

Holden caulfield's insanity

Business



Since the publication of "The Catcher in the Rye" by J. D. Salinger in 1951, Holden Caulfield has become an icon of angst, anguish, and depression: and he is only a teenager. It is clear that Holden has been troubled since a young age, flunking out of various schools and expressing disdain for practically everything he comes across.

Salinger explores Holden's mental state through a first-person narration in which Holden reveals his personal thoughts. These thoughts, paired with his actions, reveal that he is not emotionally sound. Holden lacks self-control and often acts impulsively. He is also a habitual liar, lying freely and often for no reason at all. This tendency among others results in a void of healthy relationships in his life. Although Salinger never explicitly reveals Holden's mental state, Holden Caulfield's mental instability is inferred through his lack of self-control, his constant lying, and his purposeful alienation from others.

Holden Caulfield consistently demonstrates a severe lack of control over his actions. When Holden was thirteen, his younger brother, Allie, died.

Overwhelmed with emotion, Holden punched out all the windows in the garage. He claims that it was "just for the hell of it" (39). This alone indicates that he is not a psychologically healthy adolescent, as he cannot articulate the thought process behind his actions.

Although Holden cannot explain why he did it, he says, "it was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie" (39). Although Holden was insightful enough to understand that his violent actions were unwise, he could not control himself. This is explicit evidence that at times he has no control of his actions. This lack of

control is not only displayed in moments of extreme stress or trauma, but also in his daily life. In the heat of an argument Holden attempts to punch his roommate, Stradlater. He says, " I tried to sock him, with all my might, right smack in the toothbrush, so it would split his goddam throat open" (43).

He acted violently towards Stradlater in spite of the fact that he had just described Stradlater as " a pretty friendly guy" (26). The fact that Holden attempts to punch somebody whom he usually considers to be a friend demonstrates his inability to restrain his anger, as he acts violently with no regard to the consequences of his action. Holden's repeated lack of control is not normal adolescent behavior and is a clear indication that he is not mentally sound. In addition to not being able to control his actions, Holden has no control over what he says. He is a self-proclaimed liar and is not ashamed of his lying, claiming that he is " the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life" (16).

Although he does admit that his habit is " terrible," he continues to lie and often lies for no reason at all (16). His disregard towards his own behavior indicates mental illness, as excessive, pointless lying is consistent with several mental disorders. Holden lies because it gives him a sense of emotional security. It shows that Holden is not comfortable with exposing his vulnerability to others and he will do anything, including alienating himself from others because of his lies, to avoid being hurt. This becomes clear when he is with Sunny, whom he hires as a prostitute.

Holden gives Sunny a fake name and age, which demonstrates the facade that he builds through his lies in an attempt create a separate and less

personal identity for himself. He becomes nervous and doesn't want to lose his virginity because he doesn't want to grow up. In his first-person narration he reveals the truth that he is "nervous" and "depressed," but he uses a lie to avoid these emotions (96). He says that "nothing's the matter [...] the thing is, I had an operation very recently" (96). Holden feels more secure when he lies because by covering up his emotions, as he does with Sunny, he feels like nobody can hurt him. Holden Caulfield uses lies to avoid emotional damage, and this behavior describes that of a mentally unsound individual.

As a result of his lying and purposeful alienation from others, Holden has few healthy relationships in his life. Holden does not have a strong relationship with any of his peers. He often expresses a general dislike for Pencey Prep and the people who attend it, calling them "jerks" (168) and "bastards" (54). Holden has an unhealthy relationship with Stradlater and Ackley, two of his supposed friends. Holden is responsible for these strained relationships; he has physical fights with Stradlater and is disrespectful towards Ackley. Holden directly insults Ackley, saying that he has no personal hygiene and would "feel better if [he] sort of brushed [his] teeth once in a while" (24).

The demeaning comments to Ackley show a lack of regard for the feelings of others, and therefore little concern for his relationships with them. This social ineptitude is due to the heightened feeling of security he achieves when he is emotionally detached from others. Holden has a lack of healthy relationships because he is constantly distancing himself from others through his demeaning comments and lies, and this is a clear indication of mental instability. Although Holden Caulfield's mental state is never

specifically disclosed to the reader, it is clear that Salinger intended on describing Holden as a troubled, and even insane, individual. Holden has little control over his actions, is constantly lying, and purposefully alienates himself from others.

Although these habits are unhealthy, he sees them as means for protecting himself. Early on in the narration Holden discloses that he is a victim of childhood trauma: the death of his younger brother Allie. This gives the reader an understanding of Holden's unhealthy mental state. Holden is constantly in the pursuit of security to avoid being a victim again, and he disregards the fact that he is victimizing others in the process. Holden's lack of control, his pathological lying, and his purposeful alienation from others are all indications of his mental instability, and it was this mental instability that made Holden Caulfield's character famous for being one of the most relatable and authentic characters in literature.