Masked By Isolation: Holden Caulfield

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Losing someone is difficult, especially a loved one. People behave differently when losing a family member. Some continue forward, and others fall into a more profound depressive state. In the novel, The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger, Holden Caulfield is solely at fault for his isolation from society because of his inability to communicate, make decisions, and control his behaviour. Holden has built a protective wall around him so he does not have to face reality but also forces him to live in a confined circle.

Holden’s inability to communicate drives him to be more isolated from society, he does so by classifying everyone as phony. This all began with the death of Allie Caulfield, Holden’s younger brother, who drives Holden to stop communicating with others would not be able to walk out of his life. Leading to a more isolated and depressive state. He convinces himself he cannot move forward because society will not accept him and his past. Young Holden feels the most comfortable when with Allie. This is illustrated when Holden communicates to Allie when needing emotional support. During his time in New York Holden is having a breakdown and says, “Allie, don’t let me disappear.” (198), showing Holden's inner emotions. His inability to communicate forces him to talk to an individual who is not physically there. Holden isolating himself causes him to be distant from others which prevent him from communicating. This results him disappearing but also shows Holden does not want to lose his identity in society. Before Holden began to isolate himself, he develops feelings for Jane Gallagher over their time spent together a few years back. When Holden finds out that Jane is going out with Stradlater he constantly says, “I oughta go down and say hello to her” (31), but never does. When faced with the possibility to talk to Jane who Holden felt close to, like Allie, he passes because he is “not in the mood” (33). He keeps distant from Jane because he believes over time she has changed her feeling towards him. For example when Jane was dating Al Pike, Holden describes him as, 'a terrible guy' (135), and 'a show-off bastard' (135), showing that he is very protective of her but also explains why he started a fight with Stradlater. His fear of rejection prevents him from talking to Jane. In the same way, he lacks the courage to tell his parents the trouble he is having after Allie’s tragic death. They are unable to understand Holden needs someone to talk to. This is because both Holden and his parents lack communication with each other. At the beginning of the novel, Holden says, “you’ll probably want to know how my parents were occupied and all before they had me.” (1). His father is a busy man and rarely has free time and his mother is constantly worried for him but only talks to Holden when it is about his future. Holden only talks about them when it is related to school or his ability of handling money. When he decides to avoid his parents, he drives himself into a deeper depressive state which causes him to be emotionally blocked out. Thus Holden Caulfield purposely blocks out society so that he does not have to communicate with others, and can be left to delve into his dark and depressing thoughts.

Holden’s jumbled thoughts prevents him to make his own decisions. He continuously disregards his opinion and integrate someone else's in the hope he could fit into society. For example, he describes Ackley as a pimply, insecure boy with terrible dental hygiene but when in need of emotional support, he is the first-person Holden goes to and tells him he is a

“gentleman and a scholar boy” (47). This illustrates what Holden says is not what he means because as Holden becomes more isolated his first instinct is to get comfort by Ackley but never tells him what happens between Stradlater and him. This is Holden’s last chance to make a friend but does not take it because Ackley may not be phony like others but is disliked by a lot of students. Therefore, Holden feels he will be more outcast by society if he accepts Ackley, so he decides to not be friends with him even though Ackley was the only guy he felt was not phony. Another example is Holden’s parents, Holden thinks adulthood is full of corrupt people but if Holden was living with his parents, he could have seen there is more to life. By living with him family Holden could have learnt people skills, communication and responsibility. “If they caught me, they caught me. I almost wish they did, in a way.” (180). Holden is struggling to hold his grip in life, but by the end of the novel, Holden sends clues that he wants to be around people that will accept him so he can finally be comfortable in his skin. When Holden almost wishes his parents would catch him sneaking out of their house, though he does not dare to face them. Holden probably senses that he is falling apart and needs to find something or someone to grip onto. This shows Holden can not make decisions because he lies so he does not have to share himself and he wants to stay disconnected from the world around him.

Society is unable to understand Holden’s depressive state because of his inability to control his behaviour around people. When he conceals his emotions, others think Holden dislikes them which drives him to be even more isolated. In the dorm room, Holden gets frustrated at Stradlater and rips the composition he wrote about Allie’s glove. “I didn’t even answer him...we both didn’t say anything for a long time.” (41). He had multiple chances to tell Stradlater the reason behind writing the essay. By doing so Holden constantly believes no one understands how he is feeling but does not release he is at fault for it. His lack of communication stops him to interact with others, causing depression. This further leads to isolation because Holden has completely given up in life and does not expect any good outcome. Sometimes Holden cannot keep his thoughts to himself and needs someone to talk too. His first real interaction is Sally Hayes. Sally is an attractive young woman who is easy to talk to. When Holden grows tired of her, he says “you give me a royal pain in the ass” (133). Holden just tells Sally he wants to live with her and now he cannot stand it when Sally does not support his opinion. It shows how he is not accepted into society because his opinion does not match with others. The repetition of this scenario is so constant in Holden's life that he has decided to not communicate at all but does not realize he is at fault, not Sally. Holden’s lack of communication results in him being stuck in his childhood and let time pass by. He believes by hiring a prostitute he will somehow become an adult, so he unwillingly hired one but then changes his mind and say, “Perhaps you might care to chat” (95). It is clear now this is beyond Holden's capability because when one is in depression they block out anything that makes them happy which is what Holden is doing. Like all children he is getting influenced by the people around him and by doing so his own identity is slowly disappearing because he is unable to make decisions for himself. Therefore society is unable to understand Holden because they he barricades himself with his thoughts and forces him to live in isolation.

Holden’s self-imposed isolation makes him feel lonely. His lack of communication with others causes him to lose his grip on reality, causing him to fall further into isolation. His attempt to connect with his friends further rejects him from society because of his behaviour and inability to make decisions. Therefore, in the novel, The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger, Holden Caulfield is solely at fault for his isolation from society because of his inability to communicate, make decisions, and control his behaviour. Holden’s isolation allows him to be comforted however, it forces himself to be isolated.