
Telltale Signs Of Contentment And Social Castes In Brave New World

Every author has a purpose behind every piece they write; some sort of message or deeper meaning behind their work. Aldous Huxley's purpose in writing *Brave New World* was most definitely a warning towards the possibilities of the future. The dystopian society within *Brave New World* showed a world dominated by technological advancements that sculpted society itself through a variety of means. Through *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley warned against the dangers of social casting, the acceptance of comfort and contentment over true happiness, and the risks in these factors that technological advancements bring.

One of the biggest themes within *Brave New World* is the presence of social castes and their effect on society. Society in *Brave New World* is broken up into five castes, each with different intelligence and societal roles. The highest caste, the Alphas, is the dominant class both in intelligence and status, and contains the leaders of society both through the government and in the various sciences. As the caste level becomes lower, the intelligence and positions of the people drop, gradually deteriorates into the lowest Epsilon class, which are moronic and forced into jobs of menial labor. Social casting like this is not something that is uncommon even in today's society, although it is far more subtle in the real world.

There are definite trends in the jobs performed by different people and their general intelligence levels. Those who are able to be properly educated can earn a college degree and are able to earn a significantly higher income overall, with a Bachelor's degree earning an average of 1.65 times the income of a high school diploma, and Master's degrees earning an average of nearly twice the amount (Baum, Ma & Payea, 12). Differentials in income level due to education often lead to a separation between people and create an informal social casting in itself. However, the differences in social classes in today's society aren't something that is very concrete.

Because of the lack of concrete social castes in today's society, it's relatively easy for anyone to get to a better position in life. Anyone can put enough effort into their life and find a way to become more successful than they currently are. This isn't the case in *Brave New World*, however. The caste system is put into place before people are even born. Instead of people having children normally, all children are conceived and raised in a hatchery. This allows the people in charge of the hatchery to directly influence what conditions the unborn child is subjected to, as well as what genetics go into each child. Because of this, the government has direct control over what caste each person becomes, from the highly intelligent Alphas to the moronic Epsilons. While genetic engineering of this quality was little more than a theoretical concept when Huxley wrote *Brave New World*, it's now relatively common, albeit not among humans. Many crops and livestock have been genetically engineered to become resistant to diseases or to be able to provide more food, but similar treatments could easily be done among humans (Simmons). While ethical restraints have limited this only to help cure or prevent diseases, the possibility to use genetic engineering for powerful eugenic reasons is a real threat, and if the government were to gain the ability to implement a eugenics program of this scale, the caste system of *Brave New World* could very well become a reality.

Another issue that Huxley warned us about through *Brave New World* is the acceptance of

contentment and the over-valuing of comfort. Within the society of *Brave New World*, people are conditioned to shun away emotions entirely, the society is built upon never having to feel emotions such as anger, fear, and sadness, but at the same time, true happiness is something that is also frowned upon. Small propaganda phrases are pressured onto society from childhood, such as through the phrases “when the individual feels, the community reels,” and “everybody’s happy nowadays” (Huxley). To further condition negative emotions out of society, they are encouraged to take soma, a specially engineered drug that can easily overwrite negative emotions with feelings of comfort and euphoria. The use of soma is further encouraged through phrases such as “a gramme is always better than a damn,” “a gramme in time saves nine,” and “one cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments,” (Huxley). Through the use of soma, the society of *Brave New World* was ensured to eternally have comfort, and the basic contentment that comes with it, but never know the feelings of true happiness.

Much like the people of *Brave New World* did, society today has a large tendency to strive for and value comfort in place of true happiness. Technological advancements are one of the leading causes for these changes in values, leading to a materialistic society that values whatever the most comfortable thing money can buy. It’s difficult to become truly happy, but relatively easy to become very comfortable. The problem with comfort is that the easier it is to attain, the more boring and mundane it becomes. Blogger Mariele Anastasia puts it bluntly yet concisely when she says “Comfort is defined by its mediocrity. If you are striving for happiness, you have risks to take: You risk being afraid, being hurt, being rejected, being wrong. You risk feeling the lowest lows. You may feel downright wretched. At least you’re feeling something” (Comfort vs. Happiness). These risks are things that many people are afraid to take, and as a result they settle on comfort in order to avoid these fears. Within *Brave New World*, soma acts as a barrier from these undesired emotions. Huxley further focuses these concepts of using comfort to mask negative emotions through the descriptions of soma by the Alpha caste members.

“And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there’s always soma to give you a holiday from the facts. And there’s always soma to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle.” (Huxley)

Hiding from negative emotions through comfort keeps society in a state of ignorant bliss, as no one who is comfortable has to experience true unhappiness. However, the lack of unhappiness is not the same as happiness, and without embracing the risks of negative emotions, true happiness can never be achieved.

The desire to accept the highs with the lows and accept all emotions in their fullest extent is the biggest standout between those that are truly happy and those who are content and comfortable. Aldous Huxley stresses this concept through the conversations between Alpha caste members and the Savages, people who live outside of the established society and the policies that they set in place.

“But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness, I want sin.’

'In fact,' said Mustapha Mond, 'you're claiming the right to be unhappy.'

'All right then,' said the Savage defiantly, 'I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.'" (Huxley).

Through this quote, the Savage shows his desire for true happiness even though it means the risk of unhappiness at the same time. By accepting all of the realities and risks associated with true freedom and emotion, the Savage is able to enjoy all of the highs alongside the lows. Without a feeling of true misery or unhappiness to compare to, it's impossible for one to truly experience happiness itself.

While these issues pertaining to comfort blanking emotion may not seem like an actual societal problem, what really is dangerous about this is the apathetic nature that easy comfort brings to those who experience it. When one is continuously content and comfortable, they are easily manipulated into believing whatever is going on politically and socially is good for them, whether it actually is or not. This is a defining factor in the control the government has over society in *Brave New World*. Huxley further defines this through the following quote. "A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude." The government-issued comfort through the use of soma and early-life conditioning makes society accepting of everything that happens to them and the state of everything in their world. While society today hasn't gotten to a point of accepting everything the government does without question, the nature of technology keeps many people content with comfort alone. Devices like smartphones absorb the time and attention of many people, and other technological advancements such as the internet keep people distant from others. Psychologist Sherry Turkle has said "We live in a technological universe in which we are always communicating. And yet we have sacrificed conversation for mere connection" (15). The distancing of genuine human interaction further cuts down on the experience of true emotions, and further spirals society into the apathetic state of comfort that Huxley represented in *Brave New World*.

While society appears to be a long way off from dissolving into the dystopia represented in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the warnings he gave us should still be taken to heart. There have been much technological advancement in both genetic engineering and various comforting technologies, and these advancements are enough to make nearly everything Huxley warned us about a reality. If society isn't careful, they could succumb to the apathetic outcomes of comfort and contentment, allowing the government to change enough to change the world we know into a brave new world.

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