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What is equality?

As Rosa Parks once said, "I would like to be known as a person who is concerned about freedom and equality and justice and prosperity for all people." A small portion of the country tends to question what equality stands for and why everyone fights for equality. What people mean when they say "equality" is race, religion, and gender. The story "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut gives examples of how the government created a way to represent equality to be able to stay in power. The government forced equality through beauty, strength, and intelligence instead of using equality by dealing with race, religion, and gender. They thought that if they were to give the people the equality that was protested for, then the government would lose their power over the country.

The story starts by addressing the year of 2081 and how everybody is finally equal. No one was better than anyone in any way and it was because of the 211th, 212th, and 213th amendments of the constitution. The first example shown of the government forcing equality was by intelligence when George and his wife Hazel are watching the ballerinas on television when a buzzer sound goes off in George's head. As Hazel says, "that was a real pretty dance, that dance they did," and George responds back "huh" (para.7-8). He responds that way because he does not remember anything after that sound went off. The buzzing sound was due to a headset he wore which was only worn by anyone with a high intelligence. George's wife had a perfectly average intelligence to where she did not have to wear the headset. The only ones that did not
wear the headset were anyone part of the government, and so that way the government would stay in power.

Also, the story mentions how the government forces equality by strength. An example the story uses of forced equality by strength was when Hazel notices how tired George looks and says to him "why don't you stretch out on the sofa, so's [sic] you can rest your handicap bag on the pillows, honeybunch" (para.24). Around his neck is a forty-seven-pound handicap bag to keep his strength equally to everyone else's. The same happens when Harrison tries to overthrow the government. Harrison shows his strength, by ripping off the handicap bag, after stating "crippled, hobbled, sickened - I am a greater ruler than any man who ever lived! Now watch me become what I can become" (para.55). He is soon shot, dead, by Diana Moon the handicapper general. She shoots him to show what would happen if they try to break the law of equality. Since Diana Moon was part of the government, she was required to have a headset nor a handicap bag either. Harrison was not blind, like most people were by the government's equality form, he knew what their real motive was. "Diversity and Equality: Race and Class in America" states "Whenever there have been shifts and changes in the political, cultural, and social life of the American peoples, a closer examination always reveals new developments in the U.S. economy, as part of an increasingly integrated global capitalist economy" (Katz-Fishman 570). Harrison knew, clearly, that something need to be done, and he wanted to show that it was possible to break free from the government. Towards the end, Harrison failed to overthrow the government because they had more power over the people, and continued to.

The third example of the government forcing equality is when the announcer, due to his speech impediment, hands the bulletin to one of the ballerinas to read. She was going to announce the escape of Harrison Bergeron, but as she speaks her voice is unfair and apologizes
at once. She says, "excuse me-" (para.40) and starts again with an uncompetitive voice. She continues to speak terribly till she is finished but to the government that was an equal voice.

Again, another example is given when the ballerinas are wearing a hideous mask to shield their actual beauty. Their beauty was not fair, but the mask was not the only essential worn. When Harrison showed up, on the stage, he was wearing a rubber nose and had shaven eyebrows as well as black caps put randomly on some of his even, white teeth. The government takes the creation of equality and their power seriously so that when Harrison and a ballerina showed their strength and beauty, they are murdered. At that moment, the government felt that their power was threatened and needed to show what would happen if anyone were to break the law. What the government had been representing to the people was nowhere near equality.

In "Addressing the Forces Driving Inequality in the United States" Peter A. Diamond wrote,

"In 1787, the United States had a constitutional convention. Most of the constitution that we still have emerged from it. What followed during ratification by the states was a fascinating debate over several issues. One was how much power to give the central government. Remember, this was a society that revolted against a very powerful central government when they were colonies in the distant periphery. And the existing central government had very limited powers. The argument was about the powers of the central government relative to the powers of the states and local governments" (Diamond 411). America’s founding fathers created the systems of the government so that neither the people or government would have more power. There had been a power problem before and they feared if they did not set boundaries then the people’s lives would be in danger. The founding fathers created the constitution to set limits on laws the government could pass without violating the
rights and freedom of the people. "Harrison Bergeron" represents that the people are dealing with a government that has all the power. In the story when Hazel sees how tired George looks, she says, to him, "if there was just some way we could make a little hole in the bottom of the bag, and just take out a few of them lead balls. Just a few" (para.26). George then explains to hazel what would happen if they were to cheat the system and adds "then other people'd get away with it-and pretty soon we'd be right back to the dark ages again, with everybody competing against everybody else. You wouldn't like that, would you?" [sic] (para.29). Actually, they were living the “dark ages again” from the past without noticing the government never stop being in more control.

Gender equality is an issue for many people, especially women. Wedad Andrada Quffa, a researcher from the University of Bucharest, wrote in "A Review of The History of Gender Equality in the United States of America" that "Women find themselves dealing with a harder challenge when faced with entering the workforce and finding a job and maybe usually choose jobs that allow them to have time for their family and children" (Quffa 144). Even though the Equal pay act was passed in 1963, companies of this generation still pay men more than women. In "Harrison Bergeron," Hazel is portrayed as not intelligent but wants to resemble everyone else and have a headset even though it is a terrible device. The ballerinas are rejected from their beauty and must wear masks while Harrison is able to show parts his face. In the same article "A Review of The History of Gender Equality in the United States of America" that "An important evolution in the history of women's rights in the United States of America could have been the Equal Rights Amendment, a proposed and failed amendment to the United States Constitution which only received 35 of the necessary 38 state ratifications" (Quffa 146). The article statement made the government seemed as if no one wanted women to have any say at all or be equal to
men. It seems as the only women to show power is Diana Moon Glampers and the ballerina that dances with Harrison, but she is shut down of her strength when Diana kills her and Harrison but even the capacity she shows is taken down when the television network switches off. So, was this the men of the government showing their power by shutting women off from representing ability to run the country?

Religion does take its part in equality when the it is not separate from state, which starts conflict with passing laws for the people. Others believe that many take freedom of religion for granted. The article "Religion is Special Enough" defends what the first amendment represents. Christopher C. Lund wrote in the article (written by John Garvey)

"The best reasons for protecting religious freedom rest on the assumption that religion is a good thing. . .. [This] is the most convincing explanation for why our society adopted the right to religious freedom in the first place . . . [and it is] also the reason why many, perhaps most, religious believers claim the right to freedom today. It enables them to perform their religious duties, and to" [sic] (490-491).

Honestly, freedom of religion is an amazing right but can also be misunderstood by many people. Why? To some people, freedom of religion seems to only be accurate if it is their freedom of religion. Today, politician's religious beliefs and women having the right to abortion perfectly prove this point. If politician's religious beliefs say that having abortions is wrong, then they try and prevent women from doing so. The politicians are harming women's right to privacy, and, by violating their rights, the government is violating the constitution. The same happened with same-sex marriage; politician's beliefs attempted to prevent legalization but failed as same-sex marriage became legal in 2015. In "Harrison Bergeron," if Hazel was Diana Moon
Glampers, she tells George "I'd have chimes on Sunday-just chimes. Kind of in honor of religion" (para.16). Funny to say that the government did not even care for religious equality.

In summary, "Harrison Bergeron" displays how the government twists means of equality to stay in power. Vonnegut is warning people the government will use the argument for equality to create dominance over citizen's lives. The government does not meet the expectations for equality that everyone has in their minds because governmental officials do not wish to lose power or money. The idea of equality is to respect one another by religion, race, and gender so no one is more powerful than any other individual. If government will listen to what its citizens mean by equality, then that is the day equality will mean something.
Works Cited


