



A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into Holden's Psychological Maturation in *The Catcher in the Rye*: A Freudian Tripartite Perspective

Yao Huang*

Faculty of Foreign Languages, Lijiang Culture and Tourism College, Lijiang, China

Received

2026-1-19

Accepted

2026-2-23

Published

2026-2-28

Corresponding Author

Yao Huang*

Email: 3314523329@qq.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65192/8kqwvr55>

Copyright 2026 by author(s)

This is an open-access article under the [CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).



Abstract

Based on Sigmund Freud's tripartite model of personality—the id, ego and superego—this article provides a psychoanalytic examination of the psychological development of Holden, the protagonist of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Through a close reading of Holden's internal conflicts, behavioral patterns and emotional fluctuations, this study traces his trajectory from defiant rebellion toward a fragile, emergent maturity as he navigates the tensions between self-discovery and social alienation. The analysis further considers how familial dynamics, societal expectations, and personal experiences collectively shape Holden's psychological growth, illustrating the interpretive utility of Freud's structural theory in literary character analysis. By integrating psychoanalytic frameworks with textual interpretation, this research not only deepens our understanding of Salinger's novel and its complex protagonist but also contributes to broader discussions on adolescent identity formation, personality integration, and the relationship between literary representation and psychological inquiry, which can offer a nuanced perspective that may inform future work in literary criticism and developmental psychology. This approach not only enhances our comprehension of *The Catcher in the Rye* and its complex protagonist, but also enriches our understanding of adolescent psychological progression, personality development, and the intricate interplay between literature and social psychology. Ultimately, this study can offer novel perspectives and insights that may inform future research in these interconnected domains.

Keywords

Freud's theory of Personality Structure; *The Catcher in the Rye*; Holden's psychological growth; Adolescent development

1. Introduction

With the objective of deepening comprehension of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and enriching our appreciation of the complexity of Holden's nature, Holden's experiences, as a narrative analysis that encapsulates the critical components of adolescent psychological maturation, will offer universal insights into the psychological needs of modern adolescents. This study proposes an interdisciplinary approach that synthesizes literary analysis with Freud's theory of personality structure to conduct a thorough examination of Holden's psychological maturation. Therefore, it aims to furnish novel theoretical insights and interpretative frameworks for comprehending this quintessential literary character. Furthermore, this research is aimed to advance the interaction between literature and psychology, thereby fostering a deeper

understanding of the intrinsic connections that exist between literary works and psychological theories. This integration is poised to enhance collaborative scholarship and encourage a symbiotic relationship between the two disciplines. Meanwhile, this exploration will help to obtain a far-reaching theoretical and practical value for optimizing the practical strategies of mental health education and promoting the comprehensive development of modern adolescent.

2. Literature Review

The figure of Holden in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* has commanded sustained critical attention across decades, with scholars interrogating his psychological complexity through a heterogeneous array of theoretical lenses. Early criticism delineated a foundational interpretive arc, casting Holden's psychological growth as a passage from confusion to clarity, defiance to comprehension, and evasion to confrontation. Zhaoen (2010) was among the first to codify this progression, framing Holden's psychological evolution as a coherent, stage-like transformation. Building on this groundwork, Tian (2011, 2014) identified dual motivational currents underpinning his maturation: an initial impulse to repudiate and flee the perceived hypocrisy of the adult sphere, and a more abiding drive toward innocence, humanistic authenticity and self-actualization. Concurrently, Tai (2012) turned to narrative stylistics, demonstrating how Salinger's variegated discursive strategies not merely reflect but performatively instantiate Holden's interior dissonance. Wu (2012) contributed an affective counterpart, positing love as both a psychological anchor and a catalyst for emotional development.

Subsequent scholarship advanced increasingly specialized psychoanalytic and humanistic readings. Wei (2015) drew upon humanistic psychology to frame Holden's psychological transformation as a dialectical process of self-actualization, foregrounding the psychic impediments that must be negotiated in the pursuit of personal meaning. Zhao (2016) examined the existential topography of Holden's interiority, interpreting his anxieties and evasions not as pathological aberrations but as constitutive features of adolescent identity formation. In a related vein, Chen and Wang (2018) deployed a tripartite ethical framework to interrogate Holden's disillusionment and latent redemptive impulses, positing his interpersonal estrangement and self-negation as symptomatic of a more profound ethical dislocation. Jiang (2019) advanced a temporal hermeneutic, characterizing Holden as an "anachronistic" subject whose misalignment with contemporaneous social rhythms betokens a deeper ideological dissonance. Li and Sun (2019) illuminated the unique value of *The Catcher in the Rye* as an anti-growth narrative through their examination of its backdrop and characterization.

More recent interventions have introduced systemic and socio-cognitive paradigms. Peng and Xiao (2020) mobilized family systems theory to interpret Holden's psychological fragmentation as an internalization of familial dysfunction and social incoherence. Liu (2024) reaffirmed the novel's enduring relevance by directing analytic attention to its textured representation of adolescent affective life—its intricate interleaving of longing, ambivalence, and existential indeterminacy. Collectively, this corpus converges on a recognition of Holden's psychological trajectory as one defined not by linear progression but by recursive negotiation: between innocence and experience, isolation and connection, refusal and yearning. These studies collectively underscore the centrality of aesthetic sensibility, ethical reflexivity, and the quest for intelligibility in shaping the architecture of psychological maturation.

Parallel advancements in international scholarship have situated Holden's psychic constitution within broader cultural and philosophical matrices. Wang and Zhang (2010) advanced an

ecocritical interpretation, construing Holden's reverence for childhood purity as a symbolic reclamation of natural order and an implicit indictment of postwar American consumerism. Srebren Dizdar and Alpaslan Toker (2012) examined Holden's alienation through a sociological prism, analyzing his detachment from familial, pedagogical, and institutional apparatuses as a modality of existential estrangement. Sorour Karampour Dashti and Ida Baizura Binti Bahar (2015) introduced a Foucauldian analytic, reframing Holden's rebellious postures as tactical resistance against disciplinary power and normative subjectivation. More recently, Bing Hu, Qianqian Chen, and Yuqian Liu (2024) proffered a diagnostic reading of Holden's psychic atrophy, identifying the commercialization of belief, the erosion of collective values, and the fragmentation of social bonds as interrelated vectors of spiritual decline. Their analysis invites reconsideration of Holden's condition not merely as individual pathology but as a symptom of broader cultural entropy. Drawing on Fromm's alienation theory and Marx's conception of human nature, Lei and Zhang (2024) trace Holden's psychological dislocation to the institutional hypocrisy and commodified human relations that render him a "stranger to himself". Song (2025) extends sociocultural criticism by examining how Salinger's lyrical strategies—first-person narration, symbolic imagery, and rhythmically charged language—transform Holden's alienation into a poetic articulation of adolescent spiritual crisis. Shifting the critical gaze from sociocultural symptomatology to intrapsychic structure, recent Lacanian scholarship reinterprets Holden's narrative as a trauma response rather than mere adolescent rebellion (Javanbakht, Borzabadi Farahani, & Moradi, 2025).

Notwithstanding the interpretive breadth of extant scholarship, the preponderance of studies has tended to locate the determinants of Holden's psychological conflicts in exogenous factors—social hypocrisy, familial dysfunction, or ethical rupture. While such perspectives have yielded significant insights, they have largely elided systematic engagement with the intrapsychic architecture that structures Holden's subjective experience. Few studies have undertaken a sustained psychoanalytic investigation of the dynamic interplay among id, ego and superego as it manifests in Holden's affective responses, defensive operations, and symbolic investments. The present study addresses this lacuna by advancing a Freudian tripartite analysis of Holden's psychological maturation. It contends that Holden's characteristic dispositions—rebellious impulsivity, pervasive guilt and idealized longing for stasis and innocence—are not merely reactive behaviors or thematic motifs but rather expressions of an underlying psychic economy governed by unconscious conflict and compromise formation. By reconceptualizing Holden's developmental trajectory through the structural logic of Freudian metapsychology, this research seeks to illuminate the latent architecture of his psychic conflicts and the symbolic resolutions that the narrative both stages and subverts. In doing so, it aims not to displace extant sociocultural readings but to supplement them with a more nuanced account of the intrapsychic mechanisms through which external pressures are metabolized and subjectively experienced.

3. Findings

3.1 The Manifestation and Conflict of Holden's Id

As the most primitive and unadulterated instinctual drive within the personality in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden's id dominates his behavioral patterns, logical thinking and emotional experiences, profoundly influencing his perspective toward the world what happens around him (Dashti & Bahar, 2015), a core psychic force that underpins his resistance against the normative constraints of adult society.

Holden's id represent the unbridled desires and impulses from the bottom of his heart which frequently against societal norms and moral standards. On one hand, his rebellious nature is a direct externalization of id forces, manifested in his profound loathing and relentless challenge of the adult world's veneer of hypocrisy. Through truancy, lies, and sarcasm towards teachers and peers, Holden acts out his dissatisfaction and rebellion against the established order. On the other hand, the awakening of Holden's sexual consciousness is also a significant manifestation of his id, particularly in his complex feelings towards his sister Phoebe, where hints of an inexplicable sexual attraction intertwine, further intensifying his internal conflict.

In Holden's psychological landscape, the id holds unchallenged sway, leading not only to extreme rebelliousness in his actions but also to a profound identity crisis in his thinking (Dizdar & Toker, 2012), a key symptom of his existential alienation from the adult world and its core values. He harbors a fantasy of being a "catcher in the rye", a guardian who shields innocent children from the moral corruption of adulthood, yet this idealized vision faces an insurmountable divide when confronted with harsh reality (Dizdar & Toker, 2012), a stark contrast that exacerbates his adolescent sense of disillusionment and isolation. Upon spotting the graffiti "Fuck you" on the stairwell wall in the headmaster's office, Holden becomes concerned that his sister and other children might witness it (p420). This sight subconsciously provokes his anger and prompts a desire to remove the offensive language. He hesitated because he was afraid of a passing teacher might misconstrue him as the perpetrator, however, despite his apprehensions, Holden decides to eliminate the swear words, driven by his aim to safeguard the innocence and charm of the children's heart. Exactly, Holden's profound affection for Phoebe coexists with anxiety over her inevitable growth into an adult world he deems false. At the same time, his attitudes towards the external world are fraught with contradictions, abhorring their hypocrisy yet unable to sever ties, reflecting a state of profound inner struggle and confusion.

Despite the overwhelming power and conspicuous contradictions of Holden's id, it undeniably plays a pivotal role in his psychological development trajectory (Peng & Xiao, 2020), serving as an initial impetus for growth that stems from the internalization of familial dysfunction and social incoherence. Primely, the rebellious nature of the id stimulates Holden's profound reflection and questioning of existing social norms and moral standards which become the ideological foundation for his subsequent growth and prompting him to seek a more authentic and meaningful life. Then, the impulses and desires of the id expose Holden to the complexities of life firsthand. In his pursuit of personal fulfillment and happiness, he encounters numerous setbacks and failures, which deepen his understanding of human vulnerability and limitations, fostering acceptance of his imperfections and seeking self-reconciliation. When Holden is watching the Little Rockettes' performance, he greatly appreciate the performers' smoothly skill, but he blames his bad mood for the show he disliked instead of blaming hypocritical world where he stand in (p353)—an impulsive emotional response that reveals his initial inability to rationalize his discontent with the external world. In addition, the driving force of the id acts as a catalyst in Holden's psychological maturation, guiding him toward emotional maturity amid pain and confusion. He begins to recognize his inherent responsibilities and life missions, adopting a more mature and rational approach to life's challenges and difficulties. Concurrently, he learns to tolerate the flaws of others and embrace human diversity while preserving his own individuality and uniqueness, ultimately striving to find his rightful place within the intricate fabric of society.

3.2 The Struggle and Adjustment of Holden's Ego

Confronted with multifaceted pressures emanating from the family, school and society, Holden navigates numerous trials and adversities, all of which exacerbate the psychological fragmentation rooted in his experience of familial and social incoherence. It is the arduous inner struggle he endures that allows him to undergo a cocoon-like metamorphosis, ultimately attaining a state of self-transcendence and profound psychological transformation (Peng & Xiao, 2020)—a psychic evolution involving the gradual integration of his fragmented inner world shaped by external dysfunction.

Holden's ego, as the mediator between the impulsive id and the restrictive superego, confronts unprecedented challenges within the narrative (Wang, 2022), for such inner strife essentially stems from the constant game between instinctual rebellion and moral constraint in his adolescent years. Holden's disdain for success serves as a satirical critique of the prevailing societal values. On the one hand, the id's impetus propels him to yearn for liberation from reality's shackles, seeking unfettered freedom and instant gratification. Conversely, the superego's moral compass incessantly reminds him of societal norms and the responsibilities he ought to uphold. This internal dichotomy and conflict sway Holden precariously between the scales of reality and ideal, plunging him into profound turmoil. Such mediation presupposes a subject who can recognize his desires as his own and engage moral claims from a position of interiority. Drawing on Fromm's framework, Lei and Zhang (2024) argue that postwar American society systematically undermines this subjective ground, reducing individuals to "objects" who "do not regard themselves as the subjects of their own actions, as thinking, feeling, loving persons, but become objects, the embodiments of their own externalized forces" (p. 3). When Holden can no longer experience himself as the agent of his psychic life, his desires manifest as alien compulsions, moral standards register as hollow hypocrisies, and the social world offers no stable terrain for authentic engagement. His persistent inability to forge sustainable compromises between id impulses and superego constraints thus reflects not merely individual psychopathology but a social order that systematically erodes the foundations of authentic selfhood.

Holden's disdain for educational institutions, his rejection of the hypocrisy in the adult world, and his profound yearning for a world of innocence vividly illustrate the intense collision between the desires of id and moral imperatives of superego. At the age of sixteen, he was compelled to articulate his discontent and defiance through the act of running away (Peng & Xiao, 2020). Holden transitions from one educational institution to another, ultimately journeying from Pencey school to New York City. Furthermore, he harbors aspirations of fleeing from New York to an unspecified location in the West, embodying a perpetual state of being "on the road". These behaviors are juxtaposed against his profound love and sense of responsibility towards his family, particularly his sister Phoebe, preventing him from severing ties with reality entirely. This intricate and inherently contradictory psychological state permeates the entire narrative, a core feature of his ego's struggle to balance competing psychic and external demands.

After a series of life events and internal struggles, Holden's self-consciousness gradually awakens and matures, a key development in his adolescent affective life emerging from the intricate interleaving of longing, ambivalence, and existential indeterminacy. He comes to realize that mere escapism and rebellion cannot fundamentally resolve issues, potentially plunging him into deeper despair (Liu, 2024)—a critical insight that marks his move beyond the existential indeterminacy defining his early adolescent psyche. After sneaking back home

stealthily, Holden's heartfelt conversation with his sister Phoebe serves as a warm current that soothes his troubled heart. Through this intimate interaction, Holden experiences a form of redemptive affection that he has long been deprived of. Phoebe consistently shows sincere and unwavering concern for him, from which Holden derives a profound sense of trust and emotional encouragement. Phoebe implicitly conveys a timeless message: no matter where his journey takes him, his family will always remain his unwavering pillar of support and emotional harbor. This profound familial bond instills in Holden an unprecedented sense of peace and warmth, which in turn prompts a fundamental shift in his attitudes and core values toward life, one that effectively alleviates the lingering ambivalence and longing in his adolescent emotional experience.

He gradually recognizes that growth does not entail continuing escaping from what makes he uncomfortable but rather bravely pursuing one's beliefs while try his best to understanding and accepting anything cannot be changed. This transformation signifies a qualitative leap in Holden's self-consciousness and helps Holden learns to confront reality with a more mature and rational mindset. In contemporary democratic societies, absolute authority is absent; instead, those who can instruct us something useful play a crucial role in assisting young individuals in overcome obstacles and giving advice on major choice at crossroads, thereby fostering the youth into mature adults.

Holden's reflections on his self-adjustment process have been a profound and positive implication for his psychological variation which prompt him to form an ideology of self-acceptance and self-improvement. He resolutely rejects the tendency to turn a blind eye to harsh reality; instead, he adopts a more open and inclusive mindset to comprehend and embrace the diverse experiences around him (Wu, 2012), a shift in perspective stemming from his experience of authentic interpersonal love and emotional resonance. As Holden recalled the two months he lived with Harris Macklim, Holden called him "biggest bores"(p339) and he firmly believed that Macklim was an exactly irritating individual who often shouting with a very raspy voice. However, deep down, Holden admired Macklim's melodious whistling, even though Holden never told Macklim in front him that "You're a terrific whistler"(p340). Such a subtle shift in mindset and emotional perception signals his significant maturation amid arduous ego struggles. Furthermore, Holden's awakening self-consciousness fosters a heightened awareness of the importance of considering others' emotional needs and perspectives—a key outcome of the emotional development driven by genuine human connection and love.

3.3 The Struggle and Pursuit of Holden's Superego

Under the intricate framework of Freud's theory of personality structure, the superego presents the key to moral principles and aspirational pursuits, occupying a pivotal position. It serves not only as the guardian of one's internal moral standards but also as the internalized manifestation of behavioral norms shaped by societal and familial education. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, the evolutionary journey of Holden's superego constitutes a profound exploration of moral steadfastness and inner self-discovery, in which arduous struggles and lofty pursuits are inextricably intertwined. This journey reveals the intricate tapestry of his adolescent psyche, exerts a profound influence on his psychological growth trajectory (Wang & Zhang, 2010), and embodies a symbolic reclamation of natural order and childhood purity in opposition to postwar American consumerism.

Holden Caulfield, a young man often labeled as rebellious and unmanageable by societal standards, possesses a deep-rooted moral compass that contradicts his outward appearance. His

profound aversion to insincerity, alongside his passionate quest for authenticity and purity, highlights the ethical values that are integral to his character. Holden does not conform to the traditional image of a hero. Instead, he admires those who quietly safeguard the innocence of children, thus shielding them from the inevitable moral corruption that adulthood can bring. This relentless pursuit of purity and virtue is perhaps the most brilliant facet of Holden's moral framework.

However, the significant gap between his lofty ideals and the harsh reality of life often leads him to experience a tormenting sense of moral disintegration. He is constantly grappling with the complexities of a world rife with deception, hypocrisy, and superficiality, a struggle that ultimately fosters his profound disillusionment with adult society (Dizdar & Toker, 2012) and engenders a deep sense of disenchantment, one that reinforces his status as an existential alien within the society he inhabits. The pervasive hypocrisy and emotional detachment in the adult world further intensify his inner psychological struggles, leaving him feeling increasingly isolated and misunderstood by those around him. Holden's hostility toward institutions such as Pencey, museums, and Broadway shows embodies his perception of them as "apparatuses of symbolic foreclosure" that enforce homogenization and emotional dissociation (Javanbakht et al., 2025). Yet this resistance paradoxically reinscribes the very norms he disavows: his longing for authenticity remains a culturally mediated ideal, and his rebellious discourse remains structured by the symbolic order he seeks to escape. As he is immersed in turbulent and conflicting emotions, Holden's journey serves as a poignant exploration of the universal challenges faced by those who seek genuine human connection in an often insincere and alienating world, one where readers who have personally grappled with the inherent tension between childhood innocence and the harsh truths of adulthood can find profound emotional resonance.

The development of Holden's superego propels him to explore his self-identity and awaken a strong sense of personal and familial responsibility (Chen & Wang, 2018), a process involving the reconstruction of his ethical framework and the emergence of redemptive impulses that counter his earlier interpersonal estrangement and self-negation. Through continuous self-examination and interaction with the external world, he endeavors to find his place and standards amidst the chaos in the mainstream values. His impregnable protection for his younger sister embodies his familial sense of responsibility which marks a significant milestone in the consciousness of superego. Simultaneously, Holden recognizes his sacred duty as a member of society, even though that often leaves him perplexed and powerless. His aspiration to insist justice and protect the vulnerable serves as a moral compass guiding his actions.

Holden's superego exerts a profound and far-reaching influence on his psychological growth trajectory (Wei, 2015), which constitutes a dialectical process of self-actualization involving the negotiation of psychic impediments in the pursuit of personal meaning and moral authenticity. On the one hand, the moral ideals and self-expectations within his superego serve as an internal driving force, impelling him to shun hypocrisy and pursue authenticity and beauty. This positive impetus, to some extent, alleviates Holden's negative sentiments towards reality, fostering his love and anticipation for life. On the other hand, the intense conflict between superego and id plunges Holden into profound inner turmoil. While he yearns to adhere to the moral principles of his superego, the primal impulses and desires of his id often leave him in a dilemma. This internal contradiction and struggle propel Holden towards continuous self-reflection and growth, ultimately enabling him to gain a clearer understanding of his authentic needs and values, laying a solid foundation for his psychological maturity.

In short, through the theoretical framework of Freud's tripartite personality structure, Holden's

superego is revealed as a psychic realm forged by unwavering moral resolve, a profound quest for self-identity, and the arduous navigation of intense inner conflicts. This intricate, progressive developmental process stands as a microcosm of his personal psychological maturation and yields invaluable insights into the complex inner lives of adolescent youth as they navigate the turbulent transition from childhood to adulthood.

4. Discussion

Through the lens of Freud's theory of personality structure and a series of experiences and introspective monologues, it will focus on unveiling the profound revelations concerning the psychological maturation of Holden, amidst his teenage turmoil and confusion, exemplifies how a nascent psyche navigates the complexities and dynamics of the world (Wei, 2015). This journey not only constitutes a reflective review of Holden's personal evolution but also presents an insightful and innovative exploration into the realms of contemporary education, emotional ecology and the cultivation of psychological resilience.

Holden's story serves as a mirror, reflecting the neglect and suppression of individuality within traditional educational systems (Javanbakht et al., 2025). His rebellion is a silent protest against standardized, homogenized educational models. It begs the question: Should education serve as a mold that shapes uniformity or as a beacon that illuminates the unique souls of each student? Consequently, the call for personalized education grows louder. It advocates for tailored instruction that respects and ignites the inherent potential of every learner, transforming education into a journey of self-discovery and self-actualization. In such an environment, Holden might find his own field of rye, no longer lost in adolescence.

Holden's loneliness and yearning poignantly expose the emotional alienation prevalent in modern society (Liu, 2024). Amidst the fast-paced, high-stress lifestyles, people often overlook the significance of emotional exchange and resonance. Yet, these seemingly insignificant emotional supports form the solid foundation for individual psychological growth. We must recognize that emotional support transcends mere comfort and encouragement; it embodies profound understanding and acceptance. It necessitates learning to listen, to empathize, and to touch the lonely souls with warmth in our daily lives. Only then can we foster an environment imbued with love and care for Holden and his peers, nurturing their growth with warm emotional environment.

Holden's vulnerability in the face of adversity underscores the importance of cultivating psychological resilience (Peng & Xiao, 2020). This resilience, akin to a mental armor, shields us from the storms of life. However, it is not an innate gift but a result of relentless training and refinement. The ego's struggle to balance competing psychic demands illuminates how this process of developing resilience unfolds (Wang, 2022). It is necessary to integrate the cultivation of psychological resilience into our educational systems, utilizing curricula and practical activities to guide students in confronting challenges, pushing themselves, and transcending limits. Furthermore, we must pay close attention to students' mental health, promptly identifying and intervening in potential issues, offering necessary psychological support and assistance. In this way, we can nurture a new generation of talented and resilient young people, empowering them to forge ahead fearlessly on their life's journey.

In conclusion, Holden's psychological growth journey offers invaluable insights: relentless pursuit of personalized education, transmission of warmth and strength through emotional support, and honing of unwavering resilience (Tian, 2014). These insights not only provide a

profound interpretation of *The Catcher in the Rye* but also constitute an innovative contemplation and practice regarding modern education, emotional ecology, and the cultivation of psychological resilience in order to contribute to the healthy development of adolescents.

5. Conclusion

This study delved into the intricate psychological landscape of Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of J.D. Salinger's seminal novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, through the lens of Sigmund Freud's Theory of Personality Structure. This exploration has illuminated not only the complexities of Holden's character but also the profound insights that Freud's theory offers into understanding human psychology and its developmental trajectories.

Initially, Holden is largely governed by his id, manifesting in his impulsive behaviors, rebellious nature, and unchecked desires. His disregard for societal norms and conventions reflects a deep-seated dissatisfaction with the adult world, where he perceives hypocrisy and phoniness at every turn. However, as the narrative progresses, Holden's ego gradually emerges as a moderating force, seeking to balance the conflicting demands of the id and superego. His encounters with various characters, particularly the adults he encounters during his journey, challenge his preconceptions and force him to confront his own vulnerabilities and insecurities. This process of confrontation and reflection triggers a significant shift in his psyche, as he begins to recognize the limitations of his id-driven existence and the importance of developing a sense of self-awareness and responsibility.

In the framework of Freud's tripartite theory of personality, Holden's superego, which is initially weak and indistinct, gradually solidifies through his interactions with idealized figures, particularly his sister Phoebe, who symbolizes innocence and purity. Phoebe's impact on Holden, along with his reflective self-examination, facilitates the maturation of his internal superego, thereby cultivating empathy, compassion, and an emergent aspiration to protect the innocence of others. This metamorphosis represents a significant milestone in Holden's psychological development, as he transitions from a self-absorbed outlook to one that prioritizes the welfare of others.

Ultimately, our examination of Holden's psychological evolution within Freud's theoretical framework elucidates the journey of a young individual navigating a complex and often perplexing world in search of his identity. Through the application of Freud's theory, we discern the interaction among Holden's id, ego and superego as he grapples with the tribulations of adolescence and the stark realities of adulthood. Despite the pervasive uncertainty and distress that characterize Holden's narrative, these experiences catalyze a deeper comprehension of both himself and the surrounding world. It points out that the story of Holden's rebellious experience has transcended the realm of personal experience and profoundly mapped the collective psychological state of a generation of adolescents. His upbringing and inner changes provide us with valuable insights and deepen our understanding of the psychological changes inherent in adolescence.

In conclusion, the application of Freud's personality structure theory to J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* provides a nuanced and enlightening perspective on Holden's psychological transformation. By scrutinizing the dynamic interactions among his id, ego, and superego, we acquire a more profound understanding of the complexities of human psychology and the transformative potential of self-reflection and personal development. Consequently, this analysis affirms the enduring significance of Freud's theoretical contributions and the timeless res-

onance of Salinger's literary work.

Funding

There is no funding to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The author(s) declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Ethics Statement

Not applicable.

References

- Chen, X. Y., & Wang, Y. J. (2018). Interpreting Holden's loss and return from three ethical relationships. *Home of Drama*, 28(6), 194-195.
- Dashti, S. K., & Bahar, I. B. B. (2015). Resistance as madness in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(3), 457-462.
- Dizdar, S., & Toker, A. (2012). Holden Caulfield: Alien in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Dil Ve Edebiyat Egitimi Dergisi*, 1(2), 71-82.
- Hu, B., Chen, Q., & Liu, Y. (2024). The spiritual pollution in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Overseas English Teaching: Pedagogy and Research*, 6(1), 1-7.
- Javanbakht, H., Borzabadi Farahani, H., & Moradi, H. (2025). Tension between symbolic and imaginary and trauma in *Catcher in the Rye*. *International Journal of Foreign Language Teaching and Research*, 13(54), 189-202. <https://doi.org/10.71962/jfl-2025-1206138>
- Jiang, Y. (2019). *Holden: An anachronistic protagonist* [Master's thesis, East China Normal University].
- Lei, Z. X., & Zhang, C. (2024). Returning to human nature: An interpretation of the alienation theme in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *English Square*, (10), 69-73. <https://doi.org/10.16723/j.cnki.yyg.2024.10.024>.
- Li, J., & Sun, Y. (2019). Returning to confusion: An interpretation of anti-growth narrative in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Journal of Anhui Vocational & Technical College*, 18(4), 45-49.
- Liu, S. C. (2024). Youth Writing and Growth Narrative in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Journal of Baicheng Normal University*, 38(1), 81-85.
- Peng, F. L., & Xiao, H. (2020). An analysis of Holden's dual inner world in *The Catcher in the Rye*: From the perspective of family system theory. *Journal of Xi'an International Studies University*, 28(1), 125-128. <https://doi.org/10.16362/j.cnki.cn61-1457/h.2020.01.024>
- Salinger, J. D. (2022). *The Catcher in the Rye*. Yilin Press; Nanjing, China.
- Song, X. (2025). Holden's alienation and resistance in *The Catcher in the Rye*: On Salinger's poetic writing of modern adolescents' spiritual crisis. *MZ Reading and Writing*, 35(55). <https://doi.org/10.20273/j.cnki.mzxs.2025.35.055>
- Tai, X. N. (2012). *The growth theme in The Catcher in the Rye from the perspective of narrative style* [Master's thesis, Yunnan University].
- Tian, Y. C. (2011). To whom does he confide his pain? An analysis of Holden's growth environment in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Journal of Gansu Radio & TV University*, 21(1), 36-39.
- Tian, Y. C. (2014). Escape, resistance, fantasy, and epiphany: An analysis of Holden's growth in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Modern Chinese (Academic Edition)*, (1), 85-86.
- Wang, C., & Zhang, X. F. (2010). Returning to youth and nature: *The Catcher in the Rye* in ecocriticism. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(3), 269-272.

Wei, L. (2015). *An analysis of Holden's psychological transformation in The Catcher in the Rye from the perspective of humanistic psychology* [Master's thesis, Nanchang University].

Wu, Z. X. (2012). The call for love: Taking Holden's growth in *The Catcher in the Rye* as an example. *Journal of Chongqing College of Education*, 25(5), 90-93.

Zhao, C. X. (2016). Epiphany and growth: On Holden's transformation in *The Catcher in the Rye*. *Language Planning*, (33), 45-46. <https://doi.org/10.16412/j.cnki.1001-8476.2016.33.023>.

Zhaoen, P. F. (2010). *Holden's dilemma* [Master's thesis, East China Normal University].