

Repressed Sexuality in J.D. Salinger's

The Catcher in the Rye

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1. Introduction

Analyzing *The Catcher in the Rye* in terms of a quest plot, I will try to find support for my thesis statement that repressed sexuality in J.D Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* hinders the protagonist Holden Caulfield's ability to relate to men and women. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Porter Abbott emphasizes that the chief ingredient of the quest plot narrative is having a protagonist set out on a journey or a quest to find something or possibly flee from or avoid something (Abbott, 5). In the case of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield's journey is both that of a flight and that of a quest, which makes the steps he takes and the direction of his journey incomprehensible to both himself and to the reader. In fact, on several occasions, as will be shown in the analysis, Holden Caulfield does not fully know in which direction he is headed or why.

Being a first rate example of a contradictory character, Holden Caulfield continually avoids intimacy and human contact, yet he desperately seeks a sense of belonging and approval from those around him. In fact, despite fleeing and avoiding certain situations and places, Holden is on a desperate search for companionship, which is evident by his repetitive attempts to engage in serious conversations with everyone he meets, including taxi drivers, prostitutes, nuns and children. In his article *Holden's Museum Pieces*, Michael Cowan states, "Being entirely alone is one of Holden's greatest sources of pain. Even his fantasies of escaping west or to the woods involves being with someone" (51).

Using psychoanalytical theory and gender theory, I will in the analysis try to elaborate on Holden's relationship to men, women and children as well as to his own sexuality. The analysis will cover the following sections: Sexual Abuse and Repression, Sexuality and Innocence, Sexuality and Assertion, Sexuality and Avoidance, and Sexual Appeal. To help establish the validity of the thesis and produce satisfactory results, I have divided the thesis into three individual sub questions. These questions are as follows:

1. How does Holden Caulfield relate to traditional gender roles?
2. What are the causes of Holden Caulfield's repressed sexuality?

3. How does Holden Caulfield's repressed sexuality manifest itself?

2. About the novel

2.1 Reception

Published in 1951, *The Catcher in the Rye* has had a significant impact on American literature. Despite having proven very popular, this classic of American fiction has often provoked strong reactions (both positive and negative) from its various readers. *The Catcher in the Rye* can easily be described as one of the most widely read and discussed works in the American literary canon.

Even though the novel has gained a broad audience and a significant reputation, there has been a significant number of critics that have argued that the novel is too vulgar, immoral, and immature to be considered serious literature. Due to its nonchalant tone and style, the novel suffered a fair deal of criticism when it was initially published. Luckily, today this perspective is in decline. However, when the novel was first published, several schools, teachers and parents censored the novel fearing that it might corrupt teenagers reading it.

Even though one could argue that there indeed is an indisputably subversive quality to the novel, censoring *The Catcher in the Rye* would definitely undermine the purpose of the novel while exaggerating aspects one might find inappropriate. In his biography of Salinger, Ian Hamilton summarizes the criticism that the novel received by various magazines when it was first published. For example, he states that the magazine *Catholic World* criticized the novel for its use of profanity and coarse language (Hamilton, 1989). William Items also criticized the novel in the magazine *Commentary*: "Boredom, resentment, and the disgust in *The Catcher in the Rye* is inevitable, not of an ever so disillusioned youth, but of a well-paid satirist with highly developed technology, no particular point of view, and no other targets to aim at but himself" (Hamilton, 127).

Another Salinger biographer, namely Harold Bloom, argues that the novel has been seen as anti-religious, unpatriotic, immoral and indecent (Bloom, 16). Bloom stresses that main criticism is

a reaction to the sexual aspects of the novel together with the frequent use of slang and swear words (Bloom, 16). In fact, shortly after the first release in 1951, the novel was greeted with fierce opposition by some social organizations and interest groups in the U.S. including the National Organization for Decent Literature (Bloom, 16). Despite the censorship in various American school, bookstores and libraries well into the 1990s, the novel became increasingly popular among readers (Bloom, 16).

However, the initial reaction was not univocally negative. In fact, *The New York Times* and *The San Francisco Chronicle* stated that *The Catcher in the Rye* was an unusually brilliant debut and that a protagonist like Holden Caulfield would not be easy to match (Hamilton, 123). In the magazine *The Listener*, John Russell writes the following about Salinger: “His art is an art that denies the arts, but the easy colloquial tone and the cunning ellipses in his method, testify sensitivity to rhythm and narrative detail that even Henry James and Edith Wharton would have been the first to admit” (Hamilton, 128).

Despite the resistance that the novel encountered when it was initially published, *The Catcher in the Rye* has become an important work of fiction in the canon of American literature. Bloom argues that the novel has remained popular for generations and is today regarded as an American classic (19).

2.2 Literature Review

Published in the 50's and stirring up strong emotions ever since its first day of publication, *The Catcher in the Rye* has been the subject of extensive research. One of the issues that has been debated is to what extent the novel would qualify as an important work of literature. Researchers have often found themselves asking questions such as: does the novel merely attract unrefined teenage minds with its indecent language without furnishing any positive ideas of its own? how does the novel provide sufficient insights into the complexities of human existence and the development of American culture?

Researchers such as Charles Kaplan (1956) and Levi A. Olan (2005) have compared the protagonist Holden Caulfield to Huckleberry Finn. Olan suggests that Holden is a modern version of Huckleberry Finn since they both have difficulties adapting to the rest of the world. Olan finds that:

"Both are strange and alien to their world, not unlike the disoriented figures of much of modern literature" (Olan, 24).

In his essay *Holden and Huck - The Odysseys of Youth*, Charles Kaplan proposes that *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* both share deep fundamental elements (Kaplan, 38). According to Kaplan, these similarities lie in the fact that both novels are about young men who tell the story of their own personal journey using their own comical wisdom and colloquial everyday language. Critic Lilian Furst compares *The Catcher in the Rye* to Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novels in *the Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*. Helen Weinberg compares it to Franz Kafka's novels in *The New Novel in America* while John M. Howell in his essay *Salinger in the Waste Land*, compares it to T. S. Eliot's poetry. William T. Noon focuses on the idea of the odyssey and Holden's multiple crises. Noon claims that Holden has a life crisis where he is constantly running away from something: "Throughout most of the novel, Holden is running away" (Hamilton, 17).

In his book *In Search of JD Salinger* (1989), Ian Hamilton presents Salinger's life before and after the big breakthrough with *The Catcher in the Rye*. Hamilton details some aspects of Holden's character claiming that: "Holden Caulfield does not wish to join the adult world; he cannot bring himself to see any way into modern American life that does not require that he has to transform into any of these phonies that he abhors" (Hamilton, 137). Susan K. Mitchell discusses in her article *To Tell You the Truth* (1992), whether Holden's "word" can be taken as true or not. She argues that Holden is not always conscious, in his narrative, if he is telling the truth or not: "Although Holden has claimed that he is a liar, he does not realize whether he is lying or telling the truth. The distinction between truth and falsehood becomes blurred as he often adds the phrase "to tell you the truth" onto whatever he is saying" (Mitchell, 2). Mitchell continues to talk about Holden as an unreliable narrator and says among other things that: "Perhaps by making Holden unreliably readerly, Salinger is saying that society is both phony and necessary" (5).

Despite some critics who tend to perceive Holden Caulfield's character as exclusively negative, rude or complaining, there are those who appreciate the fullness of his character, stressing the fact that Holden is indeed insightful, complex, creative, and highly intelligent in his own way. When describing

Holden's positive qualities, a vast majority of critics take note of Holden's childlike innocence. In his essay *The Saint as a Young Man*, critic Jonathan Baumbach, observes that Holden manifests a deep inner wish to function as a saint or savior of the innocent (54). Thanks to his sensitive, innocent, and childlike side, Holden is a complex and endearing character despite the exterior layers of crudeness and immaturity.

Considering the fact that *The Catcher in the Rye* deals with issues concerning gender roles, sexuality, loss and the effects of mental development and mental breakdown, some critics focus on psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel. Interpreting the psychoanalytical elements of the novel, critics strive to explore the inner layers of Holden Caulfield's mental and emotional state in order to outline the concealed factors that motivates the character's actions. In the tradition of Sigmund Freud's theories on psychoanalysis, the standard way of discovering Holden's unveiled desires and fears is to study his childhood in the hopes of finding a pivotal and/or traumatic event that might shed some light on his mental and emotional state. In fact, the discipline of psychoanalysis gained increased validity in the 1940's and 1950's after WWII, i.e. around the time of the initial publication of the novel. In his essay *A Double Take on Holden Caulfield*, Donald Foran states that due to his shortcomings, Holden is a most complex character from a psychoanalytical perspective (Foran, 79). In fact, in the below passage, Foran describes how Holden possesses a great insight into his own psyche: "Holden is not altogether unaware of his own shortcomings, however. He frequently labels himself "a damn liar," and more often still claims that he has "meant" something when he did it, or when he said it, but, upon reflection, sees that he has committed the Capital Sin of the Caulfield world, that of phoniness" (Foran, 78)

3. Analysis

3.1 Sexuality and Repression - (Holden and Mr. Antolini)

In this section, I will analyze evidence of possible sexual abuse in *The Catcher in the Rye* with the purpose of gaining further knowledge regarding the causes of Holden Caulfield's repressed sexuality. I will do so by looking at psychoanalytic theory and particularly the concept of repression.

Psychological problems constitute a significant part of the human experience. The root of these problems often stems from childhood experiences, which shape our psychological development as we grow into adulthood. In her book *Learning for a Diverse World: Using Critical Theory to Read and Write about Literature*, Lois Tyson suggests that the purpose of psychoanalytic theory is to identify and explain these problems to prevent them from reoccurring in our lives (23). If undetected these problems can cause dysfunctional behavior. According to Tyson, a lack of insight and awareness of our own psychological problems only serves to make us more vulnerable. The less we know about our problems, the more we allow them to interfere with our relationship with both ourselves and other people. Tyson provides us with the following example of the many ways in which these psychological problems may manifest themselves: "Have you ever had a friend whose romantic relationships always seemed to be with partners who were bad for her? Have you ever had a coworker who always seemed to feel slighted by others?" (24). According to psychoanalytic theory, such behaviors function as indicators of concealed psychological problems that these individuals might not even be aware of existed within them. In fact, quite often the answer to dysfunctional behavior lies within the confines of the subconscious.

Exploring the issues of Holden's psyche, some critics have chosen to focus on gender roles in the novel and the character's sexual relationships with both men and women. Some have pointed out that a common theme of the novel is Holden's obsession with women, and his inability to act on his desire. Duane Edwards in his article *Don't Ever Tell Anybody Anything* claims that Holden has repressed his own sexuality: "Holden wants to live apart from men and wants to be unable to hear or speak anything. In expressing this Holden expresses his wish to have no reminders through speech or action of his

unresolved sexual conflicts. It should not be surprising that Holden has severe sexual conflicts: his family situation is far from ideal. The father barely exists as Holden and Phoebe are concerned, and the mother is not emotionally involved in the lives of her children” (Hamilton, 71).

As part of the rising action, Holden rents a hotel room in Manhattan. Shocked and disgusted by the sexual acts of his neighbors, Holden comments on what he sees: “I saw a man and a woman squirting water out of their mouths at each other. First he'd take a swallow and squirt it all over her, then she did it to him--they took turns, for God's sake. I'm not kidding, the hotel was lousy with perverts” (55). Even though he is clearly appalled by what he sees, Holden does not refrain from admitting that he cannot stop watching: “The trouble was, that kind of junk is sort of fascinating to watch, even if you don't want it to be. In my mind, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw. Sex is something I just don't understand.” (56). It is evident that Holden has trouble coming to terms with his own sexuality.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, one of the most interesting events in *The Catcher in the Rye*, occurs in the climactic scene in which Holden has a sleepover at Mr. Antolini's home. Mr. Antolini is Holden's former English teacher and an old acquaintance of the Caulfield family. One evening Holden phones Mr. Antolini and asks if he can spend the night at his apartment. Even though Holden acts very irrationally, Mr. Antolini allows the boy to come over the same night to sleep on his couch. While there, Holden notices something about Mr. Antolini's wife: “She was about sixty years older than Mr. Antolini” (163). In these circumstances, the age difference between the spouses is possible not sixty years in reality. Instead, this might be another one of Holden's many exaggerations that serves to produce a humorous effect in the reader as well as to indicate the prevalence of strong emotions vs. actual facts in Holden's interpretation of reality. It would appear that in Holden's eyes, Mr. and Mrs. Antolini's relationship might not be overly romantic. Holden also takes note of another interesting fact about their marriage: “The both of them were never in the same room at the same time. It was sort of funny” (164). What Holden finds funny, the reader might interpret as an act of avoidance within their relationship. If that were the case, then it would indicate a certain lack of interest and commitment in the marriage. However, Holden does not reflect upon this further. Instead, Holden pays

close intention to what Mr. Antolini has to say to him. In fact, Mr. Antolini is one of the very few adults who manages to connect with Holden and gain his confidence. Having a great deal of respect for Mr. Antolini, Holden seems intent on heeding Mr. Antolini's advice on continuing with school. It is not often that Holden appreciates the influence from the adult world.

Unfortunately, Holden's confidence and trust in Mr. Antolini is shattered when Mr. Antolini touches him inappropriately while he is about to fall asleep: "I laid awake for just a couple of seconds thinking about all that stuff Mr. Antolini'd told me. Then something happened. I don't even like to talk about it. What it was, it was Mr. Antolini's hand. What he was doing was, he was sitting on the floor right next to the couch, in the dark and all, and he was sort of petting me or patting me on the goddam head" (172). Shocked by Mr. Antolini's behavior, Holden runs out of his apartment. For the first time in the novel Holden reveals something that he has repressed all this time: "I know more damn perverts, at schools and all, than anybody you ever met, and they're always being pervery when I'm around" (172). Despite having a tendency to ramble on about anything that comes to mind, Holden does not want to talk about what just had happened.

It seems that this sort of thing has happened on several occasions before during his time in school. Holden reveals: "Boy, I was shaking like a madman. That kind of stuff's happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can't stand it" (172). Prone to exaggeration and strong emotions as shown in the case of Mrs. Antolini's age, it is possible that Holden overstates the case when saying that it happened about "twenty times" (17). However, this sentence is still a key sentence to the understanding of Holden's sexuality. Moving around from different boys boarding schools throughout much of his young life, Holden might very well have witnessed and experienced sexual abuse of various degrees.

A possible interpretation of Holden's words would be that he has repressed some of the most painful experiences in his life concerning sexual abuse. According to psychoanalytic theory, we often don't understand the magnitude and the specific source of our emotional problems. Sometimes an individual might not even be aware of having specific emotional problems (Tyson, 25). This phenomenon is due to the subconscious act of repression by which we tend to repress or keep down our

most painful and difficult experiences into the unconscious. This is the method for the brain to handle tough emotional baggage and prevent being “overloaded.” However, repressing a problem does not guarantee that it will go away permanently. In fact, the clearest sign that an emotional problem is being repressed is the repetition of self-destructive behavior (Tyson, 25).

The most effective method of keeping ourselves from becoming conscious of the issues that we have repressed it through our defenses. The phenomenon of defenses works in such a way that they prevent emotional baggage from overwhelming us. In the short term, this may be an effective way of dealing with life and overcoming stressors, but in the end, it often proves more harmful than good. Tyson states that we develop these defenses when growing up as means to protect ourselves emotionally (26). However, as adults these defenses become destructive as they prevent us from understanding and healing our own psychological wounds (26). Two of the most common defenses are for example avoidance and denial.

In Holden’s case, experiencing or witnessing sexual abuse of various degrees and other forms of abuse within the boarding schools that he attended, would explain his contempt for the adult world and his inability and unwillingness to conform to school standards. Even though Holden has flunked out in most subjects and even though he is expelled from yet another school, Pencey prep., Holden does not seem to have any learning disability. On the contrary, his mind seems to be quite sharp. Throughout the novel Holden is rather eloquent and perceptive.

While visiting Phoebe’s school, Holden makes the following observation: “You can’t trust anybody in a goddam school” (180). From the onset, school has been a great source of pain to Holden, and even more so now after the visit with Mr. Antolini, as it reminds him of the world’s “phoniness” and “perversity”. At school, Holden only trusted a few number of his teachers and peers, one of these few was Mr. Antolini. Now Holden’s already delicate trust in the adult world is completely shattered.

After leaving Mr. Antolini’s apartment in the middle of the night, Holden keeps thinking about what happened: “I wondered if just maybe I was wrong about thinking he was making a flitty pass

at me. Maybe he was only patting my head just for the hell of it” (175). Holden seems confused as to the real intent behind Mr. Antolini’s action. There are some doubts in his mind that he cannot come to terms with. However, Holden is a minor and Mr. Antolini’s hand on his head certainly evoked painful memories and strong emotions within the boy. In order to stop thinking about it Holden sets out to find something that will occupy his mind. Eventually he finds a magazine, hoping that it will keep him distracted and take his mind off things: “I read this other article about how you can tell if you have cancer or not. It said if you had any sores in your mouth that didn't heal pretty quickly, it was a sign that you probably had cancer. I'd had this sore on the inside of my lip for about two weeks. So figured I was getting cancer. I figured I'd be dead in a couple of months because I had cancer. I really did” (176). In order for Holden to process the events that occurred at Mr. Antolini’s, Holden feels that he needs to repress this memory. Trying to convince himself that he suffers from a terminal disease (even though knowing deep down fully well that he does not), is apparently the only way his mind can go on functioning and keep the experience suppressed and locked within himself together with all the other “twenty times”. Once he has finished reading the magazine the fear of cancer never resurfaces, nor does the thought of Mr. Antolini.

After the Antolini incident, Holden feels more depressed and emotionally unstable than before. When walking up Fifth Avenue, Holden fears that he will lose his mind. “Then all of a sudden, something very spooky started happening. Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again” (178). Despite attempting to repress what happened, the experience leaves Holden so traumatized that he feels like he is about to disappear and lose touch with who he is. Feeling alone and left out in a world that does not see him, Holden starts losing contact with his inner self in an almost schizoid fashion. He reaches out for his dead brother, whose death he never really processed: “Every time I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie." And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd thank him” (178). Allie was Holden’s little brother who died of leukemia when he was still young.

Holden is reaching out to the child, Allie, to save himself. By doing so, he subconsciously reaches out to preserve what is childlike and innocent within himself. Disappointed with the adult world who failed him once more, Holden makes a vow on to himself never to attend another school again. “Finally, what I decided I'd do, I decided I'd go away. I decided I'd never go away to another school again” (178).

As a last resort, Holden engages in an escape fantasy that would allow him to avoid the outside world forever. Holden wishes to leave the city behind and live close to nature: “I'd build me a little cabin somewhere with the dough I made and live there for the rest of my life. I'd build it right near the woods, but not right in them, because I'd want it to be sunny as hell all the time” (179). Holden wishes to be left alone so that no one can hurt him. By avoiding other people, he would strive to maintain a sense of security and control. He wants to be shut off from other people to the extent that he would pretend to be deaf mute: “I'd pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. That way I wouldn't have to have any goddam stupid useless conversations with anybody” (178). However, in this pastoral fantasy, Holden is not entirely alone. There is always someone with him. Despite expressing a will to be left alone, contradictory as he is, Holden desperately seeks human connection and belonging: “I'd meet this beautiful girl that was also a deaf-mute and we'd get married. She'd come and live in my cabin with me” (179). As stated, Holden's quest is both that of a flight and that of a search. The dichotomy of wishing to flee other people while at the same time desperately trying to find someone to connect with, haunts him throughout the novel. The last few phrases of his escape fantasy, “If we had any children, we'd hide them somewhere. We could buy them a lot of books and teach them how to read and write by ourselves” (178), are of particular interest because they reveal Holden's deep desire to shield children from harm. Despite hating school, he still intends to educate his future children.

It seems that beneath the thick layer of contradictions that make up the character of young Holden Caulfield, lies a great deal of knowledge and potential that many teacher and adults failed to see. Unfortunately, the only adult who fully acknowledged Holden's potential was the one that probably hurt him the most - Mr. Antolini.

3.2 Sexuality and Innocence – (Holden and Phoebe)

In this section, I will examine Holden Caulfield's reaction to sexuality and the preservation of innocence with the purpose of possibly determining how Holden Caulfield's repressed sexuality manifests itself. I will do so by looking at psychoanalytic theory and gender theory.

There are gender theorists who conclude that there are biological differences between men and women; and that these differences are not necessarily learned, as many others would suggest, but innate. In fact, in her book *Reproducing Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the psychology of gender*, Nancy Chodorow states: "there is one biological difference between men and women that may account for the occurrence of different traits and qualities between the sexes" (Chodorow, 3). Claiming that women are by nature caring and nurturing, Chodorow stresses the fact that women bear children while men do not. "Women's mothering is one of the few universal and enduring elements of the division of sexual labor" (Chodorow, 3). The mother is the child's primary caretaker. Mothering, caring and nurturing features define womanhood. Chodorow even goes so far as to expand on the role of motherhood confirming that motherhood is not merely limited to children but to men as well. Indeed, "women are thought to be the moral mother of their husbands and that they have to take care of them and nurture them in the same manner as they would their children" (Chodorow, 5).

On a number of occasions throughout almost every stage of the novel, Holden manifests a deep need to nurture and care for children. This does not automatically imply that the nurturing and caring quality is innate in Holden's case. However, the desire to protect children and prevent them from losing their innocence is very strong in Holden.

Frequently, Holden takes an interest in children and he is particularly fond of his younger sister, Phoebe. Just prior to the climax, Holden reveals a secret belief that he harbors to his sister. The discursive function of Phoebe's character here is to inhabit the position as a rational mind, trying to make Holden realize that he must grow up and take responsibility for the course of his life. Unlike many of the adults who have expressed their opinion on Holden's lifestyle, Phoebe actually gains her brother's

confidence and he takes her words to heart. In this scene, Phoebe fulfills the role of the adult, asking Holden to name one thing that he would like to be when he grows up: "Name something you'd like to be. Like a scientist. Or a lawyer or something." "Lawyers are all right, I guess--but it doesn't appeal to me," I said. How would you know you weren't being a phony? The trouble is you wouldn't" (154). Holden is not afraid to show just how little interest he actually has in taking part in the adult world. He does not approve of people assuming what he consider fabricated roles without remaining true to themselves.

In a typical "Caulfield" state of agitation and excitement, Holden tells Phoebe what he really would like to aspire to become: "Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around--nobody big, I mean--except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff--I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be" (154). This scene encapsulates not only the title of the novel, but also the key aspect of Holden's personality. Holden wishes to save children from becoming adults, from being harmed and from losing their innocence. In several ways, Holden wishes to save himself by protecting the children. Holden stands at the threshold between childhood and adulthood. He wants to remain in the children's world and avoid the natural passing over to the world of the adults that he fears and despises. Somehow, he realizes, thanks to Phoebe, that he too must become an adult and take responsibility for the course of his life.

Part of becoming an adult is being aware of one's sexuality. In Holden's case, he does not want to acknowledge his own sexual desires, and looking at the adult world, Holden sees nothing but phonies and perverts. For these reasons, Holden considers sex the main thing from which he strives to shield children. After fleeing Mr. Antolini's, Holden visits his little sister Phoebe's school to say goodbye to her before he makes reality of his desire to escape. At the school, he sees the words "fuck you" scribbled on the wall. Fueled by the repressed emotions over what had just happened at Mr. Antonlini's apartment, Holden's need to protect children from the harmfulness of the adult world

becomes even more ardent. "Somebody'd written "Fuck you" on the wall. It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how they'd wonder what the hell it meant, and then finally some dirty kid would tell them" (180). Holden's reaction is very strong and he takes it upon himself to wipe out "the stain" of the adult world, by rubbing the wall with the sleeve of his jacket until it becomes clean again. Striving to find an outlet for his misplaced anger he concludes: "I kept wanting to kill whoever'd written it. I figured it was some perverty bum that'd sneaked in the school late at night to take a leak or something and then wrote it on the wall. I kept picturing myself catching him at it, and how I'd smash his head on the stone steps till he was good and goddam dead and bloody" (180). In this passage, Holden's reaction is very strong when he sees the obscenities on the wall. He seems to be carrying a lot of anger that is just waiting to explode. Prior to his encounter with Mr. Antolini, Holden never gave expression to such physical rage. Driven by anger over repressed issues, Holden for the first time reveals a craving to physically harm and kill another human being.

It is not until he sees two children at the natural history museum that Holden begins to feel a bit more balanced: "While I was waiting around for Phoebe in the museum, right inside the doors and all, these two little kids came up to me and asked me if I knew where the mummies were. The one little kid, the one that asked me, had his pants open. I told him about it. So he buttoned them up right where he was standing talking to me--he didn't even bother to go behind a post or anything. He killed me" (184). It is noteworthy that Holden finds it particularly amusing when one of the boys buttons his pants right there in front of him. The children's behavior is honest and straight forward, unlike the "phony" adults who in Holden's eyes only pretend, dictate and deceive. The children make Holden feel better about himself and the world. They represent a source of innocence as they do not fake or hide who they are.

Peculiarly enough, Holden asks the two little boys about their school attendance: "How come you two guys aren't in school?" I said. "No school t'day," the kid that did all the talking said" (184). It seems the boys are doing the exact same thing Holden is – skipping class. It is also ironic that, after having flunked in history and particularly after receiving a failing grade on the test on Egyptian history by his history teacher Mr. Spencer (9), Holden takes a particular interest in explaining to the

children about the mummies and the Pharaohs: "You know how the Egyptians buried their dead?" I asked the one kid. "Naa." "Well, you should. It's very interesting. They wrapped their faces up in these cloths that were treated with some secret chemical. That way they could be buried in their tombs for thousands of years and their faces wouldn't rot or anything" (185).

Throughout most of the novel Holden is not at peace with himself and the world. However, when witnessing his little sister Phoebe playing on the carrousel, just like any other child, Holden's spirits are lifted and he enjoys a better mood: "I felt so damn happy all of sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all" (189). This scene is from the resolution of the novel and it shows that Phoebe's innocence is maintained intact in Holden's eyes, which makes him ultimately at peace.

3.3 Sexuality and Assertion – (Holden, Stradlater and Jane)

In this section, I will examine Holden Caulfield's ability to assert himself sexually with the purpose of possibly determining how Holden Caulfield's repressed sexuality conflicts with his relationship to other boys and men. I will do so by looking at gender theory and the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

If being nurturing is a quality of women, R.W. Connell suggests in her book *Masculinities*, that traditional view dictates that the corresponding quality of a man lies in his ability to demonstrate the concept of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 77). According to Connell all men are expected to at least try to aspire to this notion of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity implies the suppression of not only women but also men who have failed to conform to its basic requirements.

In several ways, Holden fails to live up to the masculine ideal when it comes to asserting his own sexuality. His roommate at Pencey preparatory school, Ward Stradlater, is the typical masculine role model. Stradlater is everything Holden Caulfield is not. Stradlater is sexually active, strong, cocky, a good athlete and does not shy away from demanding what he wants. For example, Stradlater does not only borrow or take Holden's hound tooth jacket to impress a girl; he also makes Holden to write him an essay while he is out on his date with a girl named Jane Gallagher. Jane Gallagher is a friend of Holden's and Holden is quite interested in her. However, even though Stradlater tells Holden that he should go and say hello to his old friend, Holden remains hesitant: "I oughta go down and say hello to her, at least." "Why the hell don'tcha, instead of keep saying it?" Stradlater said. "I'm not in the mood right now," I said" (28).

Holden soon realizes that Stradlater is only interested in Jane for sex rather than taking an interest in her as a person. Contrary to Stradlater, Holden's relation to Jane was not physical: "I used to play checkers with her all the time." "You used to play what with her all the time?" "Checkers." To Stradlater's great surprise, Holden explains how he preferred to share a platonic friendship with Jane. Stradlater, on the other hand, inhabits the discursive function of the sexual active male with little regard for the girl as a person: "What I said didn't interest Stradlater, though. Only very sexy stuff interested him" (29). Due to his having strong feelings for Jane, Holden's resentment for Stradlater grows rapidly.

When further discussing Jane, Holden also reveals his characteristic need to protect those he considers innocent, such as children and certain women such as his sister Phoebe and Jane, from what he believes to be the detrimental influence of the adult world. Informing Stradlater on Jane's past, Holden says: "Her mother and father were divorced. Her mother was married again to some booze hound, all I ever saw him do was booze all the time. And run around the goddam house, naked. With Jane around, and all. She had a lousy childhood" (29).

In this case, Holden's fears with regards to Jane and her stepfather might be justified. Even though it remains unsaid, it is not possible to rule out the fact that Jane might be a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Holden remembers a date he had with Jane one afternoon when her stepfather suddenly walked in: "All of a sudden this booze hound her mother was married to came out

on the porch and asked Jane if there were any cigarettes in the house. Jane wouldn't answer him. So the guy asked her again, but she still wouldn't answer him. She didn't even look up from the game. Finally the guy went inside the house. When he did, I asked Jane what the hell was going on. She wouldn't even answer me, then. She made out like she was concentrating on her next move in the game and all. Then all of a sudden, this tear plopped down on the checkerboard. Then she really started to cry" (70). It seems that Holden does his best to find out the truth and console Jane in whatever way he can.

Holden makes a very detailed and sensitive portrayal of Jane. Jane is a girl that he respects and feels closely connected to. Despite wishing to contact her on several occasions, Holden never does. Instead, he often holds the phone in his hands but never manages to dial her number. However, that does not mean that he does not care for Jane. In fact, with regards to Jane, Holden says: "You never even worried with Jane. All you knew as, you were happy" (72). Unlike Stradlater Holden also believes: "You don't always have to get too sexy to get to know a girl" (69), referring in this case to his long friendships with Jane and the summer they spent together.

After Stradlater comes back to the dormitory after his date with Jane, he gives Holden hints as to what Jane and he did when they were alone: "We just sat in the goddam car." Stradlater said gave me another one of those playful stupid little socks on the shoulder. "Cut it out," I said. "Whose car?" "Ed Banky's." Ed Banky was the basketball coach at Pencey. Old Stradlater was one of his pets, because he was the center on the team, and Ed Banky always let him borrow his car when he wanted it. It wasn't allowed for students to borrow faculty guys' cars, but all the athletic bastards stuck together" (37). Here Holden also shares his thoughts on typical male interests such as sport and competitive behavior.

Normally, Holden does not display signs of direct aggression. Resorting to passive aggressive behavior, Holden usually limits himself to passive aggressive verbal slurs. However, after Stradlater has gone into detail about his date with Jane, Holden cannot control his feeling and he resorts to physical violence: "I tried to sock him, with all my might, right smack in the toothbrush, so it would split his goddam throat open. Only, I missed. Anyway, the next thing I knew, I was on the goddam floor and he was sitting on my chest, with his face all red. That is, he had his goddam knees on my chest, and

he weighed about a ton.” (38). This passage indicates how Holden releases some of the anger that he otherwise keeps bottled-up inside. Ultimately, Stradlater declares his power over him by punching him to the floor.

In closing and as previously stated, the clearest sign that an emotional problem is being repressed is the repetition of self-destructive behavior (Tyson, 25). A typical example of destructive behavior would be displaying inappropriate social behavior such as tantrums or violent behavior, substance abuse etc. Except for the occasional drink, Holden Caulfield does not show signs of any substance or alcohol abuse. Nevertheless, he does throw tantrums especially towards other men or boys whom he perceives as more masculine such as his roommate Ward Stradlater. However, at the same time he avoids girls whom he really feels would make good partners such as his old friend, Jane Gallagher. His reason for avoiding Jane might be fear of “tainting” their relationships by sexual desires. Instead, Holden wishes to remain in a non-sexual relationship with her, shielding Jane (as he wishes to do with children) from feelings that he only attributes the “phony” and “perverted” of the world. However, in reality these are sexual desires and feelings that he actually represses and struggles to acknowledge within himself.

3.4 Sexuality and Avoidance – (Holden, Sunny, Mrs. Morrow and Sally)

In this section, I will examine Holden Caulfield’s tendency to seek, yet avoid sex, with the purpose of possibly determining how Holden Caulfield’s repressed sexuality conflicts with his relationship to girls and women and to traditional gender roles. I will do so by looking at psychoanalytic theory and the concepts of masculine vs. feminine qualities.

According to John Stephens masculine and feminine qualities are in direct opposition to one another, creating what is referred to as “binary opposites” in which masculine qualities are considered to be of superior rank (Stephens, 18). Outlining masculine and feminine qualities in his article *Gender, Genre and Children’s Literature*, Stephens proposes the schema below, claiming that:

“The socially desirable male conforms to the descriptors in the left-hand column; it is undesirable to transgress them. Similarly the good woman conforms to the descriptors of the right-hand column; the undesirable woman transgresses them” (Stephens, 19).

Masculinity	Femininity
Strong	Beautiful (therefore good)
Violent	non-violent
Unemotional	Emotional
Aggressive	Submissive
Competitive	Sharing
Authoritative	Obedient
Rapacious	Caring
Protective	Vulnerable
Powerful	Powerless
Player	Prize
Independent	Dependent
Active	Passive
Analytical	Synthesizing
Thinks quantitatively	Thinks qualitatively
Rational	Intuitive

Stephen’s schema, is useful when outlining certain behavior in Holden Caulfield’s character as a young man. Failing to adhere to the strict code of qualities commonly associated with manliness, Holden would frequently run the risk of finding himself socially undesirable. For example, Holden is not openly

aggressive. His personality often displays passive aggressive behavior and he is hardly the sexually rapacious player. On almost every occasion in which he has the potential chance of actually having sex, Holden manages to avoid it by acting inappropriately one way or another.

As previously stated the clearest sign that an emotional problem is being repressed is the repetition of self-destructive behavior (Tyson, 25). Often these types of destructive behaviors are easiest detectable as we relate to other people around us in an unhealthy manner. Psychoanalytic theory states that we act out our emotional problems when being with others, even though we might not be able to understand or fully control this behavior (34). On a number of instances, Holden cannot explain his sudden anger, his depression or why he reacts in a certain way. This is particularly true when Holden meets Sunny.

As part of the rising action, Holden orders up a prostitute named Sunny to his hotel room. In that particular scene he does not directly act inappropriately, but his actions still lead to conflict. Prior to the prostitute showing up at his door, Holden reflects on his own sexual experience: "If you want to know the truth, I'm a virgin. The thing is, most of the time when you're coming pretty close to doing it with a girl--a girl that isn't a prostitute or anything, I mean--she keeps telling you to stop. The trouble with me is, I stop. Most guys don't. The trouble is, I get to feeling sorry for them" (83).

This passage explores just how far Holden is willing to go when it comes to actually having sex. Confined by his own inner beliefs, Holden considers sex harmful and potentially dangerous. Consequently, he never manages to actually have sex with a girl. Disappointed with himself for not completing the act with the girls that he has known in the past, Holden hopes to have better luck with a prostitute. However, when the prostitute does finally show up, Holden's own reaction to the girl is not quite what he had expected: "She was young as hell. She was around my age. She had a tiny little wheeny-whiny voice." "My name is Jim Steele," I said. "Hey, how old are you?" she asked. "Me? Twenty-two," I said. "Like fun you are." It was a funny thing to say. It sounded like a real kid (85). Despite having the opportunity to have intercourse, Holden does not feel ready for sex. Instead, Holden ascribes the girl's attitude a sort of childish innocence. Her voice makes him think of a child's voice, as do the words that she uses. As often when there is a possible sexual tension or whenever he feels uneasy,

Holden hides behind assumed names instead of revealing his own identity. In this case, he uses the name “Jim Steele” to the effect of distancing himself from the scenario. However, he ultimately fails and instead of becoming aroused when she undresses, he becomes sad and depressed: “I know you're supposed to feel pretty sexy when somebody gets up and pulls their dress over their head, but I didn't. Sexy was about the last thing I was feeling. I felt much more depressed than sexy” (85). In many ways the prostitute merely causes him to feel pity and sorrow for her: “I took her dress over to the closet and hung it up for her. It was funny. It made me feel sort of sad when I hung it up. I thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing she was a prostitute and all.” (86).

Holden believes that he senses a sort of vulnerability in her. Characteristically of Holden, he tries to engage in a conversation with her, hoping to connect on a deeper level and possibly understand and learn about her and her world. Subconsciously seeking the approval of many of the women that he encounters on his journey, Holden wishes to protect them as he does with children. For example, he often feels guilty with regards to his own mother, striving to protect her from learning of what he considers to be the only blemish on his family's good name - his own failures in life. In this case with Sunny, he tries to get the young girl to talk to him rather than to have sex with him: “Don't you feel like talking for a while?” I asked her. She looked at me like I was a madman. “What the heck ya wanna talk about?” she said” (85). Once again, Holden is on a quest to bond with another human being but involuntarily he chooses someone who holds no interest in the thoughts and feelings that he harbors inside.

In order to avoid having sex, Holden goes so far as to invent a lie about having had an operation: “The thing is, I had an operation very recently. I'm still recuperating,” I told her” (87). In this scene with the prostitute, Holden has lied twice, first about his identity, assuming the fake name of Jim Steele, and then about an imaginary ailment. The same thing occurred as part of the foreshadowing in the exposition stage of the novel in which Holden sits on a train to NYC and in walks a new passenger, Mrs. Morrow. Despite her age, Holden secretly finds Mrs. Morrow attractive and when he asks her his name: “May I ask your name, dear?” “Rudolf Schmidt,” I told her (47). Holden desperately wants Mrs. Morrow to like him and consequently he invents a number of lies concerning her son who also attends

Pencey preparatory boarding school. Holden showers Mrs. Morrow's son with compliments to her delight. The more Holden notices that she enjoys hearing of her son, the more stories he fabricates. However, when the sexual tension rises in his mind, he cuts her off short by declaring: "I have to have this operation. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain" (50). Once again, Holden resorts to this odd behavior of claiming fake infirmities. His strong desire to have sex and consequently acknowledge his own sexuality is matched only by his peculiar wish to avoid it. It would be fair to conclude that Holden's interactions with the women that he encounters do not resemble the typical qualities of masculine aggressiveness or sexual rapaciousness.

However, there is a scene in which Holden actually does display signs of direct aggression towards a girl. Just prior to the culmination, Holden takes a girl named Sally Hayes out on a date. Despite not enjoying theatres and movies himself, Holden invites Sally to see a play with him. According to Holden, Sally is quite the phony. In fact, he comments on her enthusiasm for the play, saying: "I didn't much want to see it, but I knew old Sally, the queen of the phonies, would start drooling all over the place when I told her I had tickets for that" (105).

Harboring a great number of emotions and thoughts that he feels a desperate need to share, Holden often fails to find anyone who is genuinely willing to listen to him. While out on this date with Sally, Holden reveals to her: "I'm in a bad shape. I'm in a really lousy shape" (118). Unfortunately, Sally does not offer Holden much in terms of sympathy and understanding, preferring instead to have "the goddamn stupid conversations" that Holden so desperately tries to avoid (179).

However, despite labeling Sally a phony, Holden is clearly attracted to her. In particular, he is attracted to her physical beauty and sexual appeal. Holden even claims to actually love her: "She looked terrific. She really did. The funny part is, I didn't even like her much, and yet all of a sudden I felt like I was in love with her and wanted to marry her." (112). Sally stirs up strong emotions in Holden. These emotions are so strong in fact that he cannot keep himself from confessing his "love" for her out loud. But after doing so Holden is not at all pleased with the response Sally offers him: "Oh, darling, I love you too," she said. Then, right in the same damn breath, she said, "Promise me you'll let your hair grow. Crew cuts are getting corny. And your hair's so lovely." Lovely my ass" (112). By using words

such as “damn breath” and “lovely my ass”, Holden expresses in a very direct fashion that he does not actually harbor any feelings for her that would correspond to actual love. On several occasions Holden can hardly stand Sally, not even when they first meet: “She had one of these very loud, embarrassing voices when you met her somewhere. She got away with it because she was so damn good-looking, but it always gave me a pain in the ass” (104). Here Holden keeps talking about her beauty in terms of an almost mitigating factor that would allow him to bring himself to spend time with her.

Throughout his date with Sally, Holden never expresses any interest in her as a person or shows any appreciation of her features, except for her physicality. And yet he claims to love her, which would indicate that Holden confuses lust for love. Unlike Holden, Sally seems to be rather popular. While on their date, Sally meets and engages in a conversation with another man, someone of whom Holden does not approve: “Then all of a sudden, she saw some jerk she knew on the other side of the lobby. Some guy in one of those very dark gray flannel suits and one of those checkered vests. Strictly Ivy League.” (106). Holden often feels that he cannot assert himself in relation to men whom he perceives as more masculine or dominant than himself. Curiously enough, Holden admits not liking the other man partly because he is Ivy League. However, it is important to point out that Holden himself comes from a wealthy family and attends renowned schools. As Joyce Rowe points out in her article *Holden Caulfield an American Protest*: “Holden is not an obvious social outsider or outcast to those he live among, Well-born and well-favored, his appearance, abilities and manners make him an insider – he belongs” (91).

Despite belonging to a certain affluent cluster of society, Holden feels angry and threatened by Sally’s acquaintance. Holden has in fact quite a lot to say about this man having a conversation with Sally: “The worst part was, the jerk had one of those very phony, Ivy League voices, one of those very tired, snobby voices. He sounded just like a girl. He didn’t hesitate to horn in on my date, the bastard” (109). Feeling left out, Holden is angry because the man “steals” his date. It is clear that this man adapts a typical masculine attitude that vexes Holden. In response to the man’s behavior Holden says that he “sounds like a girl” (109), which is ironic because of the masculine qualities the man wishes to display. Not being able to steer the conversation the way he desires and failing to receive

the attention that he feels that he deserves, Holden becomes even angrier with Sally than he ever was before.

As stated, Holden cannot, or feels that he cannot, assert himself in relation to other boys and men. With the subconscious purpose of avoiding other people, Holden proposes to Sally that they run away together: "We'll stay in these cabin camps and stuff like that till the dough runs out. Then, when the dough runs out, I could get a job somewhere and we could live somewhere with a brook and all and, later on, we could get married or something. I could chop all our own wood in the wintertime and all." (119). Holden wants to flee civilization and live alone in the forest like a recluse. When Sally expresses no desire of wanting to accompany Holden on his forest adventure, he becomes infuriated and insults her by saying: "You give me a royal pain in the ass, if you want to know the truth" (119). These words reveals the extent of Holden's mental and emotional instability. While Sally functions the sensible one throughout this conversation, Holden impersonates the contrasting role by becoming impulsive and passionate, and indiscriminatingly rambling on whatever subject that springs to his mind.

There are many reasons as to why Holden is angry with Sally. For example, he resents that she failed to acknowledge his emotional state of despair when they first met, and that she let the other man horn in on their date. However, on a subconscious level, Holden is very angry with Sally because she evokes a part of his own sexuality that he wants to keep repressed.

Considering sex to be a destructive force, Holden cannot accept the idea of having sex with someone that he genuinely cares for such as Jane Gallagher. Consequently, he avoids women and girls that he likes, only to engage in semi-sexual behavior with girls, such as Sally Hayes, whom he does not care for and who does not care for him, but who still manages to arouse his sexual desire.

4. Conclusion

When applying the theories of psychoanalysis to interpreting a work of literature, a common starting point is identifying if a character exhibits any form of dysfunctional behavior and the possible psychological motives behind it. Holden Caulfield exhibits a great deal of dysfunctional behavior throughout the novel. For a great number of reasons Holden represses his own sexuality and refuses to be part of the adult world. He alludes that this is partly due to him witnessing and experiencing sexual advances from adult men at different boarding schools that he attended. As a result, Holden resents the school system, wishing instead to save children from becoming corrupted by the “perverts” and the “phonies”.

As the analysis showed, on his quest to find someone who will understand him, Holden repeatedly reaches out to people who are not right for him. Holden’s great dilemma is that he tries to connect with people who end up hurting him (Sunny – the prostitute, Sally Hayes, Mr. Antolini, etc.). At the same time, he avoids those who hold the potential of helping him such as his family and the only girl for whom he genuinely cares, Jane Gallagher. The only exception to this rule of search and avoidance is Holden’s sister Phoebe Caulfield whom he confides in. Phoebe is the only one who in the end actually manages to help him develop a sense of self-awareness and set him on the straight path.

Instead of developing sexual with women, Holden seems to focus most of his emotional energy on his younger sister, Phoebe. While some critics have interpreted this as evidence of Holden's repressed incestual desires and psychological immaturity, others have interpreted it as simply an affectionate bond between siblings that demonstrates Holden's innocence. While the novel may not provide any definitive explanation of Holden's sexuality, sexuality is clearly an important and interesting aspect of his character.

In future research, it would be interesting to explore Holden’s relationship with other boys such as Robert Ackley whom does not share typical masculine traits being a victim of bullying, and also to explore Holden’s relationship with his family and especially the effects of his brother Allie’s untimely passing.

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