

Name:

HERD MENTALITY

The dangers of blindly following the crowd



1. In the animal kingdom, it is statically safer for prey animals to travel in numbers because banding together in large groups protects sheep from predators which will go after the outliers in the flock. If sheep follow the crowd and flee in unison, they are more likely to be spared the ultimate and gruesome death of a predator. This hard-wired instinct to follow the crowd and form a herd mentality is so strong that sheep continue to follow even to their own detriment. An agricultural guide on raising sheep points out that sheep will naturally follow trusted friends, so if the shepherd or caretaker builds trust with the sheep over time, they can lead the sheep where they want them to go—even if that destination is the slaughterhouse. Because of this tendency in sheep, these animals are often used to illustrate how humans too have the predisposition to blindly follow the crowd. “Like a lamb to the slaughter” and “Meek as a Lamb,” are just a couple of idioms in the English language that highlight the blindly obedient nature of humans. Herd mentality in humans describes how people are influenced by their peers or leaders to adopt certain behaviors. Examples of the herd mentality range from stock market trends to health concerns to fashion. While following the crowd might keep us safely in style and privy to trends, having a herd mentality can also lead us to danger.

2. Like with Orwell's sheep in *Animal Farm*, having a herd mentality is especially dangerous when politics are involved. One such danger is showing polls in the media. Conner Clarke from *The Atlantic* makes a case against polling for their ability to influence mass opinions and perpetuate herd mentality. As behavioral scientist and economists often point out, popular behavior can snowball. When polls --either accurately or inaccurately-- show a candidate's popularity increasing or decreasing, the more likely that trend will increase. As Clarke points out, “Voters should be free to switch allegiances whenever they want, but they should do so for substantive reasons, not because they are following the flock.” Not only is herd mentality detrimental in the early stages of elections, but it can also skew democratic results mere hours before voting polls close. Exit polls (informal polls that are taken as voters leave the booth) and media reporting have been shown to influence the behavior of people who vote later in the day. If a person sees that their candidate is drastically behind they might think, “Why should I bother to go vote?” Similarly, if a person hasn't made their final decision, they might be persuaded by herd mentality to vote for the most popular candidate. In this regard, popularity polls can corrupt the validity of an election by suggesting results beforehand, and in turn, activating herd mentality.

3. Fake news is another danger spread by herd mentality. Fake news is stories based on false or misleading information that is blindly and widely shared by misguided people on the internet. Due to social media and a marketing phenomenon called “social proof,” the more something is shared, the more legitimate and helpful it appears to be. Frighteningly, the more fake news is shared, the more it seems to be true. If readers blindly “retweet,” “repost,” and share without investigating the source or corroborating the information, they are participating in a hazardous snowballing cycle in which the lines of fake news and real news become so blurred that the readers look from one to the other without being able to tell which is which.

1. Which form of hook or attention grabber does the author use?

- A. Use of Humor
- B. Setting a scene
- C. Stating a fact
- D. Asking a rhetorical question

2. The main purpose of paragraph 1 is to...

- A. Describe why sheep have a herd mentality
- B. Inform about herd mentality in sheep and humans
- C. Argue that having a herd mentality is dangerous
- D. Compare and contrast sheep's herd mentality to humans' herd mentality

3a. Highlight the words or sentences in paragraph 1 that best prove the main purpose of paragraph 1.

4. By mentioning *Animal Farm* in paragraph 2, the author...

- A. Uses a simile to compare *Animal Farm* and America
- B. Alludes to *Animal Farm* to remind the reader of Orwell's political message regarding sheep and herd mentality
- C. Uses a metaphor about sheep to show that humans are like animals
- D. Illustrates sheep in a setting

5. Using evidence from the text, give an argument for which is more dangerous to the public—Polling or Fake News.

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4. Young voters are especially susceptible to herd mentality because their instinct to follow the crowd is compounded by biology and social norms. Not only do young voters have to battle the urge to let polls influence their voting and steer clear of fake news, but they also have to resist blindly mimicking their parents' political beliefs. Because parental figures aim to shield children from danger, youngsters naturally follow their lead. Since parents are given the massive responsibility of rearing their children safely as well as morally, they tend to impart their own political viewpoints as the best viewpoints. Political conscience is developed at home and when children grow up trusting in their parents, it's easy to trust their viewpoints as well. However, with adolescence comes a greater sense of individuality and a better ability to decipher complex issues. It's around this time that young people begin to experiment with viewpoints that differ from their parents. Yet even with this time of experimentation, a 2005 poll found that 7 in 10 teenage voters hold the same political beliefs as their parents. Conversely, a newer study found that actually, "most young American's don't just blindly absorb and regurgitate their parents' political beliefs at the polls" (Gross). Instead, more than half (51.2 percent) of respondents either rejected their parents' beliefs outright or failed to correctly identify their parents' political affiliations (meaning their parents' political beliefs had no influence on them because they didn't even know what they were). As the newer data seems to be showing, it's important that young voters develop their own ideological consciousness; this means neither blindly rejecting political beliefs out of rebelliousness nor blindly accepting political beliefs out of loyalty.

5. The skills needed to think independently, question scrupulously, and reason self-sufficiently are essential in today's herd-driven world. Omnipresent access to popular opinions and trending social media means we should hone our critical thinking strategies and dare to be the outliers in the flock. Like the sheep, we might perceive safety in numbers, but should always be keenly aware that those who win our blind trust could very well be a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Works Cited

- Clarke, Conor. "Polling And The Herd Mentality." *The Atlantic*, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2009/07/polling-and-the-herd-mentality/20865/>.
- Gross, Rachel. "Study: Turns Out Your Kids Are Not Receptacles For Your Political Beliefs." *Slate Magazine*, 2018, http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2015/11/19/study_kids_aren_t_accepting_parental_politics_as_we_thought.html
- "Social Behavior Of Sheep - Behavior - Veterinary Manual." *Veterinary Manual*, 2018, <http://www.merckvetmanual.com/behavior/normal-social-behavior-and-behavioral-problems-of-domestic-animals/social-behavior-of-sheep>.

6. How does the author use a sophisticated transition to recap topics and transition to a new one in paragraph 4?

- A. Young voters...
- B. Not only...but
- C. Because parental figures...
- D. However...

7. The data in paragraph 4 contradicts itself. Which transition word helps the reader to notice this contradiction?

- A. However,
- B. Yet,
- C. Conversely,
- D. Instead,

8a Highlight the words or sentences in paragraph 4 that serve as evidence that young voters tend to follow their parents' political beliefs in yellow.

8b. Highlight the words or sentences in paragraph 4 that serve as evidence that young voters tend to rebel against parents' political beliefs in blue.

9. How can you better develop your own ideological consciousness by not, "blindly rejecting political beliefs out of rebelliousness nor blindly accepting political beliefs out of loyalty?"

10. Which sentence from the conclusion best sums up AND shows the purpose of this entire article?

- A. The skills needed to think...
- B. Omnipresent access to ...
- C. Like the sheep..