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Mob-Mentality

Intro: The Concept of the herd

The mind works in many ways. Humans are able to perceive and interpret ideas more than any other species, however it must be noted one of our primal instincts is aligning to further advance (or regress) our society. Withal, it has become quite evident our idea of aligning has transformed into a lasting chain of collective belief rather than respective individuality. The great philosopher Aristotle once said, “All persons ought to follow what is right, and not what is established”, for centuries the doctrine of the separation between followers and leaders has reformed civilization. We have been manipulated into believing those with a higher authority or the general majority judgement is the only answer. We have become afraid to expresses our own individuality, through the fear of risking our own self-image and reputation. This mentality has forced humans to lose self-interpretation, along with rationality, to adapt to the ways of those “greater” then themselves. This herd like mentality, is known as mob-mentality, and while pictures of pitchforks and mafia gangs may enter your mind, this way of thinking has been prevalent for eons.

The Crucible is a play written by American playwright Arthur Miller. The play is a dramatized and slightly fictionalized tale of the Salem Witch Trials taking place from 1692-1693. Though the plays events are mostly exaggerated, the trials were a grueling time for the Puritans, inflicting emotions of fear, dishonesty and hysteria. Although one extremely relevant theme would be that of mob-mentality. Throughout the play, the characters are captured by their ideologies to maintain a strict and obedient tradition, while emphasizing their forever lasting worship of god. With social hierarchy being extremely relevant in their society, the people of Salem felt pressure to simply substantiate with the accusers. The pressure to maintain the pristine reputation not only through the eyes of the citizens but through the eyes of god, lead them into a hysteria, disobeying all rational terms of thought. A specific case expressing the theme directly to the readers/watchers, is a line said by Deputy Danforth, “But you must understand sir, that a person is either with this court or he must be counted against it, there is not road in between” (p.94). Deputy Danforth’s position gave him a place where people saw him as a high figure, an honest person with dignity. One could say he is the main reason for the mentality of the town due to him being an important person, and condemning these people to death with no tangible evidence against their case. He made it quite evident that all those who were not following the established consensus were deemed abnormal and a threat to the people.

Mob Mentality has formed our nations, our media and our history books. It has developed the way our population acts and thinks upon every small action. Throughout the mid-20th century the idea of mob-mentality was extremely prevalent in political, social and cultural aspects. With the uprising of propaganda during the Second World War and the Cold War, the manipulation and influence the authority or power figures held on the people were the greatest of its time. Through propaganda tactics such as: flag waving, authority provoking and bandwagon; they managed to change the idealists of nations and reform countries through a cultural change. One example of this case would be the McCarthy trials, during the second red scare; where senator Joseph McCarthy invoked a new type of communist fear on Americans, causing a completely changed mindset. Our past has developed a new kind of mob-mentality, not through politics, fear or wars, but through the manipulation through media and news. Primarily, the youth of today are being taught a way of seeing thing with no evidence or factual concepts; therefore, threatening their self judgement and opportunities for our futures.

Body: In the eye of the Media

Humanities dependency on technology has become an increasing issue in our society. Though we are not fully consumed by it, technology has influenced the way we see the world today, primarily through news and social media outlets. The relevancy of Mob-Mentality holds two forms in the discussion: pressure of self-image/reputation on youth and the never-ending abundance of media. From a personal standpoint, the pressure put on the youth of today, has taken a hit to personal expression and individuality. Our minds have been fabricated to work in specific ways, to a point where our own rational thought is no longer present. We have fallen into a trap where majority of us are simply following a movement or idea of someone else, rather than persuading our own opinions on other, due to the fear of being different. We are told that individuality is a key opponent to our own success, however when we feel like we cannot personality state on opinion without gathering hatred, it seems far easier to follow the herd. This aspect of contrasting opinions has become extremely simple due to social media. Another issue that has caused a herd mentality due to social outlets has been the spread of false news. Fake News has currently arisen as a huge problem in our culture. The ‘news’ is allowing people to remain one sided and following the first idea they hear due to the belief it holds tangible facts (likewise in the Crucible). This news has caused humans to be ignorant and mindlessly adapt to what they have seen to be the truth. A study conducted by MIT has revealed that through the social media platform Twitter, accurate news will only travel to approximately 1,000 people. Whereas false news will travel from 1,000 up to 100,000 people

With the new rotation of celebrities and internet fads that have recently come our way, mob mentality is higher than ever, especially with social media which may be the most accessible outlet for all these trends with billions of young impressionable people on the platforms, watching and waiting. Our generations lives revolve almost entirely on what the internet has to say to us, much like fake news, celebrities also lie to us to get us to join their *side*. For example, with brands like Fit Tea that have so many influential people as their brand ambassadors, constantly posting pictures on Instagram and other platforms, pushing this product that has shown little to no evidence of working, and possibly even being unhealthy for the young audiences. Brands like these take the impressionable minds of young people which are the demographic of these celebrities and get them to support them with the help of a likeable leader. It is very similar with physical appearance and personality as well. Celebrities like Kim Kardashian were one of the first to bring this new view on body types and change the preferable aesthetic of our generation. Personality wise, using YouTube as an example, we have all these content creators that also have very impressionable audiences who adept to their humor and the way they talk to be more likeable, essentially joining their “mob-like” fanbase. Although that isn’t all that they influence. Even things such as political or social statements can be affected. Looking at the start of the US national anthem protests in 2016 where some American athletes had decided to kneel during the national anthem as a statement sparked great controversy, but many were quick to follow and still do to this day. Though this example is for a good cause, it shows us the power of one person’s actions on the world if they are in the spotlight.

Yet, it isn’t always celebrities injecting these situations into our lives, sometimes we create them ourselves. Things like challenges and online jokes that go viral are also becoming a problem. When we look back in the years, there have been many dangerous challenges that young people have been apart of like the cinnamon challenge and more recently, the tide pod challenge. These are dangerous, but people still attempted them because of everyone jumping on the bandwagon and wanting to be exciting on the internet to gain more likes and follows. We ourselves want to create our own mobs so badly so that we won’t have to shape ourselves into anyone else’s mob.

After considering of the number of voices constantly begging us to join their fanbases and convert to their opinions, it’s hard to stay behind what you believe in, and this is a problem that young people especially people face today. With everyone’s choices based on the decisions and lives of people in higher places, everyone wants to fit in and be “cool”. After conducting a quick poll, we learned that 87% of people in our age demographic have at one time or another changed their personality to fit in with someone else. This is becoming a huge problem in our society. To beat mob mentality, it is essential to be able to speak your own mind and stand by what you think, but we have built this stigma around being yourself as if it is a bad thing, because everyone so badly wants to be like the figures we see in media.

Conclusion: Self-change for the better

Now, the question is, how can we change this issue? There is no simple or easy answer because as humans evolve, certain problems, such as mob mentality evolve with us. Looking back in time to the crucible, their problems were centered around the trials and having people picking sides based on their reputations which is a perfect example of mob mentality, whereas today, everything is done online, which has altered the things we are being shown; for example, as mentioned before, Fit Tea. This problem wasn’t around during old days. By saying this, it introduces the fact that with time, new developments with how we can influence others will appear, making mob mentality unpredictable. Though, we could always look at it as a personal issue, rather than a societal one. Mob mentality occurs because a person is worried about their reputation or the outcome of their own lives depending on which side they choose. If we were to hypothetically have every person in the world be confident enough in themselves, we might be able to extinct the idea of mob mentality because people would be sure of their own views and opinions other than trying to change to fit in or copy other people.

When people fall under the idea of mob mentality, it’s hard to get them to admit it because of their reasoning or their reputation being put at stake. All we can do it help teach everyone to stand up for themselves and to not be afraid of who they are. Of course, in school, confidence is taught as we grow up, but there are other factors as to why a person might be a follower or a leader. According to our survey, the majority of people said that confidence is a big attribute found in a leader, and of that same group, people said that if they had to choose whether they were a follower or a leader, most chose follower. Typically, if you’re a follower you’re more prone to mob mentality because you are easily influenced and accept other people’s ideas more readily. It depends on how you are raised and how your brain processes things.

Obviously, nowadays we are more advanced than having witch-hunts and such, but with our advance, as stated before, comes with the advancement of our problems. Our upbringing will almost always show us to be proud of ourselves and to be our own person, whereas in history with things like the red scare, people were ready to take sides and lie about their identities. We don’t have scenarios as similar today in our society, but looking at schools, we can see bullying and other things that involve mob mentality. So, it’s hard to say if we will have more instances like the Salem Witch Trials.