall problem can be treated in a more effective manner. The government sponsored, mandatory HIV/AIDS testing of certain age groups within the United States or other industrialized countries could reduce the needless spread of the virus, as more would become aware of its presence. Within lesser developed countries, an aggressive campaign of widespread, systematic education of both the disease and its sexual transmission, along with the distribution of condoms and other devices could help combat the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Barclay's comments: In the first para, we have a good and solid connection about to happen. What's missing is a quotation from Gladwell that has an IDEA, specifically an idea about how the Power of Context or Broken Windows works. REMEMBER, quotes are great for setting up ideas and, in fact, when introducing an idea you should most often do so through quotation. Notice how the second paragraph does just this, by introducing

two great quotations that explain Gladwell's ideas. Ideally, these would be applied or related to actual text about the epidemic.

II. Gay/Straight Pride

Flags are representations of groups in society. Specifically for the LGBT community, the flags symbolize the communities place as a minority in a society that is mostly straight. There is a misconception that flags are used solely for pride. However, the representations of flags are not so much about pride, but about the reassurance of the LGBT's place in society "by having a flag/symbol/slogan/whatever unifies the culture they are in part constructing. If there isn't a culture already, they are definitely working towards creating their own" (Mrydzy). The use of symbolism and representations of groups help clarify the idea that the minority groups, the LGBT community, seek to be acknowledged by the rest of the public community. The trend of flags has, however, exploded due to emergence of 'straight pride.' This is an example of Tipping Point, coined by Malcolm Gladwell in his essay "The Power of Context." The epidemic spread of the use of representations occurred not from "a particular kind of person" but from "something physical like graffiti" (289). Gladwell states that physical objects or images cause the spread of epidemic crime. In the case of LGBT, the proliferation of groups was caused by the appearances of the many flags. As more divisions and groups form in society, individuals seek to belong in a group, which is why the flags are used in the first place.

Gladwell's theory of the Tipping Point can be applied to the appearance of straight pride in response to gay pride. Gladwell writes, "For a crime to be committed, something extra, something additional, has to happen to tip a troubled person toward violence, and what the Power of Context is saying is that those tipping points may be as simple and trivial as everyday signs of disorder like graffiti and fare beating"(299). The everyday signs of disorder in this case would be gay pride clothing, flags, and bumper stickers. Straight people who before may have never shown any type of hostility towards gays may now have been pushed over the edge to demonstrate their newfound straight pride. Without the appearance of the gay pride concept that brought along clothing, stickers, and flags, these straight individuals would never have reached their tipping point of developing straight pride.

Barclay's comments: Again the first paragraph has some great quotations from the thread, and works with an idea from Gladwell, but it doesn't use quotation to set up that idea. The second paragraph comes closer to this, though it doesn't have quotation from the thread.

III. Raritan River Cleanup

Manifested in the idea of the Power of Context is the Stickiness Factor. In the thread, "Go Beyond Thinking: Take the Next Step," anniea tries to compel people to do an action that tells people to "Get Your Hands Dirty- help us clean up the Raritan River for ourselves Raritan" (cross-section forum). She tries to use a sort of "stickiness factor" that involves using language as a powerful tool. She states, "Raritan River is our main source of drinking water. Come and see what is being thrown in our source of drinking water--sewage and filth. Should we tolerate sewage being smeared in the source of our drinking water?" Although this use of language as a stickiness factor is substantially effective , it can be further improved through Gladwell's detailed description of the Stickiness Factor. Gladwell describes, when

something “can be done by changing the content of communication, by making a message so memorable that it sticks in someone’s mind and compels them to action” (299). Applying this idea to improve anniea’s stickiness factor, the use of visuals may be more effective, as it will be more memorable. Accordingly, we can have a distribution and pasting of posters that depict the actual dirty condition of the river at the time, along with the expected outcome after cleaning the river. In addition to language, this will act as a visual for the stickiness factor.

The fact that anniea’s initial post was written with a sense of sarcasm, any reply given was accordingly written with an equal or greater sense of sarcasm, and eventual apathy. Since anniea immediately utilizes needless quotation marks around the words “drinking water,” as well as poses questions and then takes the liberty to answer them herself, readers assume that the entire thread is one of insincere, sarcastic notions and suggestions: “...source of our ‘drinking water’” and “...sad isn’t it? No, actually it’s ‘GROSS’.” As Gladwell describes in “The Power of Context,” when one is immediately and continually subject to an atmosphere or environment of indifference, the person in the environment tends to acquire a mentality that is indifferent, thus matching his or her surroundings. As Gladwell states, “If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares...” (p. 289). Since the initial air of the post was sarcastic, following posts were sarcastic as well, and the chain continues.

Barclay’s comments: The first paragraph here is much better at working with connective thinking because it uses text from BOTH texts. The Gladwell quotation defines the Stickiness Factor and then that’s applied directly to the thread. The second paragraph does something similar, though it works with just a smidgeon of Gladwell’s text.

Barclay’s final comments:

Strong connective thinking requires two parts of text: a quotation from one essay (usually setting up or explaining an idea) and a quotation from a second essay that is explained BY and THROUGH the first quotation. Here’s a formula for doing this kind of work:

Barclay’s Super-Secret Formula for Connection (patent pending):

Connection = CI+I+Q1+E+T+Q2+Ce

Where:

- **CI = Start by stating your claim, what you are trying to prove. That also makes it an idea-centered paragraph.**
- **I = Then introduce the first quotation.**
- **Q1 = Give the first quotation.**
- **E = Explain it in your own words.**
- **T = Give some sort of transition to the next quotation, providing a clue to connection.**
- **Q2 = Give the second quote.**
- **Ce = Explain how the second quote connects to the first one in a sentence or two. This last part is crucial. You need to explain the connection in order to really prove it.**

Barclay's Connection Supplement, or "Nail That Connection!"

This is a useful exercise to make sure that the CE of your connection, the place at the end where you explain the connection between the two quotations, matches up with the quotations you've actually chosen. I know I've commented on some papers recently that you're making an explanation that doesn't come out of the quotations. If I've written that on your paper, this is most especially for you. But this is a great exercise for everyone, since it makes your connections sharper, stronger, and slicker.

1. Select the two quotations you think make a connection.
2. Take a sheet of paper and draw a line down the middle, from top to bottom.
3. Write each quotation on the paper, on either side of the line, so that you can actually see the two pieces of text next to one another.
4. Underline the phrases in each quotation that you think actually connect and then draw a line connecting them.
5. At the bottom of the sheet, write a sentence in which you explain the connection using each of those phrases.
6. Use this sentence to create your CE.
7. Repeat for the next connection.

The idea is that you not only get to see the pieces of text next to each other, which helps you see the connection, but you also refer directly to the quotations as you explain the connection, and to the exact pieces of the quotation that actually connect. If you can't find phrases that connect in each quote, then perhaps you should choose some better quotes. If you need to explain the quote for a few sentences before you can make the connection, then there's probably a better quotation you can use. Go find it.