



Neighborhood Safety & Stability Subcommittee
02/12/08

This packet contains handouts that were distributed at the Neighborhood Safety & Stability Subcommittee meeting on February 12, 2008 and includes the following items:

- White paper, re: Apartment Complexes, amended 02/11/08, submitted by Ida Jackson
- Excerpt from *The Tipping Point*
- Memo from Tony Boselli, chair Neighborhood Safety & Stability Subcommittee, to Mayor John Peyton, Council President Daniel Davis and Jay Fant (chairman JEA Board of Directors), re: JEA funding for advertising

Neighborhood Safety and Stability Subcommittee Apartment Complexes

Amended 021108

Following are some thoughts and possible steps that I feel could be taken to help alleviate some of the crime taking place in the various apartment complexes throughout the city.

Our young people all come from some type of "family", using the broadest definition. The adults in those households need to feel they have a stake in what happens in Jacksonville. The young people need a self-esteem boost and to be shown their potential.

Having raised three sons in apartment complexes (in their teen years and beyond), I can attest to the fact that most of the youth just need to know they matter – to someone. There needs to be access to after school programs including tutoring, self-esteem workshops and programs of that nature. The adage "an idle mind is the devil's workshop" is so true when it comes to youth.

While raising my sons I took advantage of the Boys Club, YMCA and other programs. There were even courses offered at community centers on how to parent teenagers. It seems the entire focus now is on "education" which is, of course, paramount; however, we need to look at the social aspects of becoming a viable human being as well. I offer the following suggestions.

For some reason the general consensus seems to be apartment dwellers do not have as high a stake in the community as homeowners. I, personally, choose to live in an apartment and I like it. I make it a point to get to know my neighbors (at least in my building) and we look out for each other.

- In conjunction with the Apartment Council, **ask that each complex have its own "Neighborhood Watch"** which would meet regularly in a designated location. Signs would be posted throughout the complex attesting to that fact. Monthly or quarterly meetings could be held with suggestions coming from the tenants as to what needs to be done to keep up the aesthetics and cut down on crime. Do not assume everyone knows about the CPAC's. Some people would feel more comfortable meeting with just their neighbors from their complexes.
- There are usually **convenience stores** around apartment complexes which tend to be a hang out for the "bad" element. Those individuals managing the stores need to be pulled into discussions about cutting down on loitering and possibly closing at a reasonable hour. *The store closest to my complex closes at 10 p.m. – why can't they all do that? The owner/manager of the convenience store on Broward Road appears to take pride in his business and the customers seem to respect him. It is the one on the left on Broward Road when you're headed towards Lem Turner.*
- They have been **cutting down trees** on Broward Road (due to incoming development) and it has opened the area up more which is a good thing – cuts down on individuals hiding in the brush. *The Hyundai dealership is moving to land on Interstate Drive which will bring more lighting and that will be a plus.*

- Some type of award **incentive for complexes** which keep up their grounds and go for a quarter without a criminal incident. The Zone Commanders could possibly help with this. *Are there any multi-family complex owners on the CPAC's – there should be. The three on Monaco Drive appear to be the source of a lot of crime – do they have tenant associations?*
- **Police presence** more visible and, of course, the assigned officer(s) for that complex would attend the meetings. When Neighborhood Walks are done; do they walk through the complexes?
- **Gated Complexes** – For some reason, gated communities are viewed as more prestigious and safer although here lately they been invaded as well. The Apartment Council could look into this. I don't know the cost factors.

Comments

I was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois and at one point we lived in Altgeld Gardens, which was a project with townhouse type dwellings. They had a contest every month for the best yard and we won it several times. My father took great pride in his hedges and mom in her flower beds. I have very fond memories of that project.

My sons, all fine men; realize the importance of giving back to the community as I instilled it in them as my mother did me. My father died when I was 12 years old and my mom refused to let me and my sister become slack in our homework and chores. When I divorced, I was determined to not let my sons become statistics and was aided by my church family and friends. I knew all the kids in the complex as well as their mothers.

I am willing to assist in whatever way I can as my heart breaks when I hear of our youth being shot or incarcerated.

I will be more than happy to go into further detail and will continue to do research in terms of making our apartment dwellers feel they, too, are part of the journey.

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that Goetz had once symbolized. It was simply inconceivable that someone could pull a gun on someone else on the subway and be called a hero for it.

2.

This idea of crime as an epidemic, it must be said, is a little strange. We talk about "epidemics of violence" or crime waves, but it's not clear that we really believe that crime follows the same rules of epidemics as, say, Hush Puppies did, or Paul Revere's ride. Those epidemics involved relatively straightforward and simple things — a product and a message. Crime, on the other hand, isn't a single discrete thing, but a word used to describe an almost impossibly varied and complicated set of behaviors. Criminal acts have serious consequences. They require the criminal to do something that puts himself at great personal peril. To say someone is a criminal is to say that he or she is evil or violent or dangerous or dishonest or unstable or any combination of any of those things — none of which is a psychological state that would seem to be transmitted, casually, from one person to another. Criminals do not, in other words, sound like the kind of people who could be swept up by the infectious winds of an epidemic. Yet somehow, in New York City, this is exactly what occurred. In the years between the beginning and the middle of the 1990s, New York City did not get a population transplant. Nobody went out into the streets and successfully taught every would-be delinquent the distinction between right and wrong. There were just as many psychologically damaged people, criminally inclined people, living in the city at

the peak of the crime wave as in the trough. But for some reason tens of thousands of those people suddenly stopped committing crimes. In 1984, an encounter between an angry subway rider and four young black youths led to bloodshed. Today, in New York's subways, that same encounter doesn't lead to violence anymore. How did that happen?

The answer lies in the third of the principles of epidemic transmission, the Power of Context. The Law of the Few looked at the kinds of people who are critical in spreading information. The chapter on *Sesame Street* and *Blue's Clues* looked at the question of Stickiness, suggesting that in order to be capable of sparking epidemics, ideas have to be memorable and move us to action. We've looked at the people who spread ideas, and we've looked at the characteristics of successful ideas. But the subject of this chapter — the Power of Context — is no less important than the first two. Epidemics are sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of the times and places in which they occur. In Baltimore, syphilis spreads far more in the summer than in the winter. Hush Puppies took off because they were being worn by kids in the cutting-edge precincts of the East Village — an environment that helped others to look at the shoes in a new light. It could even be argued that the success of Paul Revere's ride — in some way — owed itself to the fact that it was made at night. At night, people are home in bed, which makes them an awful lot easier to reach than if they are off on errands or working in the fields. And if someone wakes us up to tell us something, we automatically assume the news is going to be urgent. One can only imagine how "Paul Revere's afternoon ride" might have compared.

This much, I think, is relatively straightforward. But the lesson of the Power of Context is that we are more than just sensitive to changes in context. We're exquisitely sensitive to them. And the kinds of contextual changes that are capable of tipping an epidemic are very different than we might ordinarily suspect.

3.

During the 1990s violent crime declined across the United States for a number of fairly straightforward reasons. The illegal trade in crack cocaine, which had spawned a great deal of violence among gangs and drug dealers, began to decline. The economy's dramatic recovery meant that many people who might have been lured into crime got legitimate jobs instead, and the general aging of the population meant that there were fewer people in the age range — males between eighteen and twenty-four — that is responsible for the majority of all violence. The question of why crime declined in New York City, however, is a little more complicated. In the period when the New York epidemic tipped down, the city's economy hadn't improved. It was still stagnant. In fact, the city's poorest neighborhoods had just been hit hard by the welfare cuts of the early 1990s. The waning of the crack cocaine epidemic in New York was clearly a factor, but then again, it had been in steady decline well before crime dipped. As for the aging of the population, because of heavy immigration to New York in the 1980s, the city was getting younger in the 1990s, not older. In any case, all of these trends are long-term changes that one would expect to

have gradual effects. In New York the decline was anything but gradual. Something else clearly played a role in reversing New York's crime epidemic.

The most intriguing candidate for that "something else" is called the Broken Windows theory. Broken Windows was the brainchild of the criminologists James Q. Wilson and George Kelling. Wilson and Kelling argued that crime is the inevitable result of disorder. If a window is broken and left unrepaired, people walking by will conclude that no one cares and no one is in charge. Soon, more windows will be broken, and the sense of anarchy will spread from the building to the street on which it faces, sending a signal that anything goes. In a city, relatively minor problems like graffiti, public disorder, and aggressive panhandling, they write, are all the equivalent of broken windows, invitations to more serious crimes:

Muggers and robbers, whether opportunistic or professional, believe they reduce their chances of being caught or even identified if they operate on streets where potential victims are already intimidated by prevailing conditions. If the neighborhood cannot keep a bothersome panhandler from annoying passersby, the thief may reason, it is even less likely to call the police to identify a potential mugger or to interfere if the mugging actually takes place.

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. The Tipping Point in this epidemic, though,

isn't a particular kind of person — a Connector like Lois Weisberg or a Maven like Mark Alpert. It's something physical like graffiti. The impetus to engage in a certain kind of behavior is not coming from a certain kind of person but from a feature of the environment.

In the mid-1980s Kelling was hired by the New York Transit Authority as a consultant, and he urged them to put the Broken Windows theory into practice. They obliged, bringing in a new subway director by the name of David Gunn to oversee a multibillion-dollar rebuilding of the subway system. Many subway advocates, at the time, told Gunn not to worry about graffiti, to focus on the larger questions of crime and subway reliability, and it seemed like reasonable advice. Worrying about graffiti at a time when the entire system was close to collapse seems as pointless as scrubbing the decks of the *Titanic* as it headed toward the icebergs. But Gunn insisted. "The graffiti was symbolic of the collapse of the system," he says. "When you looked at the process of rebuilding the organization and morale, you had to win the battle against graffiti. Without winning that battle, all the management reforms and physical changes just weren't going to happen. We were about to put out new trains that were worth about ten million bucks apiece, and unless we did something to protect them, we knew just what would happen. They would last one day and then they would be vandalized."

Gunn drew up a new management structure and a precise set of goals and timetables aimed at cleaning the system line by line, train by train. He started with the number seven train that connects Queens to midtown Manhattan, and began experimenting with new techniques to clean off

the paint. On stainless-steel cars, solvents were used. On the painted cars, the graffiti were simply painted over. Gunn made it a rule that there should be no retreat, that once a car was "reclaimed" it should never be allowed to be vandalized again. "We were religious about it," Gunn said. At the end of the number one line in the Bronx, where the trains stop before turning around and going back to Manhattan, Gunn set up a cleaning station. If a car came in with graffiti, the graffiti had to be removed during the changeover, or the car was removed from service. "Dirty" cars, which hadn't yet been cleansed of graffiti, were never to be mixed with "clean" cars. The idea was to send an unambiguous message to the vandals themselves.

"We had a yard up in Harlem on one hundred thirty-fifth Street where the trains would lay up over night," Gunn said. "The kids would come the first night and paint the side of the train white. Then they would come the next night, after it was dry, and draw the outline. Then they would come the third night and color it in. It was a three-day job. We knew the kids would be working on one of the dirty trains, and what we would do is wait for them to finish their mural. Then we'd walk over with rollers and paint it over. The kids would be in tears, but we'd just be going up and down, up and down. It was a message to them. If you want to spend three nights of your time vandalizing a train, fine. But it's never going to see the light of day."

Gunn's graffiti cleanup took from 1984 to 1990. At that point, the Transit Authority hired William Bratton to head the transit police, and the second stage of the reclamation of the subway system began. Bratton was, like Gunn, a disciple of Broken Windows. He describes

Kelling, in fact, as his intellectual mentor, and so his first step as police chief was as seemingly quixotic as Giuliani's. With felonies — serious crimes — on the subway system at an all-time high, Bratton decided to crack down on fare-beating. Why? Because he believed that, like graffiti, fare-beating could be a signal, a small expression of disorder that invited much more serious crimes. An estimated 170,000 people a day were entering the system, by one route or another, without paying a token. Some were kids, who simply jumped over the turnstiles. Others would lean backward on the turnstiles and force their way through. And once one or two or three people began cheating the system, other people — who might never otherwise have considered evading the law — would join in, reasoning that if some people weren't going to pay, they shouldn't either, and the problem would snowball. The problem was exacerbated by the fact fare-beating was not easy to fight. Because there was only \$1.25 at stake, the transit police didn't feel it was worth their time to pursue it, particularly when there were plenty of more serious crimes happening down on the platform and in the trains.

Bratton is a colorful, charismatic man, a born leader, and he quickly made his presence felt. His wife stayed behind in Boston, so he was free to work long hours, and he would roam the city on the subway at night, getting a sense of what the problems were and how best to fight them. First, he picked stations where fare-beating was the biggest problem, and put as many as ten policemen in plainclothes at the turnstiles. The team would nab fare-beaters one by one, handcuff them, and leave them standing, in a daisy chain, on the platform until they had a "full

The idea was to signal, as publicly as possible, that the transit police were now serious about cracking down on fare-beaters. Previously, police officers had been wary of pursuing fare-beaters because the arrest, the trip to the station house, the filling out of necessary forms, and the waiting for those forms to be processed took an entire day — all for a crime that usually merited no more than a slap on the wrist. Bratton retrofitted a city bus and turned it into a rolling station house, with its own fax machines, telephones, holding pen, and fingerprinting facilities. Soon the turnaround time on an arrest was down to an hour. Bratton also insisted that a check be run on all those arrested. Sure enough, one out of seven arrestees had an outstanding warrant for a previous crime, and one out of twenty was carrying a weapon of some sort. Suddenly it wasn't hard to convince police officers that tackling fare-beating made sense. "For the cops it was a bonanza," Bratton writes. "Every arrest was like opening a box of Cracker Jack. What kind of toy am I going to get? Got a gun? Got a knife? Got a warrant? Do we have a murderer here? . . . After a while the bad guys wised up and began to leave their weapons home and pay their fares." Under Bratton, the number of ejections from subway stations — for drunkenness, or improper behavior — tripled within his first few months in office. Arrests for misdemeanors, for the kind of minor offenses that had gone unnoticed in the past, went up fivefold between 1990 and 1994. Bratton turned the transit police into an organization focused on the smallest infractions, on the details of life underground.

After the election of Rudolph Giuliani as mayor of New York in 1994, Bratton was appointed head of the

New York City Police Department, and he applied the same strategies to the city at large. He instructed his officers to crack down on quality-of-life crimes: on the "squeegee men" who came up to drivers at New York City intersections and demanded money for washing car windows, for example, and on all the other above-ground equivalents of turnstile-jumping and graffiti. "Previous police administration had been handcuffed by restrictions," Bratton says. "We took the handcuffs off. We stepped up enforcement of the laws against public drunkenness and public urination and arrested repeat violators, including those who threw empty bottles on the street or were involved in even relatively minor damage to property. . . . If you peed in the street, you were going to jail." When crime began to fall in the city — as quickly and dramatically as it had in the subways — Bratton and Giuliani pointed to the same cause. Minor, seemingly insignificant quality-of-life crimes, they said, were Tipping Points for violent crime.

Broken Windows theory and the Power of Context 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. This is, if you think about it, quite a radical idea. Think back, for instance, to the encounter between Bernie Goetz and those four youths on the subway: Allen, Ramseur, Cabey, and Canty. At least two of them, according to some reports, appear to have been on drugs at the time of the incident. They all came from the Claremont Village housing project in one of the worst parts of the South Bronx. Cabey was, at the time, under indictment for

armed robbery. Canty had a prior felony arrest for possession of stolen property. Allen had been previously arrested for attempted assault. Allen, Canty, and Ramseur also all had misdemeanor convictions, ranging from criminal mischief to petty larceny. Two years after the Goetz shooting, Ramseur was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison for rape, robbery, sodomy, sexual abuse, assault, criminal use of a firearm, and possession of stolen property. It's hard to be surprised when people like this wind up in the middle of a violent incident.

Then there's Goetz. He did something that is completely anomalous. White professionals do not, as a rule, shoot young black men on the subway. But if you look closely at who he was, he fits the stereotype of the kind of person who ends up in violent situations. His father was a strict disciplinarian with a harsh temper, and Goetz was often the focus of his father's rage. At school, he was the one teased by classmates, the last one picked for school games, a lonely child who would often leave school in tears. He worked, after graduating from college, for Westinghouse, building nuclear submarines. But he didn't last long. He was constantly clashing with his superiors over what he saw as shoddy practices and corner-cutting, and sometimes broke company and union rules by doing work that he was contractually forbidden to do. He took an apartment on Fourteenth Street in Manhattan, near Sixth Avenue, on a stretch of city block that was then heavy with homelessness and drug dealing. One of the doormen in the building, with whom Goetz was close, was beaten badly by muggers. Goetz became obsessed with cleaning up the neighborhood. He complained endlessly about a

vacant newsstand near his building, which was used by vagrants as a trash bin and stank of urine. One night, mysteriously, it burned down, and the next day Goetz was out on the street sweeping away the debris. Once at a community meeting, he said, to the shock of others in the room, "The only way we're going to clean up this street is to get rid of the spics and niggers." In 1981, Goetz was mugged by three black youths as he entered the Canal Street station one afternoon. He ran out of the station with the three of them in pursuit. They grabbed the electronics equipment he was carrying, beat him, and threw him up against a plate-glass door, leaving him with permanent damage to his chest. With the help of an off-duty sanitation worker, Goetz managed to subdue one of his three attackers. But the experience left him embittered. He had to spend six hours in the station house, talking to police, while his assailant was released after two hours and charged, in the end, with only a misdemeanor. He applied to the city for a gun permit. He was turned down. In September 1984, his father died. Three months later, he sat down next to four black youths on the subway and started shooting.

Here, in short, was a man with an authority problem, with a strong sense that the system wasn't working, who had been the recent target of humiliation. Lillian Rubin, Goetz's biographer, writes that his choice to live on Fourteenth Street could hardly have been an accident. "For Bernie," she writes, "there seems to be something seductive about the setting. Precisely because of its deficits and discomforts, it provided him with a comprehensible target for the rage that lives inside him. By focusing it on the

external world, he need not deal with his internal one. He rails about the dirt, the noise, the drunks, the crime, the pushers, the junkies. And all with good reason." Goetz's bullets, Rubin concludes, were "aimed at targets that existed as much in his past as in the present."

If you think of what happened on the number two train this way, the shooting begins to feel inevitable. Four hoodlums confront a man with apparent psychological problems. That the shooting took place on the subway seems incidental. Goetz would have shot those four kids if he had been sitting in a Burger King. Most of the formal explanations we use for criminal behavior follow along the same logic. Psychiatrists talk about criminals as people with stunted psychological development, people who have had pathological relationships with their parents, who lack adequate role models. There is a relatively new literature that talks about genes that may or may not dispose certain individuals to crime. On the popular side, there are endless numbers of books by conservatives talking about crime as a consequence of moral failure — of communities and schools and parents who no longer raise children with a respect for right and wrong. 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 with stunted psychological development don't understand how to conduct healthy relationships. People with genetic predispositions to violence fly off the handle when normal people keep their cool. People who aren't taught right from wrong are oblivious to what is and what is not appropriate behavior. 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. Bernie Goetz and those four thugs on the subway were, in this sense, prisoners of their own, dysfunctional, world.

But what do Broken Windows and the Power of Context suggest? Exactly the opposite. They say that the criminal — far from being someone who acts for fundamental, intrinsic reasons and who lives in his own world — is actually someone acutely sensitive to his environment, who is alert to all kinds of cues, and who is prompted to commit crimes based on his perception of the world around him. That is an incredibly radical — and in some sense unbelievable — idea. There is an even more radical dimension here. The Power of Context is an environmental argument. It says that behavior is a function of social context. But it is a very strange kind of environmentalism. In the 1960s, liberals made a similar kind of argument, but when they talked about the importance of environment they were talking about the importance of fundamental social factors: crime, they said, was the result of social injustice, of structural economic inequities, of unemployment, of racism, of decades of institutional and social neglect, so that if you wanted to stop crime you had to undertake some fairly heroic steps. But the Power of Context says that what really matters is little things. The Power of Context says that the showdown on the subway between Bernie Goetz and those four youths had very little to do, in the end, with the tangled psychological pathology of Goetz, and very little as well to do with the background and poverty of the four youths who accosted him, and

everything to do with the message sent by the graffiti on the walls and the disorder at the turnstiles. The Power of Context says you don't have to solve the big problems to solve crime. You can prevent crimes just by scrubbing off graffiti and arresting fare-beaters: crime epidemics have Tipping Points every bit as simple and straightforward as syphilis in Baltimore or a fashion trend like Hush Puppies. This is what I meant when I called the Power of Context a radical theory. 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?

4.

In chapter 2, when I was discussing what made someone like Mark Alpert so important in word-of-mouth epidemics, I talked about two seemingly counterintuitive aspects of persuasion. One was the study that showed how people who watched Peter Jennings on ABC were more likely to vote Republican than people who watched either Tom Brokaw or Dan Rather because, in some unconscious way, Jennings was able to signal his affection for Republican candidates. The second study showed how people who were charismatic could — without saying anything and with the briefest of exposures — infect others with their emotions. The implications of those two studies go

to the heart of the Law of the Few, because they suggest that what we think of as inner states — preferences and emotions — are actually powerfully and imperceptibly influenced by seemingly inconsequential personal influences, by a newscaster we watch for a few minutes a day or by someone we sit next to, in silence, in a two-minute experiment. The essence of the Power of Context is that the same thing is true for certain kinds of environments — that in ways that we don't necessarily appreciate, our inner states are the result of our outer circumstances. The field of psychology is rich with experiments that demonstrate this fact. Let me give you just a few examples.

In the early 1970s, a group of social scientists at Stanford University, led by Philip Zimbardo, decided to create a mock prison in the basement of the university's psychology building. They took a thirty-five-foot section of corridor and created a cell block with a prefabricated wall. Three small, six- by nine-foot cells were created from laboratory rooms and given steel-barred, black-painted doors. A closet was turned into a solitary confinement cell. The group then advertised in the local papers for volunteers, men who would agree to participate in the experiment. Seventy-five people applied, and from those Zimbardo and his colleagues picked the 21 who appeared the most normal and healthy on psychological tests. Half of the group were chosen, at random, to be guards, and were given uniforms and dark glasses and told that their responsibility was to keep order in the prison. The other half were told that they were to be prisoners. Zimbardo got the Palo Alto Police Department to "arrest" the prisoners in their homes, cuff them, bring them to the station house, charge them with a

fictional crime, fingerprint them, then blindfold them and bring them to the prison in the Psychology Department basement. Then they were stripped and given a prison uniform to wear, with a number on the front and back that was to serve as their only means of identification for the duration of their incarceration.

The purpose of the experiment was to try to find out why prisons are such nasty places. Was it because prisons are full of nasty people, or was it because prisons are such nasty environments that they make people nasty? In the answer to that question is obviously the answer to the question posed by Bernie Goetz and the subway cleanup, which is how much influence does immediate environment have on the way people behave? What Zimbardo found out shocked him. The guards, some of whom had previously identified themselves as pacifists, fell quickly into the role of hard-bitten disciplinarians. The first night they woke up the prisoners at two in the morning and made them do pushups, line up against the wall, and perform other arbitrary tasks. On the morning of the second day, the prisoners rebelled. They ripped off their numbers and barricaded themselves in their cells. The guards responded by stripping them, spraying them with fire extinguishers, and throwing the leader of the rebellion into solitary confinement. "There were times when we were pretty abusive, getting right in their faces and yelling at them," one guard remembers. "It was part of the whole atmosphere of terror." As the experiment progressed, the guards got systematically crueler and more sadistic. "What we were unprepared for was the intensity of the change and the speed at which it happened," Zimbardo says. The

guards were making the prisoners say to one another they loved each other, and making them march down the hallway, in handcuffs, with paper bags over their heads. "It was completely the opposite from the way I conduct myself now," another guard remembers. "I think I was positively creative in terms of my mental cruelty." After 36 hours, one prisoner began to get hysterical, and had to be released. Four more then had to be released because of "extreme emotional depression, crying, rage, and acute anxiety." Zimbardo had originally intended to have the experiment run for two weeks. He called it off after six days. "I realize now," one prisoner said after the experiment was over, "that no matter how together I thought I was inside my head, my prisoner behavior was often less under my control than I realized." Another said: "I began to feel that I was losing my identity, that the person I call _____, the person who volunteered to get me into this prison (because it was a prison to me, it still is a prison to me, I don't regard it as an experiment or a simulation . . .) was distant from me, was remote, until finally I wasn't that person. I was 416. I was really my number and 416 was really going to have to decide what to do."

Zimbardo's conclusion was that there are specific situations so powerful that they can overwhelm our inherent predispositions. The key word here is situation. Zimbardo isn't talking about environment, about the major external influences on all of our lives. He's not denying that how we are raised by our parents affects who we are, or that the kind of schools we went to, the friends we have, or the neighborhoods we live in affect our behavior. All of these things are undoubtedly important. Nor is he denying that

our genes play a role in determining who we are. Most psychologists believe that nature — genetics — accounts for about half of the reason why we tend to act the way we do. His point is simply that there are certain times and places and conditions when much of that can be swept away, that there are instances where you can take normal people from good schools and happy families and good neighborhoods and powerfully affect their behavior merely by changing the immediate details of their situation.

This same argument was made, perhaps more explicitly, in the 1920s in a landmark set of experiments by two New York-based researchers, Hugh Hartshorne and M. A. May. Hartshorne and May took as their subjects about eleven thousand schoolchildren between the ages of eight and sixteen, and over the course of several months they gave them literally dozens of tests, all designed to measure honesty. The types of tests that Hartshorne and May used are quite central to their conclusion, so I'll identify a number of them in some detail.

One set, for example, was simple aptitude tests developed by the Institute for Educational Research, a precursor to the group that now develops the SATs. In the sentence-completion test, children were asked to fill in words that had been left blank. For example: "The poor little _____ has _____ nothing to _____; he is hungry." In the arithmetic test, children were given math questions like "When sugar costs 10 cents a pound, how much will five pounds cost" and asked to write their answers in the margin. The tests were given in only a fraction of the time usually needed for completion, so most children had lots of unanswered questions, and when the

time was up the tests were collected and graded. The following day the students were given the same kinds of tests again, with questions that were different but of equal difficulty. This time, though, the students were given an answer key and, under minimal supervision, told to grade their own papers. Hartshorne and May, in other words, had set up a sting operation. With the answers in hand and lots of unanswered questions, the students had ample opportunity to cheat. And with the previous day's tests in hand, Hartshorne and May could compare the first day's answers to the second, and get a good sense of how much each student was cheating.

Another set of tests was what are called speed tests, much simpler measures of ability. Students were given 56 pairs of numbers and told to add them. Or they were shown a sequence of several hundred randomly arranged letters of the alphabet and asked to read through them and underline all the A's. Students were allowed a minute to complete each of these tests. Then they were given another set of equivalent tests, only this time the time limit wasn't enforced at all, allowing the students to keep on working if they wanted to. In all, the two psychologists administered countless different tests in countless different situations. They had children undertake tests of physical ability, like chin-ups or broad jumps, and secretly observed them to see whether they cheated in reporting how well they did. They gave students tests to do at home, where they had ample opportunity to use dictionaries or ask for help, and compared those results to how they did on similar tests administered at school, where cheating was impossible. In the end, their results fill three thick

volumes and, along the way, challenge a lot of preconceptions of what character is.

Their first conclusion is, unsurprisingly, that lots of cheating goes on. In one case, the scores on tests where cheating was possible were 50 percent higher, on average, than the "honest" scores. When Hartshorne and May began to look for patterns in the cheating, some of their findings were equally obvious. Smart children cheat a little less than less-intelligent children. Girls cheat about as much as boys. Older children cheat more than younger children, and those from stable and happy homes cheat a bit less than those from unstable and unhappy homes. If you analyze the data you can find general patterns of behavioral consistency from test to test.

But the consistency isn't nearly as high as you might expect. There isn't one tight little circle of cheaters and one tight little circle of honest students. Some kids cheat at home but not at school; some kids cheat at school but not at home. Whether or not a child cheated on, say, the word completion test was not an iron-clad predictor of whether he or she would cheat on, say, the underlining A's part of the speed test. If you gave the same group of kids the same test, under the same circumstances six months apart, Hartshorne and May found, the same kids would cheat in the same ways in both cases. But once you changed any of those variables — the material on the test, or the situation in which it was administered — the kinds of cheating would change as well.

What Hartshorne and May concluded, then, is that something like honesty isn't a fundamental trait, or what they called a "unified" trait. A trait like honesty, they

concluded, is considerably influenced by the situation. "Most children," they wrote,

will deceive in certain situations and not in others. Lying, cheating, and stealing as measured by the test situations used in these studies are only very loosely related. Even cheating in the classroom is rather highly specific, for a child may cheat on an arithmetic test and not on a spelling test, etc. Whether a child will practice deceit in any given situation depends in part on his intelligence, age, home background, and the like and in part on the nature of the situation itself and his particular relation to it.

This, I realize, seems wildly counterintuitive. 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. All of us, when it comes to personality, naturally think in terms of absolutes: that a person is a certain way or is not a certain way. But what Zimbardo and Hartshorne and May are suggesting is that this is a mistake, that when we think only in terms of inherent traits and forget the role of situations, we're deceiving ourselves about the real causes of human behavior.

Why do we make this mistake? It's probably the result of the way evolution has structured our brain. For instance, anthropologists who study vervets find that these

kinds of monkeys are really bad at picking up the significance of things like an antelope carcass hanging in a tree (which is a sure sign that a leopard is in the vicinity) or the presence of python tracks. Vervets have been known to waltz into a thicket, ignoring a fresh trail of python tracks, and then act stunned when they actually come across the snake itself. This doesn't mean that vervets are stupid: they are very sophisticated when it comes to questions that have to do with other vervets. They can hear the call of a male vervet and recognize whether it comes from their own group or a neighboring group. If vervets hear a baby vervet's cry of distress, they will look immediately not in the direction of the baby, but at its mother — they know instantly whose baby it is. A vervet, in other words, is very good at processing certain kinds of vervetish information, but not so good at processing other kinds of information.

The same is true of humans.

Consider the following brain teaser. Suppose I give you four cards labeled with the letters *A* and *D* and the numerals 3 and 6. The rule of the game is that a card with a vowel on it always has an even number on the other side. Which of the cards would you have to turn over to prove this rule to be true? The answer is two: the *A* card and the three card. The overwhelming majority of people given this test, though, don't get it right. They tend to answer just the *A* card, or the *A* and the six. It's a hard question. But now let me pose another question. Suppose four people are drinking in a bar. One is drinking Coke. One is sixteen. One is drinking beer and one is twenty-five. Given the rule that no one under twenty-one is allowed to drink beer, which of those people's IDs do we have to check to make sure the

law is being observed? Now the answer is easy. In fact, I'm sure that almost everyone will get it right: the beer drinker and the sixteen-year-old. But, as the psychologist Leda Cosmides (who dreamt up this example) points out, it is exactly the same puzzle as the *A, D, 3, and 6* puzzle. The difference is that it is framed in a way that makes it about people, instead of about numbers, and as human beings we are a lot more sophisticated about each other than we are about the abstract world.

The mistake we make in thinking of character as something unified and all-encompassing is very similar to a kind of blind spot in the way we process information. Psychologists call this tendency the Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE), which is a fancy way of saying that when it comes to interpreting other people's behavior, human beings invariably make the mistake of overestimating the importance of fundamental character traits and underestimating the importance of the situation and context. We will always reach for a "dispositional" explanation for events, as opposed to a contextual explanation. In one experiment, for instance, a group of people are told to watch two sets of similarly talented basketball players, the first of whom are shooting baskets in a well-lighted gym and the second of whom are shooting baskets in a badly lighted gym (and obviously missing a lot of shots). Then they are asked to judge how good the players were. The players in the well-lighted gym were considered superior. In another example, a group of people are brought in for an experiment and told they are going to play a quiz game. They are paired off and they draw lots. One person gets a card that says he or she is going to be the "Contestant."

The other is told he or she is going to be the "Questioner." The Questioner is then asked to draw up a list of ten "challenging but not impossible" questions based on areas of particular interest or expertise, so someone who is into Ukrainian folk music might come up with a series of questions based on Ukrainian folk music. The questions are posed to the Contestant, and after the quiz is over, both parties are asked to estimate the level of general knowledge of the other. Invariably, the Contestants rate the Questioners as being a lot smarter than they themselves are.

You can do these kinds of experiments a thousand different ways and the answer almost always comes out the same way. This happens even when you give people a clear and immediate environmental explanation of the behavior they are being asked to evaluate: that the gym, in the first case, has few lights on; that the Contestant is being asked to answer the most impossibly biased and rigged set of questions. In the end, this doesn't make much difference. There is something in all of us that makes us instinctively want to explain the world around us in terms of people's essential attributes: he's a better basketball player, that person is smarter than I am.

We do this because, like vervets, we are a lot more attuned to personal cues than contextual cues. The FAE also makes the world a much simpler and more understandable place. In recent years, for example, there has been much interest in the idea that one of the most fundamental factors in explaining personality is birth order: older siblings are domineering and conservative, younger siblings more creative and rebellious. When psychologists actually try to verify this claim, however, their answers

sound like the Hartshorne and May conclusions. We do reflect the influences of birth order but, as the psychologist Judith Harris points out in *The Nurture Assumption*, only around our families. When they are away from their families — in different contexts — older siblings are no more likely to be domineering and younger siblings no more likely to be rebellious than anyone else. The birth order myth is an example of the FAE in action. But you can see why we are so drawn to it. It is much easier to define people just in terms of their family personality. It's a kind of shorthand. If we constantly had to qualify every assessment of those around us, how would we make sense of the world? How much harder would it be to make the thousands of decisions we are required to make about whether we like someone or love someone or trust someone or want to give someone advice? The psychologist Walter Mischel argues that the human mind has a kind of "reducing valve" that "creates and maintains the perception of continuity even in the face of perpetual observed changes in actual behavior." He writes:

When we observe a woman who seems hostile and fiercely independent some of the time but passive, dependent and feminine on other occasions, our reducing valve usually makes us choose between the two syndromes. We decide that one pattern is in the service of the other, or that both are in the service of a third motive. She must be a really castrating lady with a façade of passivity — or perhaps she is a warm, passive-dependent woman with a surface defense of aggressiveness. But perhaps nature is bigger than our concepts and it is possible for the lady to be a hostile, fiercely independent, passive,

dependent, feminine, aggressive, warm, castrating person all-in-one. Of course which of these she is at any particular moment would not be random or capricious — it would depend on who she is with, when, how, and much, much more. But each of these aspects of her self may be a quite genuine and real aspect of her total being.

Character, then, isn't what we think it is or, rather, what we want it to be. It isn't a stable, easily identifiable set of closely related traits, and it only seems that way because of a glitch in the way our brains are organized. Character is more like a bundle of habits and tendencies and interests, loosely bound together and dependent, at certain times, on circumstance and context. The reason that most of us seem to have a consistent character is that most of us are really good at controlling our environment. I have a lot of fun at dinner parties. As a result, I throw a lot of dinner parties and my friends see me there and think that I'm fun. But if I couldn't have lots of dinner parties, if my friends instead tended to see me in lots of different situations over which I had little or no control — like, say, faced with four hostile youths in a filthy, broken-down subway — they probably wouldn't think of me as fun anymore.

5.

Some years ago two Princeton University psychologists, John Darley and Daniel Batson, decided to conduct a study inspired by the biblical story of the Good Samaritan. As you may recall, that story, from the New Testament Gospel of Luke, tells of a traveler who has been

beaten and robbed and left for dead by the side of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. Both a priest and a Levite — worthy, pious men — came upon the man but did not stop, “passing by on the other side.” The only man to help was a Samaritan — the member of a despised minority — who “went up to him and bound up his wounds” and took him to an inn. Darley and Batson decided to replicate that study at the Princeton Theological Seminary. This was an experiment very much in the tradition of the FAE, and it is an important demonstration of how the Power of Context has implications for the way we think about social epidemics of all kinds, not just violent crime.

Darley and Batson met with a group of seminarians, individually, and asked each one to prepare a short, extemporaneous talk on a given biblical theme, then walk over to a nearby building to present it. Along the way to the presentation, each student ran into a man slumped in an alley, head down, eyes closed, coughing and groaning. The question was, who would stop and help? Darley and Batson introduced three variables into the experiment, to make its results more meaningful. First, before the experiment even started, they gave the students a questionnaire about why they had chosen to study theology. Did they see religion as a means for personal and spiritual fulfillment? Or were they looking for a practical tool for finding meaning in everyday life? Then they varied the subject of the theme the students were asked to talk about. Some were asked to speak on the relevance of the professional clergy to the religious vocation. Others were given the parable of the Good Samaritan. Finally, the instructions given by the experimenters to each student varied as well.

In some of the cases, as he sent the students on their way, the experimenter would look at his watch and say, “Oh, you’re late. They were expecting you a few minutes ago. We’d better get moving.” In other cases, he would say, “It will be a few minutes before they’re ready for you, but you might as well head over now.”

If you ask people to predict which seminarians played the Good Samaritan (and subsequent studies have done just this) their answers are highly consistent. They almost all say that the students who entered the ministry to help people and those reminded of the importance of compassion by having just read the parable of the Good Samaritan will be the most likely to stop. Most of us, I think, would agree with those conclusions. In fact, neither of those factors made any difference. “It is hard to think of a context in which norms concerning helping those in distress are more salient than for a person thinking about the Good Samaritan, and yet it did not significantly increase helping behavior,” Darley and Batson concluded. “Indeed, on several occasions, a seminary student going to give his talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the victim as he hurried on his way.” The only thing that really mattered was whether the student was in a rush. Of the group that was, 10 percent stopped to help. Of the group who knew they had a few minutes to spare, 63 percent stopped.

What this study is suggesting, in other words, is that the convictions of your heart and the actual contents of your thoughts are less important, in the end, in guiding your actions than the immediate context of your behavior. The words “Oh, you’re late” had the effect of making

someone who was ordinarily compassionate into someone who was indifferent to suffering — of turning someone, in that particular moment, into a different person. Epidemics are, at their root, about this very process of transformation. When we are trying to make an idea or attitude or product tip, we're trying to change our audience in some small yet critical respect: we're trying to infect them, sweep them up in our epidemic, convert them from hostility to acceptance. That can be done through the influence of special kinds of people, people of extraordinary personal connection. That's the Law of the Few. It 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. That is the Stickiness Factor. I think that both of those laws make intuitive sense. But we need to remember that small changes in context can be just as important in tipping epidemics, even though that fact appears to violate some of our most deeply held assumptions about human nature.

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, 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. The implications of this idea are enormous. The previous notion that disposition is everything — that the cause of violent behavior is always "sociopathic personality" or "deficient superego" or the inability to delay gratification or some evil in the genes — is, in the end, the most passive and reactive of ideas about crime. It says that once you catch a criminal you can try to help him get better — give him Prozac, put him in therapy, try to rehabilitate him — but there is very little you can do to prevent crime from happening in the first place. The old understanding of handling crime epidemics leads inevitably to a preoccupation with defensive measures against crime. Put an extra lock on the door, to slow the burglar down and maybe encourage him to go next door. Lock up criminals for longer, so that they have less opportunity to do the rest of us harm. Move to the suburbs, to put as much distance as possible between yourself and the majority of criminals.

Once you understand that context matters, however, that specific and relatively small elements in the environment can serve as Tipping Points, that defeatism is turned upside down. 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. Crime can be more than understood. It can be prevented. There is a broader dimension to this. Judith Harris has convincingly argued that peer influence and community influence are more important than family influence in determining how children turn out. Studies of juvenile delinquency and high school drop-out rates, for example, demonstrate that a child is better off in a good

neighborhood and a troubled family than he or she is in a troubled neighborhood and a good family. We spend so much time celebrating the importance and power of family influence that it may seem, at first blush, that this can't be true. But in reality it is no more than an obvious and commonsensical extension of the Power of Context, because it says simply that children are powerfully shaped by their external environment, that the features of our immediate social and physical world — the streets we walk down, the people we encounter — play a huge role in shaping who we are and how we act. It isn't just serious criminal behavior, in the end, that is sensitive to environmental cues, it is all behavior. Weird as it sounds, if you add up the meaning of the Stanford prison experiment and the New York subway experiment, they suggest that it is possible to be a better person on a clean street or in a clean subway than in one littered with trash and graffiti.

"In a situation like this, you're in a combat situation," Goetz told his neighbor Myra Friedman, in an anguished telephone call just days after the shooting. "You're not thinking in a normal way. Your memory isn't even working normally. You are so hyped up. Your vision actually changes. Your field of view changes. Your capabilities change. What you are capable of changes." He acted, Goetz went on, "viciously and savagely. . . . If you corner a rat and you are about to butcher it, okay? The way I responded was viciously and savagely, just like that, like a rat."

Of course he did. He was in a rat hole.

FIVE

The Power of Context (Part Two)

THE MAGIC NUMBER
ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY

In 1996, a sometime actress and playwright by the name of Rebecca Wells published a book entitled *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*. Its arrival in the bookstores was not a major literary event. Wells had written one previous book — *Little Altars Everywhere* — which had been a minor cult hit in and around her hometown of Seattle. But she was not Danielle Steel or Mary Higgins Clark. When Wells gave a reading soon after her book was published in Greenwich, Connecticut, there were seven people in the audience. She had a smattering of reviews here and there, mostly positive, and in the end her book sold a very respectable 15,000 copies in hardcover.

A year later, *Ya-Ya Sisterhood* came out in paperback. The first edition of 18,000 copies sold out in the first few months, exceeding expectations. By early summer, paperback sales had reached 30,000, and both Wells and her editor began to get the sense that something strange



MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 12, 2008

TO: Honorable Mayor John Peyton
Honorable Council President Daniel Davis
Jay Fant, Chairman, JEA Board of Directors

FROM: Tony Boselli
Chair, Neighborhood Safety and Stability Committee, Jacksonville Journey

RE: JEA Funding for Advertising

Jacksonville is faced with an appalling crime rate and unprecedented high school drop-out rate. I have been asked to chair a sub-committee of the Jacksonville Journey to look at programs to stop this trend. One of the charges to the Neighborhood Safety and Stability sub-committee is to establish partnerships to re-open closed Community Centers. We have expanded this charge to look at after-school programming in all public and private facilities, particularly in at-risk neighborhoods. It has become clear to me and my committee that funding of these programs will become the key issue in implementing a successful strategy.

This fact leads me to a request of the three of you. JEA will be spending \$7 million on advertising over the course of the next 5 years. It is my belief and the belief of my committee that these dollars would be better spent on items related to the Jacksonville Journey. In particular, we would like to see these dollars diverted to after-school programming.

Jacksonville stands at a crossroads. Our City is faced with a record murder rate, alarming high-school drop-out statistics and revenue constraints that we have not seen before. It is at times like these that ALL City agencies should step up to the plate to help. We would ask that you re-examine the expenditure of the \$7 million by JEA.

Thank you.

Cc: Jacksonville City Council Members
Jacksonville Journey Steering Committee
JEA Board Members