

# Reflection essay on malcolm gladwell

People



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Interaction Between Personality and Environment A theory that an individual's behavior is most likely based on factors such as personal convictions, personality, or inherited genes is a common belief in nowadays' society. This theory seems like reasonable and logical because it is quite natural that a person's behavior follows his or her characters. Malcolm Gladwell, however, in his essay, "The Power of Context: Bernie Goetz and the Rise and Fall of New York City Crime," examines those factors affecting peoples' behaviors and comes up with his own theory.

Gladwell believes that the environmental conditions have the most significant influence on how one behaves. Throughout his essay, he presents a few different studies to help persuade the readers and to substantiate his argument. However, those cases and Gladwell's theory are quite radical because they are only implied to certain situations, not to all circumstances and criminal cases. Even though environmental conditions have a more substantial impact on people's behaviors, it is the interaction between personality and environment that actually determines the criminal actions.

The influence that people's immediate environment has on them is significant; people are affected by their environmental conditions more than by their previous intention. Gladwell discusses the relationship between environment or situation and an individual's behavior in the Power of Context; that is, surroundings are closely related to a person's character, and this theory is well applied when studying the criminals.

As Gladwell insists, "[Broken Windows Theory and the Power of Context] 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"

(Gladwell 157). The outcome can be a whole different story by a simple and trivial factor. Similar to Broken Windows Theory, if one is at the place, where is dirty and depressed and has relatively high crime rates, one will likely think that violations of law such as throwing away garbage on the road and even committing a serious crime are fairly acceptable.

In contrast, even though one was once intended to commit a crime, if one is at the place where is comfortable and tidy, one cannot commit a violent act easily and actually begins to think again about breaking a law. This theory flows into Gladwell's argument about the Tipping Points that forces people toward violence. Gladwell believes that the little things around people can act as catalysts and significantly change the outcomes of certain situations. As Gladwell notes, "The Power of Context is an environmental argument.

It says that behavior is a function of social context" (Gladwell 159). There has been a similar argument about influence of surroundings in earlier days, but it shows little difference from the claim of Gladwell. Early environmentalism emphasizes the importance of fundamental social factors; crime is the result of social injustice, structural economic inequities, racism, and decades of social neglect (Gladwell 159). However, according to the Power of Context, Tipping Point – the critical point in an evolving situation that leads to an irreversible development – may be as simple and trivial.

People do not have to solve the big problems or undertake some heroic steps to decrease a crime rate. All they need to do is scrubbing off graffiti and arresting fare-beaters. An individual's personality or character also plays an important role in decision-making. Although environmental conditions can

greatly affect individual's action more than anything, their characters may also become a significant factor that determines violent behaviors.

Personal convictions, experiences, and even genes can affect disposing individuals to crime. As Gladwell reveals, " All of those theories are essentially ways of saying that the criminal is a personality type - a personality type distinguished by an insensitivity to the norms of normal society ... People who aren't taught right from wrong are oblivious to what is and what is not appropriate behavior" (Gladwell 159). Most criminal cases are strongly related to criminals' personal backgrounds or personal issues.

It is quite obvious that people who have not taught what is and what is not right or wrong from their parents or in schools as they grew up are ignorant of illegal or violent actions and more likely commit crimes than educated people. Personality can be built throughout one's entire life. Whether it is from family, friends, or teachers, the impact of these external forces can influence one's character significantly. Those external forces may seem like an environmental condition, but the concept is quite different from the environmental factors that Gladwell uses in his argument because they are continuous surroundings.

Family, friends, or teachers are usually key components of one's life, and thus they play a crucial role in shaping one's personality. Gladwell, in his essay, discusses many aspects of an individual's character development. As he proposes an example, " People who grow up poor, fatherless, and buffeted by racism don't have the same commitment to social norms as those from healthy middle-class homes" (Gladwell 159). This example perfectly demonstrates the idea that personality is shaped by individual's

constant character development and that character can have great influence on his or her decision-making.

Those continuously shaped personalities or characters often interact with context in determining an individual's behavior. Through effective examples of psychological and social experiments, Gladwell stresses his argument of the Power of Context. Interrelationship between personality and environment eventually determines the individual's behavior. In the example of the poor, the fatherless, and people suffered by racism committing violent actions, it is not because of either their pure personalities or environmental conditions; interact between both is that forces those people to commit a crime.

Poor or fatherless surrounding is obviously the environmental factors, but those factors shape people's personality throughout their life. As Lillian Rubin, Goetz's biographer, writes, "there seems to be something seductive about the setting" (Gladwell 159). The Power of Context reveals that a poor environment leads people to commit violent actions, but people themselves are the one who are motivated to do immoral things. As Gladwell asserts, "Environmental Tipping Points are things that we can change: we can fix broken windows and clean up graffiti and change the signals that invite crime in the first place" (Gladwell 165).

Motivations that come from environment, whether they are trivial or significant, force people to commit a crime even more. However, as the quotation insists, those Tipping Points can be changed and fixed easily by people's little attention and slight changes in the surroundings. Gladwell uses the example of graffiti to support this argument. Even a little motivations such as graffiti in a subway can act as a catalyst that leads

people to commit a severe crime because it may stimulate some people with bad experiences of childhood.

The effects that environmental conditions have are quite significant, but those situations usually interact with people's inner minds or personality greatly. People are influenced by the small changes in circumstances and force themselves into committing crimes, but this also means that the rate of crime can be decreased by fixing the slight things that affect people's behaviors and that force people toward violent actions. Environmental conditions cannot be solid reasons for every crime occurred; personality is closely related to the surroundings when studying the criminal cases.

In today's world, building one's personality is a multi-layered experience, influenced by environmental conditions. Some people may argue that the influence of immediate environment on decision-making is significant while others claim that personality or character plays a key role in controlling one's action. However, the interrelationship between personality and environment is the most influential factor that determines one's all kinds of behaviors. Every person carries pieces of identity that are not identical to other people's, but even those, in some ways, are influenced by others all the time.

Moreover, personality or character is affected not only by other people but also by social structures a person resides within, the family he lives with, and even the media he always faces. Personality can be flexible depending on the surroundings. Therefore, although environmental conditions have a much more significant influence on people's actions, the interaction between

personality and environment is the one that actually controls how and why people behave in a certain way.