

PTSD and Disconnection in Canon Literature

Catcher in the Rye's Antihero Holden Caulfield

The Guest House

April 29, 2020

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Catcher In The Rye is a classic novel written by JD Salinger and is recognized as one of the most influential pieces of literature. The book follows narrator Holden Caulfield as he explains the days preceding his entering a mental institution. The reader joins Holden as he is expelled from his school and seems to become increasingly depressed after the fact. He muses about nostalgic bits of his life, mentioning the death of his younger brother, Allie. Throughout the novel, there is a sense of discomfort as Holden tries and fails many times to connect with others. His thoughts and actions are both confusing and erratic, and we get the sense that there is an underlying issue that hasn't been addressed or treated. As his situation worsens, we are able to see the surfacing traits of PTSD, serious depression, and anxiety. Catcher in the Rye offers a great representation of the overwhelming anguish that stems from untreated trauma and mental illness.

Traumatizing Loss and Aftermath

Holden speaks frequently of his late brother Allie, who was diagnosed with leukemia. It seems that Holden never fully processed this monumental event in his life, and dealt with it at the time by punching the windows in his garage. He holds on to many mementos from his brother's life, particularly his baseball mitt that Allie had written poems on. Occasionally he speaks to Allie as if he's still there when he's feeling intense sadness. Later in life, Holden witnesses the death of a friend named James Castle, and this cements the intense trauma within him. The image of his friend from the event stays with Holden, and he mentions that it creeps up when he tries to think of happy memories. Holden displays many common traits of a person with PTSD following this loss. He has substantial amounts of guilt and depression and struggles to remember the details of events in his life. Holden's emotions seem to be highly unbalanced. His rage is extreme and his joy is more manic. He takes pleasure in lying, the expert in crafting the perfect lie, and sometimes he cannot distinguish between the truth and his fabrication. The most substantial trait of PTSD that the reader can find in Holden is the surplus of flashbacks that control his life. As he narrates, he speaks mostly of random memories that come to him from the past, and of which he only remembers parts of. His musings come across as sarcastic and casual, but there is a great amount of sadness in his behavior and thoughts that is cause for great concern.

Recovery

At the end of the novel, Holden seems a lot more optimistic. The entire novel details the events that lead up to his breakdown, and his inability to avoid his emotions or trauma any longer. After a two month jump in time, he explains that he returned home to his family and got sick. He was sent to a rest home, which is more commonly

known as a hospital to treat his mental illness. He narrates the final part of the book from this institution, with a hopeful attitude towards the future. The importance of this book is its portrayal of PTSD and how it can affect every aspect of your life, even if you aren't aware of it. Holden struggles to build friendships, relationships and always feels like he is on the outside looking in. He is overwhelmed with untreated grief and depression. His actions are impulsive and irrational, and his thoughts are very upsetting and erratic. The difficulty in social settings and trauma makes it hard for him to filter what he says to others, and he can't understand why they reject him. Luckily, his little sister Phoebe sparks some hope and comfort in him that makes him secure in returning home and seeking help. Treatment is crucial for the healing process, and we learn that it is possible. No matter what has happened in the past, we can move forward and lead happy, healthy lives.

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