J.D Salinger's The Catcher In The Rye: Through The Feminist Lens

In J.D Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye female characters, that are above the age of sixteen, are portrayed in a stereotypical manner. As the main character Holden Caulfield travels through New York he has many interactions with different female characters, all of which are either portrayed or described negatively when viewed through the feminist lens. The feminist lens is used to analyze women's roles in text, women are commonly portrayed stereotypically in text, “Women, in contrast, generally are seen as weak and submissive, dependant, domestic, sexually inexperienced, emotional, illogical, and affectionate”(Ward). The three women that Holden meets in the Lavender room are objectified and stereotyped by Holden, Sally Hayes is objectified and their date is based only upon Sallys good looks, finally Mrs. Antolini is portrayed as the stereotypical housewife under the control of her husband. In this text, the female characters all portray stereotypical female characteristics. When using the feminist lens, it can be said that the novel The Catcher in the Rye, by J.D Salinger, was written in a stereotypically sexist and patriarchal fashion.

To begin, in chapter 10, Holden goes to the Lavender room, a night club in his hotel, and meets three women, to which he makes insulting remarks about their appearance, and describes them as unintelligent. Holden acts sexist throughout the entire chapter, he refers to some of the women in the bar as ”whory looking blondes”(Salinger 77) then continues to comment on the appearance of the three women at the table next to his, Bernice, Marty, and Laverne; ”At the table right next to me, there were these three girls around thirty or so. The whole three of them were pretty ugly”(Salinger 77). When Holden first meets the three women at the table beside his he makes a snide remark about their appearance, Holden is objectifying the three women based on their looks, Holden is being sexist with regard to the fact that he made such a critical analysis of the women when he is making that remark based off of his own opinion. Later Holden states ”I'm not kidding, they were three real morons.”(Salinger 79) here Holden describes the women as ”morons” simply because they were giggling, which portrays Holden stereotyping the women based off of only one of their actions. ”some of these very stupid girls can really knock you around the dance floor. You take a really smart girl, and half the time she's trying to lead you around the dance floor, or else she's a lousy dancer”(Salinger 79) Holden is stereotyping women stating that ”stupid” girls can dance and ”smart” girls can't this shows Holden stereotyping all women based off of a few experiences he may have had. ”...females are typically characterized as passive, dependant, illogical individuals...”(Flerx) it is made very apparent in this chapter that Holden judged these women based on their looks, and refers to them as illogical when they are acting passive towards him. Holden's attitude towards women projects that he is sexist by both stereotyping and objectifying them.

Moreover, In chapter 16, Holden goes on a date with Sally Hayes, on this date Holden makes sexist remarks about Sally, and uses her appearance to blind himself from her personality traits that he finds unappealing. ”She looked terrific. She really did. She had on this black coat and sort of black beret. She hardly ever wore a hat, but that beret looked nice. The funny part is, I felt like marrying her the minute I saw her. Im crazy. 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.”(Salinger 138) Here Holden instantly falls in love with Sally based solely on her appearance, he has no regard for her

personality, only her good looks, which is a clear example of his sexist self. After spending time with Sally, Holden admits to himself that he is starting to hate her, his initial thoughts based on her appearance fades away, and he is left with the realization of what Sally is really like, however he ignores this and continues the date in order to see more of her body at the central park skating rink. Beauty is commonly used as an advantage, ”Beauty may only be skin deep, but that is deep enough to confer an unsettling array of advantages. Although most of us learn at early ages that physical attractiveness matters, few of us realize how much. Nor do we generally recognize the extent to which our biases conflict with meritocratic principles.”(Rhode), however in this case Sallys beauty is not an advantage, Sallys beauty actually leads to Holden mistreating her and making sexist remarks to himself about her body. ”they gave Sally this little blue butt-twitcher of a dress to wear...She kept walking ahead of me, so that id see how cute her little ass looked. It did look pretty cute, too.”(Salinger 143) Here Holden is completely objectifying Sally, he ignores his earlier feelings of hate just because he can see her body, and makes a crude remark about her attire. Holden's date with Sally is based completely around the sexist idea of objectifying women.

Finally, in chapter 24 of The Catcher in the Rye, the character Lillian Antolini is introduced to the reader. Mrs. Antolini is described by Holden; “She was lousy with dough. She was about sixty years older than Mr. Antolini… For one thing, they were both very intellectual”(Salinger 199-200). Although Mrs. Antolini is described as older, wealthy, and intelligent, her character is still written in the sense that she has conformed to a patriarchal society, in which she operates under the control of her husband Mr. Antolini. In chapter 23 Holden states ”I think I probably woke he and his wife up”(Salinger 192), later in chapter 24 when Holden arrives at the Antolini's apartment, Mrs. Antolini is making coffee for Holden and her husband, after which she immediately goes to bed. Holdens request to visit the Antolini's not only woke them both, but also forced Lillian to leave her slumber in order to make coffee and serve the men. Here Mrs. Antolini is forced to make coffee by the patriarchal society that she lives in, ”The modern individual family is based on the open or disguised domestic enslavement of the woman...In the family, he is the bourgeois; the wife represents the proletariat.”(Tse-Tung) When using the feminist lens it is clearly seen that Mrs. Antolini shows characteristics of being an ”enslaved” housewife by performing tasks that could have easily been done by her husband.

In conclusion, in J.D Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye the main character Holden Caulfield portrays sexist qualities, and the post adolescent female characters in the novel are all written in a stereotypical manner. Bernice, Marty, and Laverne, the three women from the lavender room, are all objectified by Holden, and the chapter itself outlines Holdens crude and immature assumptions of women. Holden's date with Sally Hayes shows Holden again objectifying women, and using Sallys appearance as a blindfold for his true feelings for her. Finally, Mrs. Antolini is an example of the stereotypical housewife who has accepted and conformed to a patriarchal society. After analysing the text using the feminist lens, it can be said that J.D Salinger's novel The Catcher in the Rye is a text that objectifies and sexistly stereotypes women in a patriarchal society.