
The Theme of Loneliness and Alienation in J.D. Salinger's "Catcher in the Rye"

J.D. Salinger was a literary giant despite his slim body of work and reclusive lifestyle. His landmark novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, set a new course for literature in post-WWII America and vaulted Salinger to the heights of literary fame. *Catcher in the Rye* is about a young man named Holden Caulfield who is undergoing treatment in a mental hospital. Depression is a common mental disorder that is present with depressed mood, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth. This mental illness affects teens more than it affects adults. Studies show that 20 percent of teens will experience teen depression before they reach adulthood. When you deal with depression, people often find it difficult to live a normal life. The 'Catcher in the Rye' written by J.D. Salinger, narrates on the main character Holden Caulfield, a hostile and negative person who suffers from severe depression.

Today teenagers just like Holden who have thought of suicide do not want to die. They just want to escape from the everyday problems that go on in their life that at that particular moment the impression of dying was the only way out. Holden tends to lie to himself to ease the guilt and emptiness he is living with, Holden even says he 'really felt like, committing suicide'. Even if we did not have the evidence that Holden was depressed through his actions of lying and having suicidal thoughts we still have the profound statement of all. What other way to prove Holden Caulfield is depressed then Holden himself announcing that life itself 'makes (him) depressed'. Almost every single page of the novel is based on Holden telling us that he is depressed. It was either Holden reminding someone to say please and Holden commenting 'that's depressing' or Holden warning us to never sleep in grand central, because 'it'll depress you,' it is obvious that Holden is suffering from a mental illness. Throughout *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden's actions and behavior match a psychological disorder. Many of the symptoms of these disorders overlap, however, and if one is diagnosed, it is highly probable that Holden is suffering from another disorder similar to that one. For example, many patients who are diagnosed with PTSD normally have to get treated for depression also.

Most mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder, depression, or PTSD is usually the body's response to stress or trauma. For Holden's diagnoses we have found instances in Holden's behavior that have the possibility of a mental disease and connected them with the symptoms of each disease.

Loneliness and alienation are two very important themes in J.D. Salinger's novel 'The Catcher in the Rye'. In this essay I will discuss these themes and how they have had an impact on the

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protagonist - Holden Caulfield's life. I will look at how Holden uses alienation to protect himself from becoming emotionally attached to others and how death plays a key role in his feelings of loneliness. The theme of loneliness and alienation is very important. Holden is too afraid to open up his heart to anyone for fear of losing them, but he is also suffering from extreme loneliness at the same time. His brother's death has impacted Holden's emotional state and mental well-being and without the support of a proper authority figure he has never learned to deal with his grief leaving him caught in a vicious cycle of desperately wanting to be loved, but being far too afraid to allow it to happen thus alienating himself from the rest of the world. Depression commonly follows loneliness, it's the stage when you feel completely isolated and do not want to let anyone in. You can't think and it's almost like you can do whatever you want in your life because it doesn't matter anymore. There are seven stages of grief through the process of life and back. These stages are denial, depression, anger, bargaining, guilt, reconstruction, and eventually acceptance. Different stages of grief are represented through the main character Holden Caulfield in the novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Three stages of the stages of grief stands out the most and are focused on as Holden goes through the process of eventually accepting his loss. In the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, the character, Holden Caulfield, goes through the many stages of grief, such as, anger, denial, and depression, after the death of his brother, Allie.

During that night, Holden expresses his anger and denial by breaking all of the glass windows and not admitting why he did so. From the loss of his brother Allie, Holden expresses his anger and denial physically and mentally. Holden's anger was expressed through his actions of physically breaking the garage windows with his fist, and his stage of denial was represented by him not admitting why he did so. According to Sarah Cifelli, Holden's denial of his brother's death leads him to take action in the garage, and when asked why he did so, Holden doesn't admit and take credit for what he has done. 'His inability to accept the loss of his brother becomes clearer. The action of breaking an entire garage full of windows poses questions, but the main point is, he did not admit the reason for breaking them.'

But one of the most prevalent themes in J.D. Salinger's *'The Catcher in the Rye'* is the complex relationship that Holden Caulfield has with his emotions. On the other hand, he is overwhelmed by the pain that his emotions can cause, but on the other when he tries to shut off these emotions he feels numb which can be equally as devastating for him. Loneliness is something that is recurring throughout the novel and in some ways, Holden's loneliness is a manifestation of the alienation he feels from the people around him. Throughout the *catcher in the rye*, Holden is separated from those around him and is constantly in search for a way to fit into a world in which he feels that he does Hogg belong. A large portion of the novel focuses on Holden's ongoing quest for some form of companionship. This results in him moving from one meaningless relationship to another which only serves to increase his loneliness. Holden uses this alienation from the world around him as a defense mechanism in order to protect himself.

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He finds interacting with other people confusing and overwhelming, so by alienating himself from people he does not have to face up to this. A great deal of Holden's loneliness and alienation can be traced back to the death of his younger brother Allie, Holden was devastated by the tragedy, which has already happened by the time we are introduced to Holden. He has essentially shut down and repeatedly mentions how important it is for him not to get too attached to people. A good example of this would be when Holden says, 'Don't ever tell anybody anything if you do, you start missing everybody'. This highlights the fact that Holden is not comfortable in opening up to anybody, because he is afraid of making a connection and then losing that person. This goes a long way towards explaining why Holden almost seems to be sabotaging any relationship that he begins to form. He is afraid of losing another person close to him, this fear has such a light grip on Holden that he continues to spiral into deep depression and loneliness to the extent that by the end of the novel he is afraid to even speak to anyone. The whole novel can be considered one whole flashback. Holden is constantly thinking about past occurrences, and many of his memories include Allie. On page 38 Holden describes Allie's characteristics, emphasizing how intelligent, nice, and sweet-tempered he was, and it is evident in the way Holden talks about Allie that he was extremely close with his redhead brother. Holden usually criticizes and notices the faults in people; with Allie, there were only compliments.

Life and death have a huge impact on Holden's emotional state and we already know that most of his behaviors are a reaction to Allie's death and to the fact that his absent parents were not there to guide him through his grief. Holden's struggles with the fact that Allie died too soon at such a young age and did not choose to do so. However, when James Castle jumps out of the school window to his death Holden begins to consider the possibility of suicide as a way to end the constant emotional pain. It is only a passing thought and although he can see a romantic ideal when he considers suicide, he is so affected by Allie's death that he actually thinks death might be worse than living with the pain. One of the things that really bothers Holden about James Castle's death is the thought of him lying on the stone in a pool of blood with nobody picking him up as though even in death nobody loved him. This is a thought that terrifies Holden and ultimately stops him from the genuinely considering suicide as an option. The death of his brother would be a major catalyst. His brother died at a young age, from the novel we can tell that Holden seemed to have been close to Allie, and the way Allie died, it was a traumatic death (leukemia while they were away for the summer in Maine, so what could have been a happy time turned tragic time for him), at least for a 13 year old. His parents seem to be fairly disinterested in him (he describes them as 'occupied' before he was born), they don't let him grieve for his brother properly, they just shuffle him from school to school without realizing that he may have a real problem. Even as he's telling the story, he is in a hospital in California. They sent him across the country, which seems like another way to keep him distant. They seem to regard him as a screw up. He obviously has some issues with his self-esteem, he refers to himself as the only dumb one in the family. He is quick to put down Stradlater for being

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handsome. He is an underachiever. He talks about suicide a few times. He thinks that it would be a good life to live in the woods and not have to deal with other people. He is obsessed with a Jane, a gal that never really showed affection for him in return. It is a good way for him to avoid intimacy.

Holden says that he is 'depressed' a lot in the book, sometimes for no real reason. Holden tries really hard to be happy by always calling people to do something but in the end he is just a lone. Isolating himself from everything has caused himself to be sad and depressed. No one can be happy without others in their life and Holden pushed people away like calling Jane and hanging up claiming he didn't feel like it. Holden won't let anyone get to close in the fear of getting hurt for example feeling that his sister gets to affectionate when she puts her hands around him. So too is Holden's vocabulary an index to his disturbed emotional state – for all that it might seem to reflect the influence of the movies or his attempts to imitate the diction of his older brother, D. B. At least fifty times, something or somebody depresses him – an emotion which he frequently equates with a sense of isolation: 'It makes you feel so lonesome and depressed.'

As seen from the essay, 'The Catcher in the Rye' centers around the central idea of not wanting to grow up. Holden is the depressed adolescent that seldom is happy, broods on every fault he finds in people, and matures with the conviction that he does not actually want to mature and grow up, but stay a child forever. He is depressed because he realizes there is nothing to keep him from growing up (glass case). What I was really hanging around for, I was trying...to feel some kind of good-by. I mean I've left schools and places I didn't even know I was leaving them. I hate that. I don't care if it's a sad goodbye or a bad good-bye, but when I leave a place I like to know I'm leaving it. If you don't, you feel worse. In this quote he is trying to make a connection with others, but his PTSD makes him fear making connections and leads him to describe his feeling as hatred when in fact it is fear.

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