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ENGLISH B**EXTENDED ESSAY***Examining the Use of Sexuality in Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World"***Word Count:** 3613

Research Question: How is the theme of sexuality used in Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World" in the context of a dystopian society?

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INTRODUCTION

Human sexuality is, as defined by the Encyclopedia Britannica, “tendencies and behaviour of human beings with regard to any activity that causes or is otherwise associated with sexual arousal.” Sexuality is an integral part of the human experience, most people who have reached an age of sexual maturity have experienced some aspect of sexuality in their lifetimes. Sex is an interesting topic of discussion as throughout history it has been shamed and shunned despite its unwavering grip on both individuals’ lives and society at large. It has remained to be seen as primal and animalistic, untouched by the upward trend of civility in human history. In the context of sexuality, Brave New World implements the antithesis of this notion. In this dystopic world, Aldous Huxley gives a taste of a society that not only accepts open and unfiltered sexual activity but enforces it on the basis that it keeps the social stability that’s built on consumerism, mindless indulgence, and never-ending pleasure.

“A SQUAT GREY building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and in a shield, the World State’s motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.”

(Huxley, 1)

Brave New World starts off with a cold description of the setting. The first chapter serves to explain the system of reproduction in this society. The social castes within the society are clearly defined into five categories. In descending order, these are Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and finally Epsilons. Alphas and Betas come from their respective genetic lineages and are relatively untampered with during their embryonic phase. The lower three castes are cloned and purposefully stunted as to be biologically underdeveloped and disadvantaged from conception. This is yet another bid for control on the World State’s behalf, the acting global governmental body in Brave New World. The second chapter’s main focus is the psychological conditioning that takes place on the infants of the society. Infants of all castes are conditioned through nothing short of torture to act within the needs of their classes. Pairing the physical conditioning with the mental, subjects who lack free will emerge. Subjects do what they have to do because they both want to and were created to do it. This provides the stability that is strived to be achieved by the World State as none of these subjects will complain or rebel. This removes the need for violence and oppression in the creation of a dystopia, the Brave New World is not a strict world by any means, it is just scarily and inhumanely efficient. The other parts of the novel that are directly connected to sexuality, and thus the main focus of this essay, are the erotic playtime in the nursery, enforcement of sexual promiscuity and polygamy, the ritual of “orgy-porgy” the government-mandated and spiritual practice of group sex for the purposes of

deconstructing perceived differences between the subjects, the cheap pornographic movies that have replaced higher pleasures of art, philosophy, and cinema, the contrast of a character thrust from the Brave New World of living to a traditional and monogamous environment, and on the opposite end of the spectrum another character thrust into a society of peak sexual liberation from one that is heavily sexually repressive.

The environmental factors of Aldous Huxley's time have certainly affected the novel and its themes. Pioneered by authors like H. G. Wells, dystopian fiction rose in the early 20th Century. By the first World War, the use of technology, and its scary efficiency in the harming of fellow human beings was displayed to the public. Then came the Great Depression in the 20s. In such turbulent times, people started expecting stability over civility. These historical events might be the main inspirations in shaping Huxley's work. (Murray) (Thorn)

My research question is "**How is the theme of sexuality used in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* in the context of a dystopian society?**". In order to answer this question, the ways in which sexuality has been used in the novel to further its dystopic view need to be analyzed. Sexual activity can be broken down into two main purposes, and the novel could be analyzed in the purview of these two categories. The first one is "reproduction". The removal and subsequent replacement of traditional reproduction with hatcheries is a way the novel uses sexuality (lack thereof in the instance of reproduction) to create a dystopian society. The other category of investigation is "pleasure". Sexual pleasure in Brave New World serves to numb the members of society and keep them in a perpetual state of bliss and happiness. This results in the population being easy to manipulate and keep in check.

The method for which I will answer my research question will be dissecting every action directly related to the theme of sexuality and reaching an all-encompassing result.

Utilitarianism

The World State functions on classical utilitarianism, proposed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham (Manoraj). Utilitarianism is a consequential ethical theory, which means that it is more concerned with the results of an action rather than the intent behind it. Bentham believed that good actions have good consequences, and to determine good actions one must consider the path which will lead to the highest amount of pleasure possible with the lowest amount of pain endured. He came up with four areas of consideration within utilitarianism to determine the best possible choice. These are intensity, duration, certainty and propinquity (whether the pleasure will come soon or be delayed.). The mass pleasure derived from the limitlessly sexual culture of Brave New World provides the maximum amount for all of those considerations. The sexual gratification that the members of society are subjected to is intense, sustained for long periods of time, easily reachable, and constantly on demand. And the entirety of society gets to experience this numbing pleasure, from the higher castes of Alphas and Betas to the mindless workers, Epsilons. From Bentham's utilitarianism, Brave New World is not a dystopia but rather a utopia.

The main contender of this idea comes from John, the savage within the story. While arguing with Mustapha Mond, the antagonist of the story, John mentions deriving pleasure from higher forms of art, literature, and philosophy. This line of thinking falls under another category

of utilitarianism, suggested by John Stuart Mill. Mill's utilitarianism suggests that there are higher and lower forms of pleasure and that one needs to aim to achieve those higher pleasures (Mill). Of course, John does not desire a society that puts pleasure above all else, his true position is not utilitarianism, Mill's or otherwise. His true views are that of abstinence and self-control, he stands completely opposed to the World State. So why would he argue in favour of another form of utilitarianism? I believe at this point in the novel John has given up on attempting to change the world he lives in and is desperately looking for a semblance of sanity. His reasoning with everyone else up to this point has failed, his attempt at inciting a riot has failed, and in the last battle he has against Mustapha Mond, he tries to find a single aspect of society that is not hopeless. Mustapha Mond, being a character that both understands the higher pleasures John suggests and rejects them for what he believes is the good of society at large provides a tasteful intellectual challenge to John, finally someone not completely taken over by this insane society! However, ultimately he knows he will not fit in, and decides that complete seclusion from society is the best path for him.

Artificial Reproduction

On the matter of analyzing the use of sexuality in Brave New World, focusing on sexuality being used in places where it would not be used in real life seems like a good path to follow, as it will allow for contrast with reality. The opposite is true too, however, in respect to the means of reproducing in the novel. It is completely separated from sex, thus parents, thus family. The concept of family and parents are seen as vulgar in the society of Brave New World, similar to how sexual activities are seen as taboo in the real world. The concept of artificial

reproduction is established in the first chapter of the novel, the first thing we learn about this bizarre dystopia is that no one is born, there are no parents, no families. Every single person that participates in this society from the privileged alphas to the bottom of the barrel epsilons is made in test tubes. The determining factor for the entirety of their future, their being is how much oxygen or nutrition they are given as zygotes in artificial reproduction centers all around the world.

Artificial reproduction replacing natural conception completely separates sex from reproduction, therefore a sense of family. Through artificial reproduction, people cease to be individuals and become units.

“Can you tell us the record for a single ovary, Mr Foster?”

“Sixteen thousand and twelve in this Centre,” Mr Foster replied without hesitation.

(Huxley, 6)

In a sense, all sixteen thousand and twelve of the individuals pumped out by the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre are comparable to single-cell twins. Thus, Brave New World destroys the notion of family by removing sex out of the equation while simultaneously stretching the traditional understanding of family as being related by blood to absurd extremes, to the point where it does not matter anymore. So what if those sixteen thousand and twelve individuals are blood-related? They are barely people, they are mere products, their raw material being derived from the same source does not carry any implications. At the end of the day, they

will all end up as clones of disfigured, mentally broken remnants of what a human is supposed to be.

Not all products of this hatchery centre are epsilons of course. Alphas are also grown in labs, just within more favourable conditions that lead them to be more physically and mentally apt. This paints a scary picture of the system in place within the Brave New World. Not even the top of the top are out of the system, there is not a conspiracy in place meant to oppress a weaker group of people perpetrated by a more powerful caste. The entirety of humanity (except for the so-called savage tribes and the banished intellectuals in the Falklands) is stuck in a self-perpetuating, all-inclusive, unbreakable curse; a curse of their own making.

Hypnopaedia

Hypnopaedia is the concept of learning in one's sleep. It does not have any scientific roots in real life however, within the Brave New World, it is an extension of the conditioning done on the subjects of this society where individuals are whispered certain phrases through speakers in their beds while they sleep, so as to implant the desired ideas in their minds while simultaneously being unaware that they were fed these ideas, to begin with. Within the theme of sexuality, there is only a single explicit mention of ideas related to sex being implanted into the minds of individuals through this mean in the second chapter.

“What’s the lesson this afternoon?” he asked.

“We had Elementary Sex for the first forty minutes,” she answered. “But now it’s switched over to Elementary Class Consciousness.”

(Huxley, 22)

Erotic Play

This concept is perhaps the most disturbing one within the book as it features children guided to engage in sexual games with each other so as to prepare them for the hyper-sexual societal structure of Brave New World. This is introduced in the third chapter, which is then followed by a discussion on the traditions of the past, sexual repression in society back then, and the revelation of the concept of family to the students following the Director. This section's only use is not just shock value, however. Within the context of the nature vs nurture debate, the line between nature and nurture gets blurred with artificial reproduction, however with hypnopaedia and erotic play one can definitely say that through nurture this dystopian society creates more subjects that are obedient and functional to the needs of the society. The environment in which these individuals are placed leads them to grow up to protect and ensure the cycle's continuance.

“It’s just that this little boy seems rather reluctant to join in the ordinary erotic play.”

(...)

“I’m taking him in to see the Assistant Superintendent of Psychology. Just to see if anything’s at all abnormal.”

Within the world of Brave New World, reluctance towards sex (let alone the refusal of it) is considered an abnormality. For an infant to show reluctance, the appropriate response is to take them to see a psychologist. For adults, as later seen with Lenina's reluctance towards engaging in sexual activity with more than one partner, it is seen as an embarrassment and antisocial behaviour. In a society that basically forces sexuality onto its subjects, what is the place of consent? With our current modern understanding of consent, erotic play in the nursery is simply not consensual, it involves children that are yet to reach an age of sexual maturity being subjected to sexual activities. In a structure that is based completely on conditioning and moulding people into becoming whatever is deemed to be necessary for the vague concept of "societal stability" can there even be such a thing as consent?

An interesting point to consider here is applying the same logic to the real world. As will further be discussed under "John", John goes through a conditioning of sorts himself through his childhood. Could it be true that the culture and environment that we are subjected to influence our actions similar to how the subjects of the Brave New World are influenced? We may feel like we have a significantly higher amount of control and freedom over our actions, however, could our childhood experiences be a similar yet weaker force to the methods used in Brave New World? This perspective leads to questions about free will, whether our choices are our own or dictated by influences outside of us.

Solidarity Service

Solidarity Service is a sort of religious ceremonial activity in Brave New World, for the purposes of breaking down prejudice amongst citizens and "becoming one" in a sense. The sexual aspect of this activity is the ending where the spiritual fervour of the activity comes to a close with a group intercourse called "orgy porgy". It is written to parallel the religious practices of real life, the T symbol is the Brave New World equivalent of the Christian cross, the soma that is taken by the participants could be compared to the wine served at Christian ceremonies, and so on. Taking a closer look at the chants in the activity, one can gather that one of the main purposes of this ritual is to remove individuality from society and become one with everyone else.

"I drink to my annihilation,"

(...)

"Ford, we are twelve; oh, make us one,

Like drops within the Social River;

Oh, make us now together run

As swiftly as thy shining Flivver."

(...)

"Come, Greater Being, Social Friend,

Annihilating Twelve-in-One!

We long to die, for when we end,

Our larger life has but begun."

(Huxley, 70)

This notion of individuals ceasing to be individuals and accepting themselves as a part of a collective is reminiscent of Buddhism, so the spiritual idea here has a basis and is grounded. Annihilating oneself or longing to die refers to an ego-death (also called ego dissolution) instead of actual, physical death. In real life, ego death can occur as a result of drug use, so the purpose of using Soma while partaking in this activity is justified.

Feelies

Feelies are a form of entertainment that adds smells and touch to the generic movie experience for increased immersion. Often sexual in nature, feelies only appeal to the consumer's senses, it lacks any intellectual stimulation or artistic integrity. It is simply cheap pornography. In Brave New World art and intellectualism are no more. Why waste time thinking when you can take drugs, numb your mind, and stimulate your body? Feelies are the replacement of art and literature in this society. They cement the type of unique dystopia that Brave New World is, a society drowning in happiness to the point of complete submission and numbness instead of a violent totalitarian regime like most dystopias are. In a way Brave New World is even more terrifying, it creates a sense of pure dread and existential horror. It leads the reader to inquire, "What if you were a member of this society? Mindlessly lost in its many pleasures to realize that you've lost your humanity long before you even got it."

John

John “The Savage” is the child of two upper caste individuals from the civilized society in Brave New World. He grew up shunned, isolated, and subjected to hate in the Indian reservation he was raised in because of his mother’s sexual promiscuity and being an outsider in the eyes of the locals. John wouldn’t fit in with the civilized society as well since his values and ideas were so wildly different than the structure set there. So he is a true loner in this story. Witnessing her mother having sex and associating the experience with pain and chaos at an extremely young age, in a way, John is naturally conditioned into refraining from sex and associating it with terrifying emotions. Similar to how the individuals in the civilized society adopt the beliefs of the hypnopaedic teachings that they are subjected to, he adopts Shakespeare’s works as guidance without completely understanding them. Similar to how lower caste infants in the story are reprogrammed to despise books and flowers with electric shocks, he gets unnaturally severed from natural sexual impulses and grows fearful of them through negative associations.

After coming in contact with the civilized society, John is shellshocked. There are two main, primarily sexual events that occur to John after the reader learns his backstory. The first one is his reaction to Lenina’s sexual freedom, and the second is the very ending of the novel, the accidental group intercourse that ends in John’s suicide.

“Whore!”

“Plea-ease.”

“Damned whore!”

“A gra-amme is be-etter...” she began.

The Savage pushed her away with such force that she staggered and fell. “Go,” he shouted, standing over her menacingly, “get out of my sight or I’ll kill you.” He clenched his fists.

(Huxley 170)

After witnessing Lenina respond to his confession of love by undressing, John is frightened. He physically and verbally assaults her. This display of sexual freedom is overwhelmingly out of his world of understanding, due to the fact that both he and Lenina have been conditioned into being on the exact opposite extremes when it comes to their perspectives on sex. Lenina is completely open and casual with her attitude to sex while John is absolutely against sex and fully repressed. John hurting Lenina despite being in love with her, and Lenina attempting to repeat her hypnotically acquired phrase "A gramme is better than a damn" despite her being in immediate danger and the phrase being almost completely out of place in regards to the situation, shows that they are both reprogrammed so deep that their free will is questionable.

I believe that the most haunting paragraph in the novel is the last one, describing how John’s lifeless body swings on a noose.

(...) the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west; then paused, and after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-south-west, south-south-east, east...

(Huxley, 229)

This is the result of John attempting a spiritual purification to cleanse himself from the perceived corruption of the society he was thrust into, but having his ritual be perverted and corrupted by the people of the civilized society. Perceiving his ritual of whipping himself as a means of getting sexual pleasure, these people spoil John's purification process, corrupt his innocence by pulling him into their group intercourse and leaving him in absolute shame. Which he can't bear, and decides to take his own life instead. With John's suicide, not only a man dies, but also the idea of valuing high arts, going back to humanity's roots, and living a life not dictated by predetermined utilitarian principles goes with him. And the catalyst of this event being sex demonstrates the use of sexuality in this novel perfectly. Mindless self-indulgence leads to the destruction of quality tastes.

CONCLUSION

Aldous Huxley's Brave New World paints a frightening picture of a dystopian future where people aren't controlled through a violent and oppressive regime, but rather through a system that writes their life stories for them before birth and numbs their minds via drugs, frivolous entertainment, and unrestrained sexual pleasure. I decided to explore the place of sexuality in this story and assess how it is used to construct the dystopia that is presented. I can conclude that sexuality is used to establish 5 major aspects of this dystopia. Perversion and cheapening of art, as primarily expressed with "feelies". To numb the individual's mind for the sake of social stability, akin to Soma. Removal of individuality, as seen in Solidarity Service and the Director's advocacy for Bentham's utilitarianism. The conditioning of subjects within society,

evident by the erotic play that children are put through. Finally, the fifth one is caused by a lack of sexuality where it would be expected, reproduction, as established with the hatcheries that artificially produce thousands of identical individuals. All of these aspects facilitate a reading experience unique to *Brave New World* and play a vital role in the creation of the dystopic world presented in the novel.

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