

Effect of bipolar disorder: the catcher in the rye



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The book *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger, follows Holden Caulfield as he narrates his life from the mental institution at which he currently gets treatment during the 1950s. Holden abandons his school, Pencey Prep, before his expulsion date and goes off to do whatever he wants. On this spree, Holden makes a lot of impulsive decisions like going to the club and hiring a prostitute, among other things. Holden displays unpredictable emotions, similar to exhibiting bipolar disorder. Swings of behavior between mania and depression characterize bipolar disorder (Stanford Medicine). Holden Caulfield's behaviors and emotions make it clear that he suffers from bipolar disorder.

The death of Allie, Holden's younger brother, causes Holden to develop bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder does not have one single source, but a traumatic event like a significant loss constitutes a cause (Nordqvist). Allie's death triggers an intense reaction in Holden. This behavior appears more frequently after this event.

"He's dead now. He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18th, 1946... I was only 13, and they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage. I don't blame them. I really don't. I slept in the garage that night he died and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it. I even tried to break all the windows of the station wagon we had that summer, but my hand was already broken and everything by that time, and I couldn't do it" (Salinger 43- 44).

Holden's strong sense of emotions and outbursts began after Allie's death which possibly marked the onset of his bipolar disorder.

Holden's manic episodes involve him exhibiting hyperactivity and making many impulsive decisions.

" During a somewhat lackluster date with Sally Hayes, a pretentious girl Holden calls out of sheer desperation for human company, he gets seized by an impulse and asks her to move to New England with him. He gushes about the possibilities of a pastoral life, and tries to force a connection where none exists" (Tolchin).

Holden starts to think about multiple things at a time and be really hyper which are clear signs of manic episodes which relate to bipolar disorder (Bipolar Disorder). Holden bases his decisions purely on impulses because he tries to force a connection that did not exist in the first place. Salinger said,

"...What we could do is, tomorrow morning we could drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont, and all around there, see. It's beautiful as hell up there. It really is.' I was getting excited as hell, the more I thought about it, and I sort of reached over and took old Sally's goddamn hand. What a goddamn *foo*/ I was. ' No kidding,' I said. ' I have about a hundred and eighty bucks in the bank. I can take it out when it opens in the morning, and then I could go down and get this guy's car. No kidding. 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 like married or something...” (Salinger 146-147).

Holden displays bipolar symptoms by talking about spending a lot of money, uncontrollable touching, and possessing multiple thoughts at the same time (Bipolar Disorder). Holden’s uncontrollable actions and impulses prove that he suffers from bipolar disorder.

Holden not only experiences manic episodes, but depressive episodes as well. J. D. Salinger wrote “ The whole lobby was empty. It smelled like fifty million dead cigars. It really did. I wasn’t sleepy or anything, but I was feeling sort of lousy. Depressed and all. I almost wished I was dead” (Salinger 101). Holden feels alone and wants to end his life, which is a sign of a depressive episode. As Tolchin said, “ Holden feels alternately inferior and superior, never a balance of the two” (Tolchin). Holden’s imbalance refers to his changing emotions between depression and mania. This change in emotions indicates that Holden has bipolar 1 disorder, which includes periods of severe mania and depression (Goldberg).

Holden, who suffers from bipolar disorder, displays his condition through his emotions and behavior. Holden’s bipolar 1 disorder causes his uncontrollable impulses leading to unpredictable situations. Many people struggle with bipolar disorder, a mental illness. Every day, people must recognize the symptoms and hardships from which a person with bipolar disorder constantly suffers. *The Catcher in the Rye* demonstrates, through Holden, what someone’s behavior looks like when they have bipolar disorder.

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