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The Value of Escapism in *Ready Player One*

Escapism is a powerful coping mechanism that enables people to get away from difficult circumstances, alleviate insecurities and elevate their quality of life. In Ernest Cline's novel, *Ready Player One* the OASIS offers the world escapism. Due to the problems that plague society in our time, it would have an immense benefit if today's programmers were to develop a similar platform.

The OASIS helps people escape the harsh circumstances of their real lives and cope with the struggles they face in reality by allowing them to enter a better world where their problems don't exist. While they're logged into the OASIS people can experience things that they would never have the opportunity to in the real world. This increases their quality of life because someone who faces awful living conditions could live in a palace within the OASIS. Or someone who is isolated in the real world can surround themselves with others. This benefit is demonstrated as Wade recounts his experiences with real-life school. "I'd attended school in the real world up until the sixth grade, it hadn't been a very pleasant experience. I was a painfully shy, awkward kid, with low self-esteem and almost no social skills... To make matters worse my limited wardrobe consisted entirely of ill-fitting clothes from thrift stores and donation bins—the social equivalent of having a target painted over my head" (30). In the real world Wade had a difficult time in school because he struggles with social interaction; however, inside the OASIS

he is free of this social awkwardness. This is evident in an interaction with an unfriendly avatar, “I turned around and saw Todd13 an obnoxious avatar I recognized from my algebra II class. He was standing with several of his friends. ‘Great outfit, slick,’ he said ‘Where did you snag the sweet threads?’ My avatar was wearing a black T-shirt and blue jeans, one of the free default skins... ‘Your mom bought them for me,’ I retorted without breaking my stride... My jab elicited laughter from a few of his friends and other students nearby” (29-30). The OASIS gives Wade a massive boost in confidence which is why he stands up to his OASIS school bullies like Todd13. This increased self-confidence also allows him to develop meaningful friendships with other characters like Aech and Artemis, relationships that couldn’t have existed without the OASIS. The OASIS helps its users cope with their problems through escapism.

The OASIS helps people alleviate their insecurities. Just like in our world today, in the world of *Ready Player One* a great deal of people struggle with insecurity regarding their appearance. Wade suffers from low self-esteem in large part due to his appearance. Wade is overweight, slightly-short and suffers from severe acne. This robs him of his self-confidence destroying his social skills. When he creates his OASIS avatar Wade can free himself of these issues with his physical appearance. He says, “I’d designed my avatar’s face and body to look more or less, like my own. My avatar had a slightly smaller nose than me, and he was taller. And thinner. And more muscular. And didn’t have any teenage acne” (28). Since Wade spends the majority of his time inside of the OASIS he almost doesn’t have to live with his real physical appearance. Similarly, Artemis has a birthmark that she considers to be hideous. The OASIS gives her the opportunity to recreate herself exactly minus the birthmark. This allows her to be the bold, confident person that she is. Also, Artemis wants to keep her real-world identity hidden

so that nobody knows who she really is behind the haptic the visor. The OASIS, as it does with all of its users grants her complete anonymity. When Wade begins to ask her about her real-world self she retorts, “You only see what I want you... This isn’t my real body, Wade. Or my real face” (186). Later in the novel Wade reveals about Artemis that, “... she looked almost identical to her avatar. The same dark hair and the same beautiful eyes that I knew so well—with one small difference. Most of the left half of her face was covered with a reddish purple birthmark” (291). In short, the OASIS lifts the burden of people’s insecurities in the world of *Ready Player One*, which is why today’s programmers should develop similar technology.

The OASIS offers its users opportunity and purpose. Wade has suffered a difficult life and feels that the world is horrible and hopeless. He also has no close relationships within the real world. This means that, to Wade, anything he could do in the real world would be pointless. Fortunately for Wade and many other gunters like him, there’s the OASIS where he can hunt for Halliday’s Easter egg. The hunt gives him something to do and look forward to, he spends a great deal of time conducting Halliday research becoming an unofficial expert on Halliday and 1980s pop culture. Also Wade Looks forward to the day when one gunter is able to obtain the copper key. A sense of purpose is one of a human beings basic needs, and for Wade it is likely the only reason that he continues living as can be seen here, “... and now I was going to lose the contest, too... I [was going to] rip off my visor and leave my apartment for the first time in six months. I would ride the elevator up to the roof... Then I would scale the barrier and hurl myself off the edge” (239). Although being alive solely for the purpose of winning a competition is a grim thought, the hunt saves Wade’s life, and most likely does the same for many other gunters. The hunt is just one of the infinite number of things to be done in the OASIS. There are

thousands of quests that can be completed to gain superior items or to level up one's avatar. Questing gives OASIS users goals to work towards. In addition, users can team up and quest together in clans in order to combine each other's skills and knowledge. This teamwork makes each user feel that they have made a valuable contribution. The OASIS also provides opportunity. For example, the OASIS gives all United States residents with an internet connection access to free high-quality public education. This means that anyone can obtain the knowledge necessary to pursue their desired occupation. Also users can meet up with other users anywhere in the world opening doors for socialization. First, this allows the user to find people with whom they share similar interests no matter how obscure. Also, it tears down geographical barriers since the entire world is connected to the same OASIS. This creates opportunity for the user to get to know people from other countries and learn about their cultures. The OASIS has ability to unite people internationally, and the benefit of doing so is demonstrated in Wade's alliance with Shoto and Daito, "... I'd managed to form a tenuous friendship with Daito and Shoto when the three of us teamed up to complete an extended quest... called Shodai Ultraman on planet Tokusatsu... It was also a Japanese language quest" (204). Wade is able to learn about Japanese culture through experiencing it first-hand with actual Japanese people. In summary, the OASIS is a platform where users can find purpose and opportunity.

In the world of Ready player one the escapism that the OASIS provides has an immense benefit on the well-being of society. Its users have the opportunity to escape harsh living conditions alleviate their insecurities and find purpose. These are things that would support our society today which is why programmers should work towards creating a similar platform.

Works Cited

Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One*. Broadway Books, 2015.

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