

Society and the individual in brave new world



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ Every one belongs to every one else,” whispers the voice in the dreams of the young in Huxley’s future world — the hypnopaedic suggestion discouraging exclusivity in friendship and love. In a sense in this world, every one is every one else as well. All the fetal conditioning, hypnopaedic training, and the power of convention molds each individual into an interchangeable part in the society, valuable only for the purpose of making the whole run smoothly. In such a world, uniqueness is uselessness and uniformity is bliss, because social stability is everything.

In the first chapter, the D. H. C. proudly explains the biochemical technology that makes possible the production of virtually identical human beings and, in doing so, introduces Huxley’s theme of individuality under assault.

Bokanovsky’s Process, which arrests normal human development while promoting the production of dozens of identical eggs, deliberately deprives human beings of their unique, individual natures and so makes overt processes for controlling them unnecessary.

The uniformity of the Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons is accomplished by careful poisoning with alcohol and produces — in Huxley’s word — “ sub-human” people, capable of work but not of independent thought. For these lower-caste men and women, individuality is literally impossible. As a result, built on a large foundation of identical, easily manipulated people, the society thrives. Stability lives, but individuality — the desire and/or ability to be different — is dead. “ When the individual feels, society reels,” Lenina piously reminds Bernard, who strives without success for a genuine human emotion beyond his customary peevishness.

This inability is a kind of tragic flaw in Bernard. Even love — acknowledging and cherishing another's unique identity — represents a threat to stability founded on uniformity. The dystopia's alternative — recreational sex — is deliberately designed to blur the distinctions among lovers and between emotions and urges, finding its social and ritual expression in "Orgy-Porgy." This organized release of sexual urges undercuts passion, the intense feeling of one person for another, as the individuals subordinate even their own sexual pleasure to the supposed joy of their society's unity.

At the Solidarity Service, Bernard finds the exercise degrading, just as anyone clinging to any idealism about sex would be revolted. John's sensitive feelings about love suffer even from the representation of such an orgy at the feelies. Significantly, it is the morning after his own experience of "orgy-porgy" that John commits suicide. His most private, cherished sense of love and of self, he feels, has been violated. In Huxley's dystopia, the drug soma also serves to keep individuals from experiencing the stressful negative effects of conflicts that the society cannot prevent.

Pain and stress — grief, humiliation, disappointment — representing uniquely individual reactions to conflict still occur sometimes in the brave new world. The people of the brave new world "solve" their conflict problems by swallowing a few tablets or taking an extended soma-holiday, which removes or sufficiently masks the negative feelings and emotions that other, more creative, problem-solving techniques might have and which cuts off the possibility of action that might have socially disruptive or revolutionary results.

The society, therefore, encourages everyone to take soma as a means of social control by eliminating the affects of conflict. John's plea to the Deltas to throw away their soma, then, constitutes a cry for rebellion that goes unheeded. Soma-tized people do not know their own degradation. They are not even fully conscious that they are individuals. Both Bernard and John struggle against the society's constant efforts to undermine their individuality, but one character reveals a deeper understanding of the stakes than the other.

Bernard rails loudly about the inhumanity of the system. His outrage stems from the injustices he suffers personally, but he apparently is unwilling or unable to fathom a debate or course of action against the malady because he is an Alpha Plus upon whom the process has been at least partially successful. Once Bernard receives the sexual and social attention he believes is his due, his complaints continue merely as a show of daring and bravado. He sees no reason and feels no moral or social compunction to fight for the rights of others oppressed by the social system.

John, on the other hand, truly challenges the brave new world with a view of freedom that includes everyone, even the Deltas who reject his call for rebellion. Although John, like Bernard, suffers from the oppression of the World State, John is able to frame his objections philosophically and debate the issue face to face with World Controller Mustapha Mond because, although John is genetically an Alpha Plus, he has not undergone the conditioning necessary to conform.

His objection is not only his own lack of comfort, but the degradation of slavery imposed by the society. John's acceptance of a free human life with all its danger and pain represents an idealistic stand beyond Bernard's comprehension or courage. Flawed, misguided, John nevertheless dares to claim his right to be an individual. By the end of the novel, all the efforts to free the individual from the grip of the World State have failed, destroyed by the power of convention induced by hypnopaedia and mob psychology.

Only Helmholtz and Bernard, bound for banishment in the Falkland Islands, represent the possibility of a slight hope — a limited freedom within the confines of a restrictive society. The battle for individuality and freedom ends with defeat in *Brave New World* — a decision Huxley later came to regret. In *Brave New World Revisited*, a series of essays on topics suggested by the novel, Huxley emphasizes the necessity of resisting the power of tyranny by keeping one's mind active and free. The individual freedoms may be limited in the modern world, Huxley admits, but they must be exercised constantly or be lost.