

Consumerism consuming society

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



“ Money doesn’t buy happiness.” Throughout history, this concept has been heard time and time again and has been proven to be true. People can continuously purchase material items, but in the end, those items can never satisfy a person’s innate need for love and connection. As people buy such objects, they are making a poor attempt at filling a missing void in their lives. In the 1920s, this ideal began to lose its significance as society became swept up in consumerism. Shopping became people’s favorite pastime and the ever-expanding consumption of goods began to set the standards for happiness. Aldous Huxley experienced the rise in the sales market and saw the negative influence that it had on society as consumerism began to dominate people’s lives; consequently, Huxley wrote *Brave New World* to depict an exaggeration of the world if society continued to participate in mass consumerism. Huxley intended for his novel to be a warning to the public of the ramifications from consumerism and to ensure that his imagined dystopia does not become reality.

In his novel, Huxley illustrated an assembly line that, rather than producing cars, produces human beings instead, making “ the principle of mass production at last applied to biology” (Huxley 5). Through the execution of Bokanovsky’s process on assembly lines, one single egg can “ become anything from eight to ninety-six embryos” (Huxley 4). In the World State, people are continuously produced like material items such as Ford’s Model-T cars. The use of Ford’s technique on human reproduction dehumanizes the creation of life and turns it into a mechanical process rather than the personal and intimate experience that it actually is. As humans are created and start life in an unfeeling manner, they continue to live in the same

manner, making the society of Brave New World emotionally stunted. The ability to make multiples of a single genetic being through Ford's assembly line immensely diminishes the value of life. People are perceived as objects in the World State that society can use while they are alive and well-functioning; however, when they are no longer of use, they are cast away and simply replaced by another engineered being.

In the 1920s, Henry Ford was the prime manufacturer in the automotive industry. His invention of the assembly line made the production of thousands of Model-Ts to be possible. His ability to continuously produce the same exact product in a quick and effective manner was what inspired Huxley's own version of an assembly line in Brave New World. Through his novel, Huxley depicted his notion that as technology and consumerism was thriving, society's morality was diminishing. In the 1920s, people's priority was to purchase new products and to contribute to the sales market. As goods were being produced frequently, people began to shop incessantly, so much so that it became society's favorite activity. Writer Sharon Beder described the increasing desire to shop, as the "leisure activit[y]" provided an "escape from real life" (45). As consumerism flourished, it superseded familial obligations and friendships, as people chose to go shopping and being in their consumerist paradise, over spending time with their family and friends. Sentimentality lost its importance in civilization and materialism took over. Society in the 1920s wrongly fixated over the assembly line and consumerism, so much so that Huxley illustrated a world where the assembly line is the source of human life and consumerism is the foundation of their civilization, to caution people of the risks of consumerism.

In Brave New World, after humans are engineered through assembly lines, they then undergo conditioning that molds them into the World State's ideal citizen. In order to keep civilization in a structure manner, conditioning is used to keep the public under the command of the World Controllers. Children endure electric shocks to be taught to "hate the country," but also "love all country sports" requiring the "use of elaborate apparatus" that requires them to consume "manufacture[d] articles as well as transport" (Huxley 16). Conditioning is a form of manipulation to ensure that people continue to purchase goods and care for nothing other than consumerism. The conditioning is perceived to be justifiable to World Controllers, as society would unravel if the cycle of purchasing goods ceased. Since consumerism is practically instilled in the citizens since childhood and contributes to the stabilization of society, people do not realize the disadvantages. Therefore, the World Controllers use consumerism as a distraction to the public to ensure that people will not detach from society's norms. Instead of questioning the ethics and fairness of the World State, people are conditioned to focus on consumerism.

Corporations and producers made consumerism an endless cycle. In the 1920s, companies encouraged people to purchase goods—even when they did not have a sufficient amount of funds—through the allowance of credit and installment plans. The notion of "buy now, pay later" enabled people to continuously buy items without any concerns of not being able to pay the full product price ("A Consumer Economy"). With the ability to buy numerous goods using credit and payment plans, the population kept increasing the amount of money that they owed to manufacturers. Eventually, people's

recklessness caught up to them, as they could no longer pay off their goods and producers began to demand the amount that was owed. Corporations had allowed credit and installment plans to achieve their “ goal [of] trap[ping] consumers in the world of consumption” (Spierings and Houtum 902). Companies deceived people by glamorizing credit and payment plans to better their product sales.

With *Brave New World*, Huxley depicted the lack of care that manufacturers in the ' 20s had for consumers and companies' true intentions behind credit and payment plans. The use of credit and installment plans were forms of manipulation that compelled the public to continue purchasing goods. Credit and installment plans were created, not to help shoppers buy more products, but for shoppers to owe more money. People unknowingly fell under the thumb of manufactures, all while under the false pretenses that corporations were providing advantageous opportunities to consumers. Huxley wanted people to stop wasting their funds buying unnecessary objects under the belief that credit and payment plans were made to be helpful systems. The use of credit and installment plans created a parasitic cycle, as corporations benefitted from feeding off of consumers' purchases and consumers suffered as they were eventually left with financial issues.

Another significant aspect of the World State that aids in sustaining social order is soma. Since consumerism is essential to the World State's functionality, the World Controllers use soma to impel the public to continually purchase goods, ensuring that the civilization does not unravel. Soma induces pleasure in its users and assures that the public's minds do

not wander away from their fictional happy world. With soma, the World Controllers are able to “ render [the] population docile” and secure the people’s obedience to their conditioning and to society’s norms (Hickman 145). As soma makes people more pliable and instills them “ in [a] world of comfort and pleasure,” they heedlessly fulfill the stipulation to shop as “ nothing else is of consequence” (Sawyer 82). People have no doubts as to why they are shopping or if they need to shop, rather their soma-induced minds makes them susceptible to believe that shopping is what they have to do and is the only activity they should do—other than having sex. The World Controllers manipulate the public through soma as the drug compels people to believe that buying goods is their purpose in life, but in actuality, soma is what allows the World Controllers to control their lives.

In the 1920s, advertisements, like soma in the World State, drove consumerism. The use of commercials coerced people to continue their consumerist lifestyle, as people was constantly exposed to promotions that persuaded them to shop. Advertisements embellished products to sway the public towards purchasing them. Through product promotions, “ advertisers were no longer simply responding to demand; they were creating demand” (“ A Consumer Economy”). Companies used advertisements to convince people to keep buying pointless items. Huxley used soma in Brave New World to describe the effect of advertisements on the public in the ‘ 20s, as people kept purchasing goods based on the products’ exaggerated benefits that the advertisements portrayed. Manufacturers glamourized their goods to persuade people to buy them, and once people bought their merchandise, rarely did they fulfill the advertised expectations. Manufacturers cared less

for their product price and the product's ability to meet the advertised claims, as they were primarily concerned with selling their goods. The advertising process in the 1920s was merely a form of a stimulus that Huxley reproduced through soma in Brave New World to show the public that producers used advertisements to manipulate the public. Through advertisements, producers were able to make an abundant amount of money and contribute to the furtherance of the sales market. He wanted people to see the truth behind the embellished claims made in advertisements and used the influence of soma in Brave New World to do so.

Soma is not the only factor that prompts the purchase of goods in the World State, as the mantra "ending is better than mending" substantially aids in the growth of consumerism (Huxley 37). The citizens in Brave New World constantly purchase new items as they are conditioned to "love having new clothes" (Huxley 37). They discard any item that is deemed old or even marginally "used" and rather than attempting to fix the item, they believe the better choice is to replace it with a new version. People choose to buy products that are easily reparable, simply because they believe a slightly damaged object can no longer function properly and has lost all significant value. The buying of new products diminishes any chance of creativity and innovation that may possibly arise with the reparation of an object and also ensures that people do not form emotional attachments to their objects. As old and broken objects are continually discarded, society remains dull and emotionally-detached. The principle of "ending is better than mending" further drives the consumption of products within the World State, along with the suppression of creativity and deep emotions.

Like the World State, the '20s saw a never-ending production of goods. New products were constantly being created and released. People would buy the "brand-new," "just-released" radio with the "best speakers for the clearest audio" in an attempt to have the newest and greatest item; however, never being able to actually achieve their goal as another "brand-new" and "best" radio would be released the following day. The public's desire for the latest products fortified consumerism as people continued to purchase item after item "for it [was] the constant production of new desires that define[d] and drive" consumerism (Spierings and Houtum 902). Companies kept creating products that they claimed were better than before—while in reality, there were only minor improvements—in attempt to increase their sales and earn more money. Huxley illustrates how the useless spending on unnecessary items contributed to the cycle of consumerism and encouraged corporations to continue their duplicitous release of products. With the concept of "ending is better than mending," Huxley shows how wasting money to constantly purchase new items causes damage to no one, but consumers themselves. Therefore, Huxley wanted to establish the message to people in the '20s, that instead of continuing to buy products that have slight improvements and falling into the manipulation of advertisements, people should be content with the objects that they currently possess.

In the World State, conditioning and soma are used to ensure the lack of identity and individuality among the population. With conditioning, people's mindset are sculpted into that of an ideal World State citizen, and with soma, people dismiss anything that negates their indoctrinated beliefs; consequently, the public is compelled to not have any thoughts other than

those of the World Controllers. When John, an outsider who grew up on the Savage Reservation, comes to the World State, he rebels against the World State's social order. He yearns to maintain and develop his identity and chooses to not "want comfort," but rather want "God," "poetry," "danger," "freedom," "goodness," and "sin" (Huxley 182). He wants to discover more of what the world has to offer and to cultivate his mind with ideas outside of those that are conceived by the World Controllers; however, according to the societal standards of the World State, by pursuing his aspirations, he is "claiming the right to be unhappy" (Huxley 182). The loss of the fundamental traits that develop people's identities is believed to be an imperative aspect in maintaining happiness in the World State. The World Controllers' idea of happiness is only attainable if people lost their opinions, morals, and essentially, their identities.

With the growth of consumerism in the 1920s, people lost their individuality and the characteristics that made them unique, and began to construct their identities based off of consumerism. The objects that they purchased determined their social status, how others viewed them, and eventually how they viewed themselves. Consumerism led to people "shop[ping] for 'identities'" and as identity was made into a commodity it could "be bought by other shoppers to acquire the same status" (Spierings and Houtum 903). Rather than valuing their own individuality, people focused on continually buying goods to fabricate an image of who they believed they wanted to be. Consumerism compelled society to care only for material items and created the belief that insubstantial objects were vital for living a successful and content life; however, author Steven White describes how people can "feel

fulfilled through [consumerism], but this fulfillment is ultimately a social and not an individual one" (91). With *Brave New World*, Huxley illustrates how materialistic items should not define happiness and identity. People's possessions do not make up their character, and spending time and money on material goods merely creates an illusion of a superior figure. Huxley wanted people to instead, spend time and effort on refining their identity to become the best possible version of themselves, and by doing so they can achieve true happiness. Through following the standards that are set—such as those by the World Controllers and by consumerism—people neglect the aspects that individualize them and make them unique from the rest of civilization.

The consumerism that swept the 1920s inspired Huxley to depict his beliefs and reasons behind specific components of *Brave New World*. With consumerism escalating in the '20s, greedy manufacturers began to manipulate consumers to increase their wealth, and identity and happiness became dependent on materialism. As society was changing due to the negative impact of consumerism, Huxley witnessed these changes and through his novel, illustrated the possible consequences of consumerism. With the creation of his dystopian world, Huxley depicted the wrongs within his world that were caused by the influence of the consumerism, specifically aspects of consumerism such as the assembly line, credit, installment plans, and the continuous production of goods. Through illustrating the exaggerated effects of consumerism in *Brave New World*, Huxley hoped to change the concept of contentment and identity stemming from materialistic

purchases and to enlighten the public out from under the grim shadow of consumerism.