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EXTENDED ESSAY

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Research Question: To what extent have Aldous Huxley's predictions about future life in terms of science and technology, human relationships and accelerated consumption in "Brave New World" become true when today's standards are considered?"

ABSTRACT

“Brave New World” by Aldous Huxley is evaluated as one of the most effective dystopian novels that reflect the future societies where individual freedom is endangered. It depicts a state which establishes all the facilities that will provide “universal happiness” and discourages anything that would upset the citizens, and therefore cause “chaos” and “social instability”. Brave New World’s validity today originates from its accurate reference to futuristic scientific and technological developments, real-life ideas of consumerism, like Fordism, and their implications on social life. The argument that the current situation of our world bears resemblance to the world described in the novel is an interesting, a highly debatable, and perhaps, a verifiable one. That is why, in this study that has been prepared as the Extended Essay for the International Baccalaureate, the aim was to answer the research question **“To what extent have Aldous Huxley’s predictions about future life in terms of science and technology, human relationships and accelerated consumption in “Brave New World” become true when today’s standards are considered?”** by juxtaposing the cases of science and technology, degraded human relationships and reckless consumption in the novel to today’s standards. The effects of aforementioned aspects in the book will be analysed and discussed in detail, by the help of quotations from the novel. Current statistics of today in these specific areas of life were used for the comparison, and the similarities were interpreted in depth. Based on these interpretations, the conclusion was reached that today’s developments, although they are not generated by a single governments and as sharply focused on the purpose of manipulating the society, they have many similarities with the scientific, emotional and economical aspects in the novel. Thus, it can be stated that Huxley’s predictions have become true to a great extent when today’s standards are considered.

Word count: 300

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Introduction:

“Brave New World” was originally written as a criticism of early 1930s’ Britain.¹ At those times, Europe was considered socially and culturally under the supremacy of America, which began to gain power after World War I. In his work “Brave New World” that has both utopian and science-fictional features, Huxley anticipates his apprehensions about the possible destiny of social life. Huxley had travelled to the United States of America between September 1925 and June 1926 and during these visits, he was astounded by the mass consumerism, and the probability that America would soon be the power to dominate the world.² Moreover, he was highly affected by Henry Ford, a remarkable industrialist of his time, who was well-known for the foundation of Ford Motor Company, and his ideas of Fordism, based on the combination of mass consumption and mass production for economic sustainability.³ Traumatized by all these cultural deviations and economical principals of consumerism, Huxley wrote: “*The thing which is happening in America is a revaluation of values, a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards.*” (Huxley, Brave New World Revisited, xiiii)

Huxley draws the portrait of a perfectly organized society. This perfection is constructed upon three main elements: Community, identity and stability. Everything is done for the sake of community, in the limits of the identity that is scientifically destined for people. Social stability is provided by elimination of any kind of strong emotions or individual ideas, the encouragement of profuse consumption and drug culture. A perfectly “stable” society, with no probabilities of chaos and rebellion.

¹ Aldous Huxley: Brave New World Revisited.

² Aldous Huxley: Brave New World, Vintage Classics. (Pages: xiii, xix)

³ Fordism & Postfordism. (http://www.willamette.edu/~fthomps/MgmtCon/Fordism_&_Postfordism.html)

Aldous Huxley has blended his concerns of the possible cultural conflicts and degeneration of social values in 1930s Britain, into a science-fictional satire of a dystopian world. He was worried about the future, and he expressed his worries in a conveniently futuristic novel. And now, 79 years after the novel was written, when we read “Brave New World”, a question mark is originated in our minds:

“To what extent have Aldous Huxley’s predictions about future life in terms of science and technology, human relationships and accelerated consumption in “Brave New World” become true when today’s standards are considered?”

In this study, the objective will be answering this question by analysing the concepts of science and technology, human relationships, and consumption in the novel. Point-by-point comparisons will be made with today’s statistics and standards, regarding these aspects. The “Brave New World” of “today”, will be discovered.

Feelies Instead of Feelings? : Science and Technology

Huxley's novel "Brave New World" is classified as a science-fictional satire. The reason behind this classification is that Huxley has founded this futuristic society mostly based on scientific and technological improvements. People are "pre-destined" for certain classes in a rigid caste system, by the help of artificial medical and chemical manipulations. Meanwhile, the citizens are prevented from complaining or even thinking deeply about any problems, by means of advanced technological systems of entertainment and soma, a drug that provides artificial happiness with no side effects. This way, the community is "organised" and this organisation is "stabilised".

The use of science and technology takes the lead in "producing" human beings that fit the needs of the World State. The reason underlying the new order is trivial: Familial life, with its relation to strong emotions, which might distract one from concentrating on his duties in society. That is why the sperms and eggs are kept in the laboratory at suitable temperatures and the fertilisation occurs artificially, in laboratory conditions. The embryos are raised and preserved in bottles, until they are "decanted", in other words, "artificially born" in hatcheries. During this preservation process, they are supplied with all the necessary chemicals that provide immunity for certain illnesses, and individuals are made medically perfect for the life that is ahead of them. "*The embryos still have gills. We immunize the fish against the future man's diseases.*" (Huxley 13) In addition, most of the female embryos are sterilised by the injection of male sex hormone, since natural fertility is an unwanted situation.

The class that a certain individual is to spend his life in is determined when he is in embryo state. Future Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons, receive different chemical

treatments according to their castes. For instance, Epsilons, who are responsible for unspecialised occupations, do not need high levels of intelligence, so they are deprived of it: They are not given enough oxygen, and they are decanted as semi-morons. *“The lower the caste, the shorter the oxygen.”* (Huxley 11) For lower castes, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons, there is also the Bokanovsky Process, which involves the exposition of fertilised eggs to X-rays, so it responds by budding and yields ninety-six identical embryos, all coming from the same zygote. It is described as “the major instrument of social stability” by the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning. *“Standard men women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory stuffed with the products of a single bakanovskified egg.”* (Huxley 5) However, Alphas and Betas, since they are expected to handle difficult situations and “be *capable (within limits) of making free choices*” (Huxley 195) are not bakanovskified. These biological and chemical developments are used for providing a strict division of labour in a “stable” society.

The use of science is evident in the education and conditioning of the citizens, as well. Scientific education techniques, such as Pavlovian conditioning and hypnopaedia, are applied on children, so that there is no chance for them to question their castes, or break out of the obligations that the social organisation requires. Lower castes, for example, are conditioned to hate books and flowers, for books could contain information that could *“decondition one of their reflexes”*, and *“a love of nature keeps no factories busy.”* (Huxley 18) Moral education is taught by sleep-teaching, where the rules of the castes and community are subliminally imposed to children in their sleep by effective catchphrases, the examples of which may include *“A gramme is better than a damn.”* for encouraging the usage of the drug soma, *“When individual feels, the community reels.”* for emphasizing the alleged damage of individuality. *“And if you were an Epsilon, your conditioning would have made you no less*

thankful that you weren't a Beta or an Alpha." (Huxley 64) The use of chemical and genetic engineering, and scientific education techniques enhances a social structure just as the World State wants: Everybody is happy in the absence of any reasons for misery and rebellion.

This perfectly stabilised community is stabilised further by chemical and technological distractions, like the drug "soma" and the feelies. After long studies, the scientists in "Brave New World" managed to develop a chemical that allows the user to take a holiday from reality whenever things go wrong –if ever. Soma is compared with today's concept of alcohol in the novel, and it is described as having *"all the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects."* (Huxley 46) The drug has become an indispensable, a completely normal part of lives, with its hallucinogenic effect that avoids facing the unpleasant facts of life. Any problem faced in daily life is ignored with soma, instead of thinking on it and solving it. Similarly, the feelies, the cinema systems in which one can actually experience the actual effects in the film, are used for public amusement. Especially the adult movies are highly preferred by the citizens and it is seen as a very normal thing. Also, the complex games like Obstacle Golf and Centrifugal Bumble-Puppy entertains the dwellers, preventing them from spending time alone. With all these scientific and technological distractions, happy, trouble-free citizens can focus on their social role, just as the governments wants.

Science and technology in "Brave New World" are highly advanced, yet they are used as a way of developing powerful systems to control the society, rather than discovering the truth and learning the facts. *"But truth's a menace, science is a public danger."* (Huxley 200) When we consider the standards of today, although it is controversial how the governments make use of it, it is clear that the experimental and technical developments are proceeding at a very

high speed. The latest news in the area of science and technology today is very similar to what we read in Brave New World. The most striking similarity is *in vitro* fertilisation, where eggs and sperms are combined in laboratory conditions for fertilisation. The rate of success of this type of pregnancy has increased very highly. In Turkey, there is an average of 40,000 applications of *in vitro* fertilisation, and in Scandinavian countries, one in a hundred children is an *in vitro* baby.⁴ The IVF has additionally provided the opportunities for cloning and the concept of “designer babies”, which imply the possibility of choosing genes of the future babies.⁵ This could be used in order to avoid the inherited diseases like cancer, as well as deciding whether they will be blonde or brunette, or even whether they will be a he or she. Another example of genetic developments can be illustrated as “Human Genome Project”, in which the gene map of human beings, DNA with all 20,000-25,000 genes will be identified.⁶ The project can help curing many diseases, but there is the possibility of genetic information being discriminatively used in society, such as employers not employing a man for he has a recessive gene of cancer, violating the rights of privacy. The ethics of these processes are still being discussed, but the mere description of cases very much resembles the use of biological and chemical manipulations in Brave New World.

Scientific and technological distractions are another topic that has to be compared with today’s world. As a shade of “soma”, drugs and antidepressants can be illustrated as examples, which are used in the state of depression, in order to feel happy. The use of antidepressants in the United States, for example, has nearly tripled between the years 1988-

⁴ Mother & Baby. In vitro fertilisation. (<http://www.motherandbaby.com.tr/haberler/detay/9243/Tup-bebekteson-yas-43>)

⁵ CNNTech: Designer Babies. (http://articles.cnn.com/2008-10-30/tech/designer.babies_1_genetic-screening-designer-babies-animal-embryos?_s=PM:TECH)

⁶ Human Genome Project Information (http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/home.shtml)

1994 and 1999-2000.⁷ In the same vein, technology is improving day by day, influencing millions of people recklessly using the Internet or watching television, hypnotised by hundreds of series and movies broadcasted per day. Moreover, one of the latest improvements in the area of technology was done by Japanese, who invented the cinema system Smellovision. In this system the scents suitable for a particular scene, floral smells for love scenes, for example, accompany the spectators, being spread by specialised machines under the back rows.⁸ With its effect on the smelling sense, Smellovision reminds us of the tactual “feelies” in Brave New World. Considering all these similarities, we can state that the world of 21st century is not extremely far from A.F. 632, the date in Brave New World, in terms of science and technology.

⁷ Prevention National Center for Health Statistics Press Office: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/04news/hus04.htm>)

⁸ BBC News. Smellovision For Japan Cinema. (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4903984.stm>)

Everyone Belongs To Everyone Else: Human Relationships

“When individual feels, the community reels.” is the motto of the World State for stabilising the society by eliminating individual concerns and emotions. The individuals in “Brave New World” are conditioned to have relationships only based on sexual promiscuity; the family concept is scientifically and morally demolished, nobody is allowed to have any kind of strong feelings and relationships. By forming such a social structure, it is aimed to provide a medium that is free of emotional tragedies, where everyone is happy, satisfying their pleasures and concentrating only on the social role given to them.

Like every other social regulation in Brave New World, the eradication of feelings and emotions is also originated from the will of stabilising the society. “*And feeling strongly (...) how could they be stable?*” (Huxley 35) Emotions are marked as a distractive source which diverts the attention from the overall society to a certain individual. Hence, all the notions that coexist with *furor* are annihilated in the community. For instance, there is a new occupation called emotional engineering, which engages in the creation of superficial entertainment, simple games, feelies, scent organs that have taken the place of works of art, books by Shakespeare or the paintings in museums, which can evoke feelings in an individual’s mind. Most important of all, love, passion, long-running relationships, and concept of family are all discarded. Instead, sexual promiscuity is encouraged. In this new world order, human relationships are thus hugely affected.

The reader does not come across any description of strong friendships, a deep relation depending on sharing ideas and feelings, except that of Helmholtz Watson and Bernard Marx, who are already feeling like outsiders in the community. Similarly in love affairs,

people are conditioned to recognise the opposite sex as bodies by which they can satisfy their pleasures, rather than individuals who should be valued. *“Don’t imagine that I’d had any indecorous relation with the girl. Nothing emotional, nothing long-drawn. It was all perfectly healthy and normal.”* (Huxley 84) Sex has become a social performance rather than a private connection between couples. Monogamy has thus become an old-fashioned concept and regarded as a totally unorthodox behaviour. *“It’s such horribly bad form to go on like this with one man.”* (Huxley 34) Because “everyone belongs to everyone else” in this social body. An example of how this new social order is different from the culture of the “savages” in “Brave New World” is seen when Linda, who is stuck in Savage Reservation, gets beaten by the women because she has sexual relationship with the men of Malpais. *“They say that those are their men.”* (Huxley 109) Linda does not seem to understand the reason, because for her, and her community, what she does is perfectly normal.

As a consequence of these alterations in the understanding of human relationships, the family concept has lost its meaning in this “Brave New Worldian” society. The natural process of giving birth to a baby, living with all the family members in the same house, the compassion that a mother feels for her children have all become immoral, “mother” and “father” have become shameful, almost pornographic words. *“‘Yes, a baby – and I was its mother.’ She flung the obscenity like a challenge into the outraged silence.”* (Huxley 131) No strong sensations are spared for family members. No passion felt for a spouse, no affection for a child, or no grievance for the death of a beloved one can blind one’s eyes and destroy the idea that “community, identity and stability” are the most important notions in life. *“The world’s stable now. (...) They’ve got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about.”* (Huxley 194) Moreover, most of the females are sterilised during the state of embryos so that they will not have to deal with pregnancy, a disaster, as it is regarded. The savage John’s connection to

his mother is thus considered very abnormal. *“In spite of his m – ‘s senility and extreme repulsiveness of her appearance, the Savage frequently goes to see her and appears to be much attached to her.”* (Huxley 139) It is worth noting that the word “mother” is not written at full length in this report that describes John. To sum up, the ancient values of human relationships are far forgotten. *“Mother, monogamy, romance. (...) No wonder those poor pre-moderns were mad and wicked and miserable.”* (Huxley 35) A new order that sacrifices the individual emotions for the sake of the interests of a “stable” society has taken over.

In Brave New World, we see people that lack the freedom to construct reliable relationships; they are deprived of having individual emotions. And when we open our eyes and look around ourselves, what do we see? Fortunately, emotions and feelings are still enthusiastically felt in our world, friendships are still strong; relationships, engagements, marriages are still important; family is seen as the unit cell of the social body to an extent. Yet, it would not be true to claim that these values are what they used to be in the past. Technological improvements like Facebook have reduced friendships to a single click on the mouse. Many people meet each other and engage in virtual relationships on the Internet. In the sexual aspect, it is obvious that sex is not seen as a taboo or a very private thing as it used to be. Almost everyone in the United States has premarital sex frequently.⁹ Making money and being independent is becoming more and more valued than families are throughout the world. As a result, the cases of divorce increase. In Spain, for example, the number of divorced couples increased from 50,974 in 2004 to 109,922 in 2008. In Turkey 99,663 divorce cases were seen in 2008 whereas the number was 91,022 in 2004. In China, the number increased

⁹ Trends in premarital sex in the United States in 1954-2003. Pubmed.
(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/17236611>)

from 1,665,000 to 2,098,000 between the same years.¹⁰ Seeing all these, we can come to a conclusion that, though not as sharp as in Brave New World, a change in our values about human relationships can be observed.

¹⁰ Demographic Yearbook of 2008. Table 25. United Nations Statistics Division.
(<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2008.htm>)

Ending is Better than Mending: Consumption

One of the major characteristics of the community that is depicted in “Brave New World” is consumerism. Consumption in this society is highly encouraged in each and every way that one could ever envision: Goods, technology, transport, drugs and entertainment are constantly “used” by the citizens. Spending money and time on these concepts is considered as a crucial part of happiness, and this consideration has a huge effect on the society.

The reason behind the aforementioned encouragement is the idea that consumption of all kinds of goods and services is a vital source that provides social stability. The term “social stability” here refers to maximum universal happiness and minimum possibility of chaos. Buying and possessing things renders the society satisfied, because the human nature is constructed upon the principle of “always wanting more than one already has”. When there are no limits for consumption, people can do, buy and spend their time on anything they want. A strictly capitalist system based on “supply and demand” is thus formed: As people consume, the production increases, so that there are more things to be consumed. Meanwhile the population tends to increase enormously. The cycle goes on and on, keeping the economical and social stabilities fully upright. Is there any chance of misfortune, chaos and rebellion in such a social body?

The answer of this rhetorical question must have also struck the World State that it has provided the citizens with all kinds of facilities to consume. Furthermore, it has made consumption a subconscious obligation, a way of life, rather than an opportunity. Perfume-pouring taps, artificial viscose clothes that are suitable for mass production are everywhere. Every area of life is designed in a way that facilitates consumption, and activities that do not

suit this condition are omitted. For instance, ancient games, which are “*played only with a ball or two, a few sticks, and a bit of netting*” (Huxley 25) are left behind in the past to be replaced by games, like Centrifugal Bumble-Puppy, which require complex, numerous apparatus. “*Imagine the folly of allowing people to play elaborate games which do nothing whatever to increase consumption.*” (Huxley 25) Likewise, the consumption of soma is widely boosted, for again, it is one of the main sources that provide artificial happiness distraction from problems. Since people are conditioned to be happy and away from any apprehension, they lean on this hallucinogenic drug whenever it is necessary to meet the case of this conditioning. ““(…) *why you don’t take soma when you have these dreadful ideas of yours. You’d forget all about them.*”” (Huxley 79) It is legally served with coffee in restaurants, or in community services, testifying the usual and widespread use of soma in the society.

To steadily implant the idea of accelerated consumption into the citizens’ brains, the education technique “hypnopaedia” or “sleep-teaching” is used. Various catchphrases that recommend spending are settled into the subconscious minds: The examples include “*The more stitches, the less riches.*” or “*Ending is better than mending.*” (Huxley 42) Hence, nobody can question whether consumption is necessary, or even reasonable, because they have subliminally accepted that it is an indispensable part of their lives. Lenina’s remark about her Malthusian belt, “*I’ve had it nearly three months.*” (Huxley 44), is a sign that shows us how unusual it is to own goods for long periods. Another example of the madness of consumption is Linda, a Beta who had to live in a Savage Reservation for years instead of the “civilised” state and who had gone through many difficulties about her habits. “*This beastly wool isn’t like acetate. It lasts and lasts. And you’re supposed to mend it if it gets torn.*” (Huxley 104) Based on these examples, we see that the society in “Brave New World” is

addicted to consumption, which has become an effective way to distract the citizens from any possible problems. People hedonistically focus on their desires only, and therefore “universal happiness” and “social stability” are achieved.

“Think of what it can mean to your firm in profits if you can condition a million or ten million children, who will grow up into adults trained to buy your product.” Aldous Huxley has quoted Process of Persuasion by Clyde Miller in his novel “Brave New World Revisited” (Huxley 71) Also considering that Huxley was inspired by the real-life idea of Fordism that suggests mass production and mass consumerism as the primary condition of economic sustainability, we see that this situation is not very far away from today’s world. Hundreds of advertisements are broadcasted to trigger the impulse of spending. Mass production goes through the roof especially in countries like China. Companies produce, people continue to buy and a cycle of consumption similar to that in “Brave New World” is formed. Examples may be shown from any area of life. The World International TV Market represented the statistics of TV revenue to be 268,8 billion Euro around the globe in 2009.¹¹, which is a reflection of the “feelies” in real life. Also, the number of cars on the roads has increased from 53 million to 500 million since 1950¹², which makes us recall the large number of helicopter taxis that are used to travel in the city in the World State. In addition, the annual consumption of plastic materials all over the world has risen from million tonnes to 100 million tonnes in last sixty years.¹³ Along the same road, use of prescribed antidepressants has almost doubled

¹¹ TV Market Data. International Television Expert Group. (http://www.international-television.org/tv_market_data/world-tv-market-2010.html)

¹² Consumption statistics. Green Living Tips (<http://www.greenlivingtips.com/articles/185/1/Consumption-statistics.html>)

¹³ The State of Consumption Today. World Watch. (<http://www.worldwatch.org/node/810>)

in many countries like France (between 1992 and 1995)¹⁴ and in Canada the United Kingdom and the United States since the 1990s¹⁵, reminding us of the reckless consumption of soma in Brave New World. And if the world population continues to increase with today's pace, the levels of consumption will shoot up in a parallel trend. Taking all these points into account, we can say that Huxley's predictions about the future consumption have become true to a very disturbing extent, and continue to realise.

¹⁴ Antidepressant consumption in the global population in France. Pubmed.
(<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12386542>)

¹⁵ Antidepressant Utilization in British Columbia from 1996 to 2004.

Conclusion

In this study, the purpose was to answer the research question **“To what extent have Aldous Huxley’s predictions about future life in terms of science and technology, human relationships and accelerated consumption in ‘Brave New World’ become true when today’s standards are considered?”** In order to fulfil this task, the standards of the aforementioned aspects of “Brave New World” and of today’s society were deeply discussed and compared by quotations and statistics.

The results of the interpretations were clear: First of all, genetic improvements like *in vitro* fertilisation, Human Genome Project show great similarity to the biological manipulations in Brave New World. Secondly, today’s increasing divorce rates and teenage pregnancy incidents can be considered parallel to the degenerations of family values and encouragement of sexual promiscuity in the novel. Last but not least, the accelerated consumption in “Brave New World” resembles the madness of consumption of today’s capitalist world, where increasing populations are triggered to buy and sell with hundreds of advertisements among all the shopping centres.

All the regulations in “Brave New World” are taken as precautions to stabilise the community, to prevent the discontentment and chaos. Today’s improvements, though they are not as focused on such a purpose, bears great resemblance to those in the book and they may well be used in favour of great authorities if they want to. All in all, bearing all the similarities in mind, we can say that Huxley’s predictions about future life has become true to a great extent.

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