The Theme of “Harrison Bergeron”

The theme of “Harrison Bergeron” by Kurt Vonnegut Jr. proposes the idea that complete equality comes at a cost, specifically at the expense of people. In the dystopian story, equality was successfully achieved for the citizens of America by making everyone fit the lowest level of capability. Along with the idea of everyone being equal, widespread disconnect from reality and no room for difference arose because of the way the government created “equality”.  The handicaps were forced on those who had any slight advantage, leaving the residents in a state of obscurity, unable to act on their own.  In the short story, the effects of the handicaps were seen when, “tears [fell] on Hazels cheeks, but she’d forgotten for the moment what they were about.” (Vonnegut Jr. 59).  Another character, George, sits on the couch all day and watches TV in pain, as every 20 seconds, the radio in his ear blares, preventing him from thinking more than would be equitable to everyone else. This made the quality of life extremely low which shows how equality came at a price. Additionally, the number of handicaps and things one had suffer to decrease their intelligence greatly affected one’s creativity and individuality. One occurrence was when, “the transmitter would send out some sharp noise to keep people like George from taking unfair advantage of their brains.” (Vonnegut Jr. 58/59).  Ultimately, the government remained superior and able to continue to keep their power as society was never be able to progress due to the lack of opportunity for excellence. Individuality is essential to a functioning society, but in this society, everyone was the exact same and getting nowhere. The experiment to prove equality was possibly only showcased how it is far from ideal.  “Harrison Bergeron” heavily emphasizes that complete equality by forcing a balanced society leads to mental and physical torment and that trying to achieve it is a dangerous and costly idea.