

# Mob mentality

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Mob mentality, or mobpsychology, has been observed in numerous rock concerts and sports events in the United States, which often ends in riots and numerous people trampled to death. These events imply that there are certain influences exerted by a group that affect a person's behavior (Waddington & King, 2005). The effect of these observations is the conduct of many studies and theories in the field of social psychology.

As early as 1895, Le Bon, who was writing about crowd psychology, published his work entitled, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. His work posits that people who form a large crowd lose their conscious personalities, and these are “ replaced by a sinister uncivilised and potentially barbaric 'collective mind (Waddington & King, 2005).’”

The concept of mob psychology is rooted on the idea that the persons involved are burdened with an incapacity for self-control. Thus, these people who are susceptible of being part of the mob easily succumb to pressures, influences, and temptations (Feasibility and Admissibility of Mob Mentality Defenses, 1995).

The perceived reason underlying mob mentality is classified into three complementary mechanisms. First among these is anonymity. A person who usually acts as a distinct person is prevented from behaving badly because his actions would be associated with himself alone. However, a person who loses his personality and becomes merely a part of large crowd becomes anonymous, making him feel liberated from personal responsibility from their actions (Waddington & King, 2005).

Another mechanism involved in crowd disorder is suggestibility. Le Bon asserts that people in a group become “less resistant to the ‘hypnotic’ powers of suggestion.” Thus, the mob is compelled into engaging in abnormal and unsavory behavior. This mechanism suggested by Le Bon is built upon by Allport in 1924, who suggested that mob psychology involves “social facilitation” whereby mutual stimulation causes the overriding of customary self-restraint exercised by people in normal circumstances (Waddington & King, 2005). Finally, there is contagion. This mechanism refers to the fact that the “high emotions spread contagiously” as if such effect is inevitable. This leads to the often-observed violent frenzy of mobs (Waddington & King, 2005).

Mob mentality is a defense against criminal liability, and is based on psychological theory. In technical terms, it is referred to as MobViolenceProclivity Syndrome. It belongs to other psychological defenses to criminal liability, such as child sexual abuse syndrome and rape trauma syndrome (Feasibility and Admissibility of Mob Mentality Defenses, 1995).

The idea is that group criminal behavior is explained by the tendency of humans to get caught up in the excitement of situations and people such that they are unable to make meaningful, real, and rational decisions about their behavior (Feasibility and Admissibility of Mob Mentality Defenses, 1995).

The legal community has observed the effects of an understanding of this human behavioral tendency on public policy, the law, and criminal liability. Whereas in the old times, crimes committed by a group had been made

graver by the fact that several people participated in the act, nowadays, such fact is used to mitigate criminal liability of the offenders.

Thus, the fact that people who merely followed the mob did not have the opportunity to make rational choices about their actions is enough to help them negate or avoid criminal responsibility for their acts (Feasibility and Admissibility of Mob Mentality Defenses, 1995). This particular effect of the psychological concept of mob mentality raises serious concerns on public policy and the law.

#### References

Feasibility and Admissibility of Mob Mentality Defenses. (1995). Harvard Law Review 108(5), 1111-1126.

Waddington, D. & King, M. (2005). The Disorderly Crowd: From Classical Psychological

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