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The OASIS and Societal Decline in Ready Player One

In Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One*, the dystopian society of 2044 is plagued by a lack of resources, overpopulation, pollution, disorder, and many other issues. In the novel, Wade Watts, an 18 year old living in America, narrates his story of hunting for the treasure left by OASIS creator James Halliday. The OASIS is an online simulation game run on an OASIS console, which grew into being used as the global virtual reality world. Most of humanity now uses the technology on a daily basis for anything from virtual shopping, religious gatherings, combat, and more. Although the creation of the OASIS provides an outlet for many people to escape their miseries in the real world, because of how it results in people dissociating from reality and the health risks that can come with prolonged use of the OASIS, the creation of the OASIS hinders the state of Cline's society.

The OASIS provides many people with a way to escape their misery in the real world. Students who struggle with the social interactions that happen within schools are able to find a safe haven by attending school in the OASIS. When talking about his learning experience in the OASIS, Wade says "Bullies couldn't pelt me with spitballs, give me atomic wedgies, or pummel me by the bike after school. No one could touch me. In here, I was safe" (32). Such people who struggle with social interactions are able to mask their insecurities to make friends in the OASIS because it provides anonymity and the ability to customize avatars. Wade describes another character Aech as his "closest friend" even though "[he] didn't know anything about who Aech

was in the real world,” becoming best friends simply “because [they] shared all the same interests” (38-39). Additionally, the OASIS allows people living in poverty throughout the world to experience things otherwise not available to them virtually, such as Wade’s religious neighbor taking tours of the holy land virtually (25). The OASIS clearly provides a way for the people of 2044 to escape their lives full of misery in tumultuous times.

However, because people are able to live in an artificial reality, they neglect the real one in which they live, allowing the world to deteriorate. The society of 2044 faces many issues, making it no time for people to cower away with their OASIS in an attempt to escape their reality. Wade mentions from the onset of the novel that the world faces “[an] ongoing energy crisis. Catastrophic climate change. Widespread Famine, poverty, and disease. Half a dozen wars” – all dire issues requiring the collaboration of all humanity to fix (1). Wade says “The hour or so after [he wakes] up was [his] least favorite part of each day, because [he] spent it in the real world” (195). This is only natural given the state of his world, but if regular people are able to feel content with their lives simply by spending all their time in a virtual world, it enables those in power to continue the trend of deterioration in society. The potential of the OASIS to be used solely for matters that contribute to the advancement of society such as in education is vastly overshadowed by its use for mindless entertainment as a means to escape reality, rendering people incapable of taking care of themselves, let alone the society they live in.

Many are so engaged with the artificial reality the OASIS provides that they ignore their physical health and their mental health deteriorates. No matter what a person is doing in the OASIS, chances are that in reality, they are in a stationary position. This factor coupled with the fact that most of humanity spends hours on end in]the OASIS results in widespread poor physical health. Wade says near the beginning of the novel that he had been overweight for “as

long as [he] could remember,” acknowledging his OASIS addiction as a main factor (30). But it's not just physical health that declines from endless OASIS use, but also mental health. Having poor physical health naturally results in low self esteem, with Wade recalling himself dropping his gaze from his bathroom mirror because “[he] didn’t much like what [he] saw there” (195). Additionally, the OASIS keeps people so happy that they become depressed when forced to realize their actual situations. Wade throws away his OASIS sex doll after realizing that “At the end of the day, [he] was still a virgin, all alone in a dark room, humping a lubed-up robot” (193). In effect, the OASIS destroys mental health when people compare their artificial reality to their real one and ruins physical health because people do not exercise during prolonged use.

The ability of the OASIS to provide an escape from reality backfires because it causes people to neglect themselves and the world they live in. The society of 2044 in *Ready Player One* is one plagued by issues, and the OASIS provides an outlet for people to escape this reality. However, this causes people to disassociate from the reality they live in, leaving it in destructive hands that continue the world's deterioration. Additionally, when people become engaged in this artificial reality, they become unfit from prolonged use and their mental health is damaged because their real lives cannot compare to the happiness the OASIS provides. Clearly, the OASIS is a driving factor of societal decline in Ernest Cline’s *Ready Player One*.

Works Cited

Cline, Ernest. *Ready Player One*. London, England: Crown, 2011.