

Garrett Malenko

EN40SL1

December 8, 2017

Ms. Smith

AP  
 Alienation portrayed in Holden's Language in *The Catcher in the Rye*

1950's post-war America contained feelings of freedom and joy due the several "booms" of the decade, including the booming economy and baby boomers (History.com). Technological advancements such as the first credit card and the first commercial computer were introduced (Oxford), and rock and roll was beginning to make its appearance everywhere. However, some adults did not take too kindly to this new style of music, as it was thought to cause juvenile delinquency (Vaillancourt 14). In fact, adults did not like most activities adolescents were participating in, and teens were often marginalized by adults (Powers). This marginalization could lead up to alienation, which is evident in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield's unique vocabulary shows that he lives in a hypocritical society that alienates adolescents. Therefore, Holden attempts to make his voice heard by using repetition, reinforcement of the truth, and slang, but is unable to do so. ✓

American adults of the 1950's did not want to be bothered with the different values of teens. As a result, teens were often punished for acts that included using slang, talking about taboo subjects such as sex and drugs, and even for wearing jeans in public (Powers). Due to his innate use of slang, Holden is subjected to alienation. Not only did slang bother most adults of the time due to its unclear meanings, but it was also seen as offensive "in the eyes of the status quo" (Powers). Holden also finds himself in the sights of alienation because he talks openly about topics that are considered taboo by the society he lives in. Specifically, Holden is very curious about sex and women, but "there was an alarm about teens

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Actually, it fell off due to poor stapling...

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dating and 'heavy petting.' Any talk about sex was taboo and could be punishable." (Powers). He is often disregarded by older figures due to his need to ask questions, as seen when his interaction with Carl Luce is "made unbearable by his rude behaviour" (Chen) when Holden asks Luce about his sex life. At this moment, Luce tells Holden to drop the topic, (147) yet Holden claims that when they went to school together, Luce would pressure classmates into giving up personal information (147). This is an example of how the society that Holden lives in is hypocritical towards adolescents. Consequently, Holden wants to be heard in a way that is strong and dignified so he is not frowned upon for being a teen.

As an attempt to be heard, Holden repeats himself many times throughout the novel. He strives for clarity but often achieves the opposite by adding alternate meanings to his words and phrases. For instance, Holden only uses a miniscule amount of adjectives, which ends up in them having no logical meaning or correlation to the term they are describing. Costello states in his essay that "most of the nouns which are called 'stupid' could not by any logical framework be ignorant." This is a result of Holden using "stupid" to describe nouns such as a hill, a towel, and even life. Another example of this is when Holden uses "old" when mentioning people. Instead of "old" having something to do with age, it is used in a sense that recognizes the familiarity that Holden has with a certain person (Costello). If the reader does not pick up on this, they may be led to believe that everyone Holden interacts with is old. More examples of this are the times when Holden directly repeats himself. In this case, Holden uses repetition to reinforce his truthfulness. This can be seen when Holden makes side comments to the reader when talking about his little sister, Phoebe. To ensure that the reader believes him he states "She can be very snotty sometimes. She can be quite snotty." (167). Holden also reinforces his truthfulness by reiterating the fact that he is not lying. He is afraid that adults, including the reader, will not believe his stories since he is an adolescent, so he adds phrases such as "it really is" (147) and "it really did" (90) when speaking to them. Holden specifically does this because he is aware of the "phoniness" and hypocrisy of the adult world, and does not want to slip into this himself (Costello). A more prominent

phrase that Holden tends to use to state his truthfulness is "if you want to know the truth." He uses this in many different instances when speaking to the reader, starting from the very beginning of the novel when he chooses not to describe his past life (1), up until the end when he does not know what to think about the story that he told the reader (214). However, there is a slight amount of doubt that accompanies this phrase each time Holden uses it, as it is apparent that in his world, very few people want to know the truth (Costello). Similarly, Holden uses slang to capture the attention of adults, because slang is seen as risky and offensive, protesting is an effective way to get attention. ✓

Holden's use of slang, especially towards adults, indicates that he is trying to bring out his voice in a world that alienates him, and grab the attention of adults. However, through this slang he is unable to clearly explain what he means when speaking. For example, Holden uses the term "crap" a total of seven different ways (Costello). He uses it to mean "messy matter" or "animal excreta" or just "anything generally unfavourable" (Costello). Also, Holden uses "crap" to represent general nonsense talk, when he wants to "shoot the crap" with someone. These several meanings lead up to an overall failure to precisely communicate (Costello). It is evident that Holden recognizes that he is being alienated and ignored because he uses dangling phrases at the ends of his sentences, such as "and all", "or something" and "or anything." These short phrases imply that Holden is aware that more could be said, but he chooses not to continue speaking (Costello). A certain ambiguity could be assigned to these expressions since Holden knows there is more to say, but he continues to choose to not utilize his voice (Jing). Holden's slang is a slight protest towards the adults who alienate him, but his protest is not effective as it only gives more reasons for adults to disregard his opinions. ✓

By using repetition, reinforcement of the truth, and slang, Holden attempts to make his voice heard in a society that alienates adolescents. However, he is unable to do so, and ends up feeling lonely and depressed during his time in New York, one of the busiest cities in the world. No matter what he does, Holden's voice is never brought out, as adolescence is often regarded as a time of rebellion

(Powers), and the best way to counter rebellion is to ignore it. Instead of ignoring teens, attention should be brought to them, and their ideas should be accepted and contemplated. It is important that today's society does not ostracize any particular age group, but rather empathize with each and every person that desires their voice to be heard.

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## Explaining Your Writing Variables

Identify your choices for the five writing variables for your writing task

Central Idea: Adolescents, including Holden Caulfield, may feel alienated in the society they live in

Form: expository essay

Purpose: To inform adults that adolescents feel alienated, and attempt to be heard

Audience: Adults who have a negative opinion on teens

Context: In a highschool and junior high office

**Explain how your choices for the writing variables work together to make your text effective.**

5 marks

110

By utilizing the form of an expository essay, I will be able to inform adults that adolescents feel alienated and attempt to be heard because of the several examples that I can use. I am able to provide proof from "The Catcher in the Rye" and other recognizable sources that show that Holden Caulfield uses vulgarity, slang, and repetition to capture the attention of adults because he feels alienated. Adults who have a negative opinion on teens will be interested in my essay because it will allow them to become more open-minded, and perhaps realize that teens might only act a certain way to get their attention. My essay will cause these adults to become more aware of how they interact with teenagers, and they will also be able to empathize with teens. The context for my essay should be important to my audience because if adults go into a school office, they might be there to pick up a student, or they might just have to interact with students. Since these adults may have a negative opinion on adolescents, they might try to avoid interactions, and therefore pick up my essay to read. After reading my essay, these adults will have a different opinion on teens and the reason why they act and speak a certain way. As a result, adults will be more inclusive towards teens, and there may be a decrease in slang, vulgarity, and repetition among teens.

## Formal Outline

- I. **Thesis statement** – Holden's unique vocabulary shows that he lives in a hypocritical society that alienates adolescents. As a result, Holden tries to make his voice heard by using vulgarity, slang, and repetition, but fails.
- II. **Topic sentence** – In the 1950's, adults did not want to be bothered with the different values of teens. As a result, teens were often punished for using slang, talking about taboo subjects such as sex, and even for wearing jeans in public.
- a. Holden consistently uses slang to transmit his ideas, which adults dislike.
- i. - Slang bothered most adults, it was seen as offensive "in the eyes of the status quo" (Powers)
- b. Holden talks about sex, and not understanding it. He wants to learn more so he asks people such as Stradlater and Luce, but they know that it is taboo to talk about it, and therefore disregard his questions.
- i. "Alarm about teens dating and 'heav petting'. Any talk about sex was taboo and could be punishable" (Powers)  
"His conversation with Carl Luce... are made unbearable by his rude behaviour" (Chen)
- \*Transition sentence** – Consequently, Holden wants to be heard by adults and not frowned upon for being a teen.

- III. **Topic sentence** – Holden's tendency to repeat himself shows that he wants to be clear to adults, but sometimes he ends up using the meanings of the statements.
- a. Holden uses a certain amount of choice adjectives and adverbs that he constantly repeats. This ends up in them having no logical meaning or correlation to the term they are describing.
- i. "Most of the nouns which are called 'stupid' could not in any logical framework be ignorant." (Costello)  
"Old before a proper noun has nothing to do with age" (Costello)
- b. Holden directly repeats himself many times as if to clarify his statement and to enforce his truthfulness.
- i. "She likes me a lot, I mean she's quite fond of me." (141)  
"She can be very snotty sometimes. She can be quite snotty" (150)

- \*Transition sentence** – Similarly Holden uses slang to capture the attention of adults, because slang is seen as risky and offensive.

- IV. **Topic sentence** – Holden's use of slang, especially towards adults, indicates that he is trying to bring his voice out, and grab the attention of adults. However, through this so many different ways slang he is unable to transfer a clear meaning. that it becomes unclear as to what he means each time.
- a. Holden's 'crap' is used in seven different ways.  
his slang "often fails at precise communication"
- b. Holden recognizes that he is being alienated and ignored because he uses dangling phrases such as "and all", "or something", and "or anything".
- i. "they signify that Holden knows there is more that could be said about the issue at hand, but he is not going to bother going into it" (Costello)  
"This expression was ambiguous, as if there was still something to say" (Jing)
- \*Transition sentence** – Also, since Holden believes that adults do not trust him, he constantly insists that he is telling the truth, to gain their trust.