

Negotiating Masculinity in J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*

by

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Abstract:

This analysis focuses on several masculinities conceptualized by Holden Caulfield within the sociohistorical context of the 1950s. When it is understood by heterosexual men that to be masculine means to be emotionally detached and viewing women as sexual objects, they help propagate the belief that expressions of femininity and non-hegemonic masculinities are abnormal behavior and something to be demonized and punished. I propose that Holden's "craziness" is the result of there being no positive images of heteronormative masculinity and no alternative to the rigid and strictly enforced roles offered to boys as they enter manhood. I suggest that a paradigm shift is needed that starts by collectively recognizing our current forms of patriarchy as harmful to everyone, followed by a reevaluation of how gender is prescribed to youth.

Keywords: Holden; masculinity; men; gender; manhood; healthy; "real"; hegemony; heteronormative images

Intro:

Holden Caulfield is first introduced to the world under the title “I’m Crazy.” Unsurprisingly, this has encouraged scholars to center much of the conversation about him around issues of mental illness and disability. Duane Edwards, for example, argues that the popular perception of Holden’s account as the truth, whereas the world around him is wrong, is failing to ignore grave deficiencies in his character (1977). His analysis points out that Holden himself is exuding phoniness, thus inhibiting his self-awareness. This distortion of reality can most famously be seen when he substitutes the word “meet” to “catch” in his explanation of wanting to be the “catcher in the rye.” Edwards says that this shows both his willingness to manipulate the truth and emotional dysfunction because he focuses on danger and potential death rather than love and personal relationships.

He also points out the obvious, yet overlooked depression in Holden. Many have argued that Holden is actually telling his story from a mental institution. The best evidence to support this assumption comes during Holden’s final words of the novel: “A lot of people, especially this one psychoanalyst guy they have here, keeps asking me if I’m going to apply myself when I go back to school next September” (234). The word “keeps” implies that Holden has been having regular visits from a psychoanalyst. Regardless of whether he is in a regular hospital or mental hospital, Holden is certainly on the receiving end of some psychiatric care. We might also add that because he is receiving psychiatric care, it is possible that he is not yet fully capable of admitting the extent of his illness, which could then be a contributing factor to Holden’s willingness to distort the truth. Most importantly, at the end, he says “don’t ever tell anybody anything” (234). Edwards interprets his refusal to talk about his adolescence as an indication that he will

remain ill. Ambivalence is Holden's defining characteristic that will keep his mental instability alive.

However, the ambiguity of how "crazy" is being defined in the original short story complicates what has been previously thought about Holden's inner workings and what is truly troubling him. Among the themes that reappear in *Catcher in the Rye*, the dynamic between the right and wrong way of being is particularly highlighted. In the final passage, Holden narrates: "I lay awake for a pretty long time, feeling lousy. I knew everybody was right and I was wrong." Of course, this notion of right and wrong is a reflection of his *environment*, not him as an individual. According to Tobin Siebers, author of *Disability Theory*, spatial arrangements are constructed to make able-bodied people unaware of their own body and non able-bodied people hyper-aware of their body. In other words, Siebers argues that each society creates an ideal way of functioning. If this is true, then the fact that Holden refers to himself as being "crazy" nearly five times in just a two page spread is a strong indicator that there is something happening with his environment to spark his awareness of his difference. Despite knowing which is the right way and which is the wrong, he feels "lousy" because he has perpetually failed to act on the collective understanding of correctness. His dysfunction comes from his inability to conform his thinking—this is what he means when he claims to be "crazy."

More specifically, his hyperawareness comes from not being able to conform to notions of success. He says, "I knew that I wasn't going to be one of those successful guys, that I was never going to be like Edward Gonzales or Theodore Fisher or Lawrence Meyer. I knew that this time when Father said that I was going to work in that man's office that he meant it, that I wasn't going back to school again ever, that I wouldn't like working in an office." He makes an important distinction about success when he points to specific male examples and pin points the

narrative of the working man. Clearly, Holden is making an association between success and gender. According to Holden, in order to be successful, he must do what has always been done: sit in an office and produce something. A man's value depends on his economic gain, not how much they "like" themselves or what they do for a living. He quickly abandons these more serious thoughts and resumes to back to childish pleasantries when he starts "wondering again where the ducks in Central Park went when the lagoon was frozen over, and finally...went to sleep." He can't even bear the thought of this life, let alone conform to it. Ultimately, this first appearance of Holden condenses the inextricable relationship of his evolving intersection with gender and age and the outside forces working to direct him: a relationship that later comes to be known as "phony" vs. real.

While I do think that Edward's analysis is a valid critique of his character, the prominence of gender as a major factor to his mental insecurity in "I'm Crazy" cannot be ignored. In light of this, we have yet to establish a sufficient feminist critique of how his gender confusion progresses in the novel. Like many men who suffer under the extreme pressures of manhood, Holden is no exception and struggles with, what I will argue is, a deeply unhealthy construction of masculinity. Seeing that Holden Caulfield has remained a beloved character for all sixty years of his existence and his readers continue to feel connected to the anti-conformist attitude that represents 1950s and 60s American youth, we might take this as evidence that not only does a crisis in masculinity still exist, but that it is still being supported in the same ways Holden experiences. Through understanding Holden from a less scientific, and by default, masculine, point of view, a feminist critique has the potential to aid our understanding of social and cultural structures that feed his destruction and ultimately serve others who are affected by them like the many readers who have seen Holden within themselves. Dismissing his dysfunction overlooks that we

as a culture must take accountability for our role in withholding the glorification and rewards for a performance of masculinity that can be debilitating.

As a feminist scholar, I will be attempting this critique using the following assumptions: the first being that as westerners, we are alienated—from ourselves, from our creativity and passions, and from our bodies. The second being that what we have been taught in western culture about happiness, success, and power is inadequate and in fact leads us away from happiness, success, and real power. Lastly, a new paradigm for social change is needed that acknowledges our interconnectedness and draws on the healing power of compassion, replacing metaphors of warfare and struggle that have predominated western discourse (Bullington). Using these as my foundation for this critique, I will examine what messages of masculinity and femininity are being presented to Holden, and then consider how these messages are either negated or propagated in his own behavior. Finally, I will determine how, through Salinger's construction of Holden Caulfield's character, hegemonic masculinity during this time produced a monolithic ideal of the male gender that delegitimizes their unique personhood and deadens a man's capacity to engage and access tools for emotional intimacy.

Analyzing the Text: *Stradlater*

Salinger attacks several core hegemonic masculinities that characterize his lifetime: soldier masculinity, imperial masculinity, and complicit masculinity. Holden's greatest desire is to find an adult role model who exemplifies "real" masculinity, but as he explores a range of these available roles of maleness under the umbrella of normalcy, he finds himself dissatisfied by them and quickly abandons them.

Holden's roommate, Stradlater, perfects imperial masculinity as it is issued out by the male boarding school system; but although Stradlater walks through life with ease as a result of his gender performance, Holden sees his character as consisting mostly of narcissism and womanizing. Holden narrates that "he was madly in love with himself" (31) and that "just because *they're* crazy about themselves, they think *you're* crazy about them, too" (32). Holden is disgusted by Stradlater's high and mightiness and sense of entitlement. His tone when using the word "crazy" is saturated with sarcasm, and suggests that he interprets Stradlater as ignorant. Right away, he makes the connection between Stradlater's gender performance and phoniness. This is affirmed by the scene where Holden watches Stradlater shave his face. He says "[the razor] was always rusty as hell and full of lather and hairs and crap...He always *looked* good when he was finished fixing himself up, but he was a secret slob anyway" (31). The dirty, tarnished razor symbolizes Stradlater's manhood; his masculinity is rooted in superficiality and inauthenticity; it doesn't matter how he treats Holden, as long as he puts in the work to look the part of a "real" man, he will be powerful. The obsessive fixation on power over dignity, however, is merely a product of their educational environment.

Robert D. Dean defines this phenomena of imperial masculinity in his discussion of the function of all male boarding schools in the 1950s. In response to this period of extreme social

change, the white, upper class had been sent into a deep moral panic and used this school system as key to defending the privileged boundaries of the WASP upper class and calming their anxieties regarding the erosion of their political and social power. In other words, the schools were ultimately a breeding ground of wealthy, white men to be fed into public office. Stradlater demonstrates his inheritance of this CEO-like complex by reinforcing a power-over relationship with Holden. He asks Holden to write his composition for him as if Holden is “just dying to do [him] a favor” (32). With Holden’s recognition of Stradlater’s internalized superficiality, he is positioning himself in opposition to Stradlater, and therefore rejects imperial masculinity as a “real” model of maleness.

This rejection of imperial masculinity and negation of the messages about being a “real” man is heightened by the contrast of each of their relationship to Jane Gallagher. There is no evidence to truly back up the stories Holden tells of their time together, but nevertheless, he feels an intense obligation to play the role of her protector, while Stradlater, on the other end, sees her as merely a body for him to take her “innocence” away from her. He starts by saying “I knew [Stradlater]. Most guys at Pencey just *talked* about having sexual intercourse with girls all the time—like Ackley, for instance—but old Stradlater really did it” (55). The problem for Holden is not that Stradlater is a womanizer; the problem is Jane’s perceived innocence. He recalls a past experience from a double date they once had: “His date kept saying, “No—*please*. Please, don’t. *Please*.” But Stradlater kept snowing [on]” (56). Holden’s anxiety is floored because the memory of the girl’s voice and how Stradlater silences her desperate cries situates her in a position of helplessness. In claiming that this was Stradlater’s “technique” (55) he implies that this behavior is strategic and calculated no matter who it is being acted upon. This causes him to conceptualize femininity as weak and defenseless, and imperial masculinity as threatening and cruel.

Although Holden views femininity in a different way than Stradlater, both of them are acting from a masculine understanding about the female body. Holden's view of the female body and his relationship to them is merely representing one part of a broader social landscape. With the rise of consumer culture, television sets became the center of all American households, and companies like J. Walter Thompson chose to capitalize on this new medium, more Americans were gravitating to the now unavoidable images they found on the screen. For the first time history, Americans were being given more than just an two-dimensional picture or voice on the radio to model themselves after, it was a full fledged human being with movement to match the personality and outer appearance. So when characters such as Ward Cleaver were created, middle class white boys and men gained a more explicit notion of the ideal man. What 1950s men learned through these male TV roles was that their highest role is that of the moral legislator. In order to assume this ideal role, they must assume the "guise of the selfless patriarchs" as demonstrated by many of the 1950s sitcom fathers: "the stereotypical dad...[manages] to demonstrate a remarkable, even mythic, capability as a universal moral legislator, neatly rising above the fray and sorting out tangled family affairs by the end of each week's episode" (Calton 335). With the distribution of this norm made more accessible, more individuals could adapt to the gender scripts governed by the conservative, nuclear family portrait of which was a key marker of the 1950s era. With the American Dream perfectly spelled out, it made it so that there was virtually no excuse for anyone to not live up to the golden standard. Based on this, Holden's infantilization of women propagates one aspect of hegemonic masculinity, however, considering the hierarchical nature of hegemony, as a bystander to Stradlater's objectification of women, he still teeters on the edge of being an outsider.

Holden reproduces complicit masculinity in this sense; he doesn't agree with characteristics of hegemonic masculinity but doesn't challenge it. Whether it be the assumption that women's bodies are something that are fragile and vulnerable and ought to be protected, or the assumption that they are meant to be used and objectified by men, both approach this character from a place of power-over. Neither one is better than the other, I simply use this to point out that despite their differences, and despite Holden's inability to conform to the brotherhood of imperial masculinity in the way Stradlater has, not all messages of this socialization are propagated. Innocence tends to be gendered as feminine, so when Holden's obsession to control innocence is turned inward it is a feminine act, when it is projected onto others, especially women and girls, it is a masculine act of male dominance and perpetuates harmful gender roles.

Thomas Keith further discusses this kind of hyper-masculine relationship with women, such as Stradlater's, in his documentary, *The Bro Code* (2011). He argues that American culture creates sexist men by training them to womanize, immersing them in pornographic images, making rape jokes, and establishing "masculinity cops." These techniques establish the idea that in order to be man, one must constantly be seeking power through the sexual exploitation of as many women as possible, and status through material possession. We might think that working young boys into this sexist mentality has been accomplished through an unspoken code of conduct that is internalized unconsciously, however, it is very much a conscious phenomenon as well. What Stephen Ducat calls "The Wimp Factor" (2004) is what ultimately drives young boys to conform to this path toward dysfunctional manhood. Based on the patriarchal context that U.S. society is founded on, it is because of male anxiety of being feminized that an internal threat arises where men feel that they must assert their masculine power through the surveillance of

young boys and other men as “masculinity cops.” What begins as a warrant of behavioral or verbal judgment against those who don’t adhere closely to the strict rules of masculinity turns into a cycle of power conflict between men and abuse of women. Eventually, what the “bro code” teaches is that one cannot be truly masculine unless they possess all of the qualities enforced under the code and unless they are constantly trying to assert its goals through the exploitation of other boys and men or women.

When men learn what it means to be a “real” man, that knowledge coincides with what they know about “real” femininity. In other words, even though Holden shows more respect toward women, his understanding of a “real” man as their protector consequently reinforces an inequality between masculinity and femininity. Holden sets up a demonized perception of femininity in fear of being seen as weak, just as he sees the women who come into contact with Stradlater, and leaves him with the paradox of wanting to be in neither position.

Salinger extends his critique of Stradlater by attacking soldier masculinity. Leading up to the moment of their fight, Holden is annoyed that “Ed Banky [the basketball coach at Pencey] always let [Stradlater] borrow his car when he wanted it. It was allowed for students to borrow faculty guys’ cars, but all the athletic bastards stuck together” (48). Holden is describing a key sanction of the all male boarding school ritual. Sports like football, for example, was a particularly idealized realm of manhood because it brought a kind of nostalgia of wartime comradeship and warrior-aristocrat pride (Dean 28). In a post-war era that is positioned alongside the celebrated soldier masculinity, characterized by its “self-confidence based upon the sacrifice and heroism of ordinary men” (Gilbert 2), men, particularly adolescent men, become obsessively preoccupied with regaining that confidence while at the same time defying the roles of manhood that war created. If soldier masculinity could not be resurrected, there was at least football to bring

back the memory of better times, where a man could be a “man” and the perception of domination and collective identity could live on. It promised “redemption from the effeminate temptations of materialism” (Dean 34) that marked their existence in this new era.

In order to reproduce the masculine code required of such a responsibility, valuing strength, loyalty, and stoic service, all-male schools were systematically designed to provide a toughening ordeal for privileged sons into a mentality of collective identity over individualized identities. Sports being the most direct example of this, therefore granted the most rewards, however, this prescription for conformity was enacted in a number of forms: hazing of peers to repudiate feminine characteristics, being removed from the family—particularly the mother (Dean 22), or ostracism, ridicule, and ritual physical abuse to those who deviated from the brotherhood (Dean 25). There was no direct attack on those who did not perfect these aspects, however, as we see in the arena of sports, the men like Stradlater who *did* had access to celebrity and levels of the brotherhood that were not otherwise given. Much like the rigidity of Stradlater’s masculinity, the rigidity of this brotherhood makes sure that their social power stays within the sacred bounds of their selected circle.

Holden’s response to the tension with Stradlater and the image of maleness that he represents is to latch back onto the safety net of childhood. His hunting hat is used as a metaphor for repression. With the red color mimicking the color of Allie’s hair, every time he puts it on his head, he can to the innocence of his dead brother and escape the horrors of adolescence. Take for example when he says “I kept sitting there on the floor till I heard old Stradlater close the door and go down the corridor to the can. Then I got up. I couldn’t find my goddam hunting hat anywhere. Finally I found it. It was under the bed” (51). With the fragmentation of the last four sentences, it is as if Holden is void of his personality and distinctive voice for the first time. He is

scared. He waits to move one more muscle until this figure, a physical embodiment of the thing he knows he must become in order to survive, but cannot become, leaves. To cope, he reaches for the comfort of childhood. The hat not only reminds him of Allie, a child, but the act of putting it on and wearing it is reminiscent of a child playing dress up. The hat is physical evidence of Holden becoming “crazy.”

To emphasize, Dean also critiques “the absence of any escape from quasi-officially approved group punishment, [of which] led some to consider suicide” (25). Boys who failed to conform to the golden standard granted them high vulnerability to both physical and psychological abuse. While being ordered to imagine the “right” manhood, students often learned that their vulnerabilities were made invisible, which was then taken out in aggressive frustration. At the time, there was virtually no structural protection for students with difference; their alienation was backed up by a system with imperial masculinity at its core. In fact, many were sentenced to expulsion as a result of their inability to conform. For as long as they remained in the boarding school system, students like Holden would be left to deal with the violence against them on their own terms. For Holden, this means a serious dysfunction in his development as a man.

His emotional intimacy among other men is one area that is tremendously affected. The hunting hat is mentioned repeatedly, one of them being in a conversation with Ackley: “Up home we wear a hat like that to shoot *deer* in, for Chrissake,” he said. “That’s a deer shooting hat.” “Like hell it is.” I took it off and looked at it... “I shoot people in this hat”” (26). While Ackley sees hunting as an activity that the men in his home can share and enjoy together, Holden turns his comment around, showing his unhealthy hatred for other men. His obsession with innocence and refusal to grow up leaves Holden ostracized by characters like Ackley and Stradlater to the point where being at Pencey “made [him] too sad and lonesome” (58). The psychological effects

are overwhelmingly evident by the time he decides to finally flee the school, wearing the red hunting hat, of course (59).

Allie

Holden pushes nearly every male character away, but does, however, hold on to the memory of his younger brother, Allie. Allie's character is the only thing Holden expresses explicit interest and affection toward. When Phoebe asks him to name one thing that he likes, he answers with: "I like Allie...Just because somebody's dead, you don't just stop liking them, for God's sake" (189). The immediate tone switch from casual conversation to harsh defensiveness shows that Allie's death is a topic of apparent sensitivity. He exaggerates Allie's memory, thinking he was "a thousand times nicer than the people you know that're *alive* and all" (189). He speaks of him as if he is still alive to distract from having to confront his sadness of reality and justify his obsession with him. When he finally admits to his death, he skips over it quickly and speaks of it matter-of-factly. Almost as if it comes out of nowhere, Holden says "He's dead now. He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him" (43) and then continues on in his glorified description of Allie, completely unfazed, his emotionlessness suddenly dissipated. Holden's apathy toward Allie's death allows him to perpetuate stories about him that align with his perception of the world. As Holden ages, Allie gets to stay young forever and preserved as perfectly innocent. The more Holden hangs on to Allie, the more he is able to hang on to childhood and innocence.

He continues to avoid thinking about his death by placing emphasis on Allie's physical body. The first known characteristic about Allie is that he is left handed. Left-handedness is culturally coded as a non-normative characteristic and deviant characteristic. This is significant because Holden, too, is labeled as "[doing] everything backasswards...[he doesn't] do *one damn thing* the way you're supposed to" (46). However, there is one major distinction between Allie and Holden: while Allie's difference is visible, Holden's difference is rooted internally. Holden

is unable to describe Allie without celebrating him—even his difference is beautified by the poems written on his baseball mitt—whereas, Holden’s difference is spoken of with disdain and impatience. Regardless of the obvious contrast between Allie and Holden’s likability for their differences, it is important for Holden to make his brother’s difference known because it comforts him that a positive image of difference can exist. It offers him hope that people like Allie—people like him—can be beloved instead of ostracized.

The second physical characteristic that we are given is his red hair. Holden makes a point of describing the intensity of the color when he reminisces about a time when he was twelve years old. He says “[I was] teeing off and all, having a hunch that if I turned around all of a sudden, I’d see Allie. So I did, and sure enough, he was sitting on his bike outside the fence... about a hundred and fifty yards behind me, watching me tee off” (44). Though he is two years younger than Holden, meaning he would have been ten years old at the time of this memory, Allie acts as a kind of guardian to Holden. The scripts defined by their age are reversed in that the role of the caretaker is claimed by a child and the role of the cared-for is claimed by the elder. As a consequence, Holden is given the illusion of independence and a warped perception of what it means to take care of something. Still, Holden relies on the feeling of Allie’s presence in order to survive being on his own.

Lastly, we know that Allie has red hair. It is important to note that Holden makes the association with red-haired people to anger (43), acknowledging that Allie was contrarily extremely kind and well-behaved. Much like his left-handedness, his hair reaffirms how his character actively defies stereotypes. In this case, he defies the assumption that aggressive behavior is assumed to be innate in male bodies. In both name and actions, Holden constructs Allie as being

genderless. The image of the baseball mitt covered in poems exemplifies this notion. The obvious masculinization of sports and the body is contrasted by the feminization of his intellect and emotional expression. Allie reads “when he was in the field and nobody was up to bat” (43) and even in solitude, finds happiness. Holden, on the other hand, finds himself in a crowded system that attempts to masculinize everything, yet leaves it feeling nothing but “lonesome” (58).

In a way, immortalizing Allie offers Holden a sense of stability as he himself is forced to endure life’s changes. This could explain why Holden often returns to the thought of his brother at his most vulnerable times. The best example of this is in the scene after Holden flees from Mr. Antolini’s. He says “Boy, did it scare me...I started sweating like a bastard...Then I started doing something else. Every time I’d get to the end of the block I’d make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I’d say to him, “Allie don’t let me disappear. Please, Allie.” And then when I’d reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I’d *thank* him” (217-218). I interpret this scene as a depiction of Holden’s adolescence. Holden feels out of control, so resorts to the comfort of Allie’s presence that was once felt when he was teeing off. Playing “make believe” momentarily takes the pressure of growing up, or in this case, reaching the other side of the road unharmed, off of him. Instead, he gives thanks to Allie as if he is the one navigating his inevitable transition into manhood.

If Allie represents Holden’s internalized ideal of manhood, his fixation on him is indicative of Holden’s true desire for a more fluid expression of masculinity, compared to the hyper-masculinized imperial masculinity offered at Pencey. He glorifies his brother because he himself is negotiating the feminine and masculine parts of himself like a child. If Holden is able to convince himself that gender fluidity is something others will accept, then the possibility of accepting himself will become more real. What he of course fails to acknowledge about others’ love for

Allie is that it is only possible as a child. Dealing with the feelings about his gender is complicated as he enters adulthood and femininity becomes demonized—a struggle that Allie never had to face.

Mr. Antolini

Salinger solidifies his definition of a healthy masculinity in the final three chapters of the novel. Despite putting on the act that he can take care of himself and that he is already an adult, ultimately, Holden succumbs to his vulnerability and need for a sense of safety and guidance. It is here, in his most visible moment of weakness, that he finds an alternative to the rigid models of maleness seen before.

Mr. Antolini's position as a teacher constructs his masculinity with interconnectedness. Although it is peculiar that Holden turns to a person from the same institution he has rejected and been rejected from a sense of protection and comfort, Mr. Antolini presents Holden with a new kind of authority that is positively inconsistent with other models of manhood he has seen before. In the western model of education, students conform to a rigid power dynamic that relies on a center to obtain knowledge. Holden often expresses distrust for the other men at Pencey including Mr. Spencer and Mr. Thurmer, and was disturbed by the penalizing practices performed there. Salinger takes this position of authority and molds it to reflect a more fluid and reciprocal mode of learning. In this sense, Mr. Antolini offers the possibility for more fluidity and change while still preserving a structure that is familiar to Holden and within his comfort zone.

For the first time, another man gives Holden raw, honest advice about being a man. Most notably, he tells him that "the mark of an immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one" (207-208). One interpretation of this statement about men who "die for a cause" is that it alludes to wartime masculinity. This is significant because in condemning soldier masculinity by labeling it as "immature," Mr. Antolini reaffirms Holden in his response to soldier masculinity and draws him in with the appeal that he isn't the only one who feels this way.

Mr. Antolini's strategy of directing Holden toward a stable, healthy masculinity can best be understood through an analysis of Salinger's use of a dualistic framework. Literary theorist, Mary Klages, notes that our conception of a gender is based on our ability to position it in opposition to another. To elaborate, "poststructuralist feminist theory sees the category or position 'woman' as a part of a binary opposition, 'man/woman', in which 'man' is the favored term" (96). In other words, because we gain our understanding by considering what the other is not, this simultaneously situates them in a hierarchy of valuation. Thus, by placing these two masculinities in opposition to one another, Salinger enforces the claim that one is better than the other: a humble man over the hyper-masculinized soldier. This comes off as confusing because when considering what gender performances receive privileges and which ones do not, the answer points to the reverse of this conclusion. Salinger is mimicking the backward nature that Holden experiences, recognizing that this backwardness is socially constructed.

Mr. Antolini continues to construct several binaries in this passage in relation to the non-conforming/hegemonic masculinity tension initially mentioned: maturity/immaturity, humility/boastfulness, life/death, and by conjecture, substantiality/shallowness and carefulness/carelessness. Qualities on the left side can be aligned into one group, representing the category: "good," and qualities on the right side into another, representing the category: "bad." This forces Holden to revisit his assumptions about hegemonic masculinity and recognize the potential detriment it poses. The desired conclusion Mr. Antolini attempts to draw is that the hegemonic masculinities Holden has been grappling with are in fact dysfunctional masculinities.

Particularly, the binary underlying this scene is that of the internal/external. He says, "Among other things, you'll find that you're not the first person who was ever confused and

frightened and even sickened by the human behavior... Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now.” (208-209). The first thing that he emphasizes is that Holden’s internal conflict is defined by fear and confusion. This is important for Holden because masculine socialization tells men that they must always be focused on their outward performance even if it compromises their internal crises. To elaborate on this inaccessibility to the internal, theorist Judith Butler claims that gender is performative. Gender is characterized as the outward behavior constituted from other observed performances of gender. The effect being that a static or ‘normal’ gender is reinforced while other contradicting acts are obscured. If this is true, that gender is a social construction, not something that is derived from within, then we can group the external self with normative gender performance and the internal self with deviant gender performance; this interpretation of gender means that there is always a disconnect between one’s external image projected to others and one’s inner self if one is to be seen as “normal.” With that, Mr. Antolini is suggesting that Holden’s socialization to make this distinction is inherently flawed, since it has hindered his and “many, many [other] men” in their ability to exist maturely, humbly, and meaningfully. Instead, he would advise Holden to acknowledge his inner and outer workings as functions of each other. His approach: a non-dualistic stance that emphasizes holism.

A major aspect to Salinger’s concept of “healthy” masculinity derives from the theme of role differentiation prevalent in the 1950s. Irene Traviss Thomson notes that “individuals in the 1950s not only face internal conflicts, they must also deal with the difficulties of the “compartmentalized self” ” (501). To elaborate, H.A. Overstreet says that in our culture “the domestic self, the business self, the religious self, the political self...are housed in one body but remain strangers to one another” (140). In other words, a lack of wholeness disabled people to feel

whole within themselves, let alone feel connected to one another. Like many other characters of 1950s literature, Holden attempts to deal with his unconscious urges left unresolved by the code-switching nature of his compartmentalized self, but fails. While on one end he pursues the role offered in boyhood that allows him to exist in a state of innocence and authenticity; on the other end, he participates in roles of manhood all the time: he is the womanizer, the protector, the conformist, and the autonomous individual, of which are in constant disagreement with one another.

Mr. Antolini offers a new method of learning to assuage this conflict. He says “It’s a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn’t education. It’s history. It’s poetry” (209). The “it” in this statement refers to masculine socialization. For Holden, much of that experience comes from his time in boarding schools. Knowing this, Mr. Antolini makes the distinction that this kind of learning he is proposing is not one that is not marked by standardization and conformity—a system of which has rejected and failed Holden; this is what he means when he says “it isn’t education.” Rather, he encourages space for femininity in male gender performances by equating it to topics of history or poetry. He flips the existing western hierarchy that values more formulaic areas of study to more fluid, creative styles; the assumption here being that one is rigorous, intellectual, and therefore, important, and the other is not. His analogy allows Holden to interrogate the oppressive systems that he, and the rest of the youth population, are forced into that reinforce the inevitability of unhappiness. Forcing Holden to think about the influence of his environment aims to relieve the blame on Holden, so that he is able to move on and establish his gender in a way that doesn’t make him feel “crazy.”

Holden, however, actively rejects Mr. Antolini. Though he employs paternal language to communicate his acknowledgment of Holden’s need for safety and comfort, it is consistently dis-

missed by Holden. Before going to sleep, for example, Mr. Antolini says “Good night, handsome” (211). Holden responds by reinforcing a more formal relationship on him by calling him “sir” (211). This microaggression would have been easily overlooked had the following event not happened: in it, Holden wakes up to find Mr. Antolini hovering over him, stroking his head. Although Mr. Antolini sees this as a performance of a father-son kind of interaction, Holden is severely disturbed by this unfamiliar intimacy. He narrates “I don’t even like to *talk* about it...When something perverted like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kind of stuff’s happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid. I can’t stand it” (211,213). Holden speaks vaguely about “that kind of stuff” to show his offense and disgust. By making it out to be unspeakable, Holden is able to deflect some of the blame for his irrational response and dysfunctional relationship with male emotional intimacy, and construct himself as a victim to *Mr. Antolini’s* actions.

In doing so, Holden is actually manifesting a key aspect of hegemonic masculinity. Among the many key functions embedded in hegemonic masculinity, avoidance of responsibility creates intense adversity when it comes to men’s ability to be intimate. According to Atkinson and Calafell in “Darth Vader Made Me Do It!” men enter a “gray area” that deflects their need to take accountability for wrongful action. With so many conflicting messages about what it means to be a “real” man, explanations for men’s actions can become ambiguous and explicit intent is impossible to prove. Because of this, it is easy for men to claim a kind of choicelessness or make the assertion that they “didn’t mean it like that,” thus removing the obligation to own their behavior. I believe this to be the case in this particular scene. There is no indication that Mr. Antolini’s actions were sexually coded. There is, however, evidence that suggests Holden’s construction of masculinity would cause him to resist a situation like this. Holden has been far removed

from his own family, particularly his father, that he would not have gained enough experience in intimate male relationships like that of a loving father and son. Yes, unexpected and unwanted physical affections of a male teacher was hardly uncommon in the all-male boarding school realm, but considering the details of this scene, as well as what we know about Holden and his fragile masculinity, readers shouldn't dismiss this plainly as sexual abuse.

In fact, there is much more informing Holden's interpretation of this experience. In "Regulating Male Intimacy," author, David Plummer, talks about how homophobia in hegemonic masculinity creates deep anxiety within men, forcing them to foster a hyper-masculine performance of their sexuality. He writes: "the closer contact becomes, the more it is restrained by homophobia. However, instead of intimate contact being prohibited by homophobia, it often becomes highly stylized instead." One of the research subjects notes that "the only way many of us express fondness of each other is by teasing or mock fighting...Anything more openly affectionate would be suspect" (258). Even though brotherhood is a key component of masculinity, Holden has learned that asserting one's heterosexuality is more important and overshadows all possibility for men to express and accept friendly or paternal love because there is an overriding fear of being cast as gay, and therefore not real men or worse, women. It is likely that Holden has internalized these messages having been in close proximity with boys and men for most of his adolescence in all-male boarding schools. His relationship with Stradlater reinforces this statement. Holden proves on several occasions that male intimacy must be closely monitored and ensured that it doesn't cross outside the heteronormative boundaries. So, while he should certainly be supported and offered professional help regarding his claim that he has experienced pedophilia multiple times in his life, I find it is more likely that Holden, like many other men, needs

to address underlying issues of socialization that have become entrenched into his everyday experience of life causing him to aggressively push away any form of intimacy with other men.

There are several other conclusions that we might draw from this response Holden provides. One explanation could be that Holden fosters a fear of his own identification with Mr. Antolini's masculinity. Assuming that Holden does want to have the freedom to be more emotionally expressive, based on my analysis of his younger brother Allie, his ability to act on that desire is complicated by having witnessed the harsh consequences of non-conformity at Pencey and does not yet know how to interpret the things that he knows don't align with what is understood as safe. Ultimately, the cause of their clear disagreement of each other's perception of their relationship can be narrowed down to the intersection of Holden's gender and age; Holden is still stuck in a state of in-betweenness as he enters this period of change and is forced to make decisions about his gender performance that conflict with his personal ideal of embodiment. In this moment, he exemplifies immature masculinity but is on the right path toward the inevitable dysfunctional masculinity that Mr. Antolini is attempting to steer him away from.

This is partially what Mr. Antolini is suggesting when he says "The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one" (207-208). Referring back to what we know about Allie—that he personifies a performance of gender that is only socially plausible during childhood and that he is literally unable to live as he is—Mr. Antolini is asking Holden to commit to the transition into adulthood and let go of his childish obsessions. In other words, innocence will be the cause that Holden will eventually die for if he continues to live as he is now.

Holden's inability to grapple with all of the messages about masculinity he has accumulated throughout the novel switches into crisis mode when ignited by a model of maleness that

contradicts them; for the first time, Holden is being spoken to empathetically and in a way that is nurturing and loving, and reacts with fear and rejection. Several scholars have interpreted this scene as a possible example of the sexual abuse that was common in private boarding schools, but I disagree; I interpret this reaction as both a consequence of his socialization and evidence that he propagates certain aspects of it. While it is important to consider why Holden might feel sexually victimized by Mr. Antolini, what is missing from these analyses is a comprehensive understanding of the underlying social structures informing his experience. Based on the information known about Mr. Antolini's rhetoric, I believe that much of the blame for the trauma of this interaction can be placed on the fact that his relationship with masculine socialization has prevented him from developing the necessary tools to interpret male emotional intimacy. To Salinger, through the character of Mr. Antolini, healthy masculinity comes from being able to access and acknowledge a range of human emotions, not just those that are favored on the side of the binary correlating with imperial hegemonic masculinity. Only then, can a man be truly capable of bridging the gap between his internal being and external performance of gender, and live in integrity.

Salinger has every reason to feel this way; according to Shane Salerno's film, *Salinger* (2013), it was very clear to those who knew him that he was deeply troubled by the horrors of war; even his writing came back with a devoted and shell-shocked tone in it. In a letter to Elizabeth Murray, a romantic interest at the time, Salinger writes "I dig my fox-hole down to a cowardly depth. Am scared stiff constantly and can't remember ever having been a civilian" (1944). Based on this recognizable internal shift, it is evident that war had disturbed his mental soundness. In fact, upon his arrival home, he suffered a nervous breakdown. After his release from the hospital, he wrote a short story narrated by Holden Caulfield titled: "I'm Crazy." This is the first

time that Holden is introduced to the world, and considering the timeliness of his creation, we can assume that he is, at least in part, a tool for Salinger to cope with his own mental corruption. Despite his troubles, he signed up for a longer tour of service as a part of the denazification of Germany where he would interrogate those suspected of committing crimes in Nazi Germany. We cannot concretely say what contributed to this decision or whether or not it furthered problems with his mental health, but considering what his life was like afterwards, it is fairly apparent that he was never able to recover from the idealized masculinity that he pursued during the war.

It has been interpreted that, in response to the horrors Salinger was subjected to as a soldier, he sought intimate relationships with much younger women as a projection of his deepest desire to preserve innocence; he may have been unable to redeem his own, but he could act as the protector of their purity. A pattern of relationships with young women continue over the next few decades of his life: Jean Miller, the 14 year old girl he met on the beach of Daytona when he was 30; Claire, the mother of his children, Joyce Maynard, the young writer whom he lived with; and Colleen O'Neill, his third wife who was 40 years younger than he. When he was unable to stop them from growing up and pursuing things like occupational success and sexuality, Salinger responded with anger and resorted to a life of reclusiveness. Salinger becomes obsessed with trying to deal with the emotions of war—his unappeasable sadness of his stolen boyhood—and takes his depression, disaffection, anger at authority, and disgust with sexuality, and puts it into Holden Caulfield. His own feelings may have subsided, but is forever embedded into his character.

So, when Mr. Antolini implies that a man who dies for a cause is not as mature, and thus, not as great of a man as one who lives humbly for one, we can presume that this is largely coming from Salinger's own reflection of how his participation in the U.S.'s attempt to restore the

glorified manhood once supported by the role of the soldier was misguided; this scene is Salinger's dialogue to a younger self concerning his regret to devote his time to less meaningful masculine pursuits. By drawing attention to Mr. Antolini, who emphasizes empathy and interconnectedness among men, a stark antithetical to what is advertised to men during war, Salinger is hinting at the fault in the ways we have been taught to approach masculinity and place value on select expressions.

After having gone through the checklist of a proper masculine socialization and come out unable to ignore or cope with his internal suffering, Salinger's aim is to call attention to the ways men have been given false promises and led to failure by their own social structure: whether it be through the emergence of mass media and popular culture which commodified gender norms, wartime propaganda that glorified soldier masculinity, or the education system that geared men toward a masculinity of racial superiority, class privilege, and the ability to function relying solely on their intellect.

If the key to success and happiness is one's ability become a "mature" individual (501) then it would appear that when under the pressure to satisfy often inconsistent roles, one can only expect that internal tension and struggle for peace is inevitable. It is not practical to assume that men can be "inhuman exploiters in their business life, and loving husbands and fathers at home" (Blanton, 146). If there is ever going to be hope for Holden, there must first be a paradigm shift that alters the way he exists; one that sees his being as inseparable and in harmony.

Conclusion:

“The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves. If an individual is not successful in emotionally crippling himself, he can count on patriarchal men to enact rituals of power that will assault his self-esteem.”

-bell hooks

As a third-wave feminist, I have observed a lot of discussion around the topic of men’s role in feminism. Many think that the only real way cisgender men can be involved in the movement is to support women and use their privilege and platform to uplift women’s voices. I, however, do not find this to be an effective means for change. This allows men to continue occupying space over women and act as their saviors. More importantly, this gives men permission to passively reinforce the roots of gender-based oppression without having to put in real effort toward personal development work. For a feminist movement to be successful, men’s role in it must be in cultivating a masculinity that doesn’t rely on a power-over dynamic. As with all aspects of human identity, those with privilege tend to be seen as neutral. Men are then seen as genderless, and therefore don’t know how to navigate their gender, thus becoming alienated from their own self. Holden’s struggle to discover a healthy, “real” model of maleness is not something that has been lost; we are still attempting to deal with a crisis in masculinity that harms women and gender non-conforming folks in the process of harming themselves.

In the article “Politics of Masculinities,” Michael Messner describes the radical shift that occurred in men’s movements during the 1970s. Specifically, his discussion of the Men’s Liberation Movement recognizes that the masculinities that emerged out of this movement were unique because having brought attention to the burdens placed on men, they moved away from

characteristics of aggression, dominance, and emotionlessness, allowing more freedom to express themselves honestly and openly. This kind of critique of hegemonic masculinity paved way for more men to adopt fluid expressions of gender and deviate from the path of rigid roles. While the movement was certainly not flawless and continued to perpetuate the gender binary, it was a tipping point in the way masculinities were regarded, and was a significant shift away from misogynistic language and overall demonization of femininity. This is just one example of how a paradigm shift has been pursued.

With that, I want to propose that a potential solution to altering the damage of a rigid heteronormative enforcement of gender is to initiate a paradigm shift which starts by collectively recognizing our current forms of patriarchy as harmful to everyone. An important action that I would like to see come out of this shift is recreating the learning environment that young boys are put into. Safety, both physical and emotional, is evidently missing—from Holden’s narrative and the collective narrative. We cannot afford to choose methods of teaching that are insensitive to the diverse ways kids develop if we aim for transformative masculinities to exist; without which, defensive masculinities will thrive and continue to wear down the psychological well-being of both men and women and gender non-conforming people.

Creating a sense of safety is a task that demands a more proactive investment in allowing more diverse images of masculinity to be dispersed to young folks so that boys, from an early age, they are aware and welcoming of healthy modes of gender expression. Targeting the classroom has potential to better support the emotional needs of young boys as they develop. The film “Boys Will Be Men” illustrates how the current set up of education perpetuates the learning gap

between boys and girls. Boys often find they are lagging academically because “boy code” hinders their ability to express their struggles and seek help. Again, it is about establishing new outlets that supports boys in their own, individualized endeavor.

Partially, this also depends on alleviating some of the pressures adult men experience to attain status, occupational/material achievement, and heterosexual rewards. This paradigm shift shouldn't be the sole responsibility of our youth. Holden looks to adult images of maleness for guidance. Had influences like Mr. Thurmer, Mr. Spencer, or his father not outweighed people like Mr. Antolini, maybe he wouldn't have been so spooked by the unfamiliarity of his gender performance. Without this rigid structure of heteronormativity manifested in the older generations, it is more likely that Holden won't feel that he is stuck in this gray area, forcing him to sacrifice genuine human interaction in order to sustain a “true” masculine image to the outside eye.

The way that we have prescribed gender to young boys failed Holden Caulfield, and continues to fail all people still. There are no positive heteronormative images of masculinity and what few images of heteronormative gender that do exist are rigid and strictly enforced; *this* is essentially what makes Holden “crazy”—he simply wants an alternative. Holden is constantly negotiating what is “real” and what is “not real” while at the same time trying to negotiate between “phony” and “authentic.” Unfortunately, what his society deems as being a “real” man means having to compromise one's authenticity.

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