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**Mental Maturation : A Psychosocial Study Of J.D.
Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and
Zooey***

A Thesis

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Submitted by

Marwa Taha Abed

Supervised by

Prof. Luma Ibrahim Shakir (Ph.D.)

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Abstract

This study examines the psychosocial impact of the backward experience on an adolescent's maturation process throughout using two notable works by the American author Jerome David Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny and Zooey*. In this thesis, the researcher formulates the analysis on the findings of the psycho-socialist Erik Erikson who is best known of his landmark psychosocial approach that deals with the influence of the psychosocial factors on the mentality, behavior and personality of adolescents. The thesis demonstrates that the main selected characters of this study, Holden Caulfield, Franny and Zooey are confused adolescents who have a negative behavior due to the impact of the paralyzed nature of trauma and the hatred of phony people and society. Such negative factors prevent an adolescent from maturing and entering the world of adulthood. Then, the researcher proves that such backward factors have a deep possibility of speeding up the process of maturation by learning how to get lessons from the sever traumatic experiences.

Throughout a close reading of the selected works, the researcher evaluates the main reasons and factors behind the sufferings of adolescents. Based on Erikson's study of the development of personality, it is natural that every person faces psychosocial as well as coming of age problems during the cycle of his life. This study shows that individuals enter the world of maturity because of the psychosocial troubles that have led them getting older than their age and reaching the level of mental maturation. Their dilemmas and obstacles have compelled them for such growth. However, this thesis offers new ways of reading the texts of these novels by showing how a very notable author, J. D. Salinger, deals with the inner and external problems and struggles of adolescents seriously by

reflecting the indirect impact of WWII as well as modern age on the mentality and behavior of adolescents. Accordingly, the intent of this study is to offer a general comprehension of the traumatic experiences and the struggles of adolescents literature.

This thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction to the study, problem statement, thesis statement methodology and literature review. The introduction gives the readers general ideas about this study while literature review serves as a review of works that have relevance to the topic. It includes books, articles, theses and dissertations. It comprises a brief overview of the critical works to the selected works of this study. The second chapter consists of two sections. The first section presents Psychosocial Approach: Meaning And Literary Treatment. This section serves as a theoretical outline for chapter three . The second section explains The Psychosocial Impact on American Families From 1951-1961. This chapter aims to be a prelude for chapter three since that chapter will rely mainly on its analysis.

Chapter three consists of two main sections. Each one of these main sections containing subsections. The first main section consists of four sections that are ; J. D. Salinger: Personal Background, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*: Introduction, Thoughts Could Leave Deeper Scars Than Any Thing Else and The Rediscovery of the Self. While the second main section consists of three subsections that are J. D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*: Introduction, a Struggle for Self-improvement and Urging A Stable and Calm Life. This chapter presents a psychosocial analysis of the aroused question in the selected works in this study to find out a suitable solution for it. Finally, this thesis encloses with chapter four that engulfs two sections: Conclusions, and Recommendations. In the

conclusion, there is a brief summary about what has been discussed in the previous chapters in order to relate the researcher with the reader.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it. (*The Catcher in the Rye* 5)

Despite that issue of adolescence has a long history of culture but it comes to occupy a unique place in culture and becomes a vital modern event. It becomes a very notable and recognized one in western culture especially after the two world wars and the occurrence of the industrial revolution that freed children from working hard labors. Adolescents in the modern age are totally different from previous centuries. They are more free and rebellious. They refuse any kind of restrictions and social norms. The advances in technology have a great influence on them. The great new economic shift has influenced and made many societies becoming more rich financially. Teenagers respond to that shift negatively because of their suffering from the idea of being sentimentally ignored by their families and societies. Everything around them was arranged materially and there was a rare spiritual and emotional connection between them and their parents. Such realistic issues come to be taken into consideration by a number of writers and authors. The most notable one who has tackled such phenomenon is the American author J. D. Salinger. He writes diverse works that carry the mentioned realistic issues. Among them are his famous notable novel *The Catcher in the Rye* and the fledged novel *Franny and Zooey*.

Salinger is a notable icon in American literature for many reasons. Among the most important reasons behind his recognition as a giant author is his decision of living a life of squalor. Also, he deals with unique issues like themes of maturity and the coming of age. In fact, he was not the only one tackling such themes about young people. Many authors present adolescents in their works like Charles Dickens who wrote *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* and many others but they could not reach the precise way of Salinger's rendering of teenagers. He presents post war generations who are totally different from the previous centuries. He depicts their realistic psychosocial sufferings. He acquired such ability of depicting them accurately throughout his personal experiences during WWII. The severe actions of this war did not leave him aloof without trauma. He was hospitalized according to that from mental and emotional breakdown. By reflecting his personal experience in many of his works, Salinger in this way serves as a reminder tool of the Bildungsroman of the nineteenth century introduced basically by Charles Dickens. Moreover, adolescence in the old Bildungsroman is showed as a risky and complicated period in human life. Many authors, scientists, psychologists and philosophers reflect the period of adulthood as a more problematic one(Marshall- Rubin 13-16).

Many viewers and critics influenced by Salinger tackled the issues that deal with the problems of young matures. For instance, Christine Griffin shows that the initial philosopher who tackles maturity in a serious way after J. D. Salinger is G. Stanley Hall, who occupied the first position in depicting such issue till 1980s. In Hall's two-volume book, *Adolescence*(1970), he points to teenagers and their connection with their parents, society, peers ,education, sexuality and employment, “provided a firm biological foundation for the dominant concept of adolescence which is still with us today: the “storm and stress model”. Adolescence is seen

as “a potentially distressing time for all young people, owing to the inevitable hormonal upheavals associated with puberty that are assumed to set the young people apart from the world of mature adulthood” (18-19).

The two selected works chosen in this study, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and *Franny and Zooey* (1961) carry the idea of psychosocial sufferings of teenagers. In the first text *The Catcher in the Rye*, the reader is introduced to an adolescent named Holden Caulfield, who is sensitive and mentally disturbed. He is totally confused due to the harsh traumatic experiences that are inescapable and he is obligated to endure and accept. It is regarded the first novel that deals with the problems of teenagers who are confused due to the impact and consequences of wars, revolutions and multiple difficult circumstances of life in modern age. It occupies a unique place in literature for its crucial subject therefore it is regarded as “the beginning point not so much of adolescent literature but of adolescent literature as a case writing about troubled youth” (Kidd, Freud169). In *The Catcher in the Rye*, the protagonist Holden Caulfield represents a troubled adolescent who is unable of transcend to maturity because of his feeling of fear from the coming. He refuses growing into a mature person due to his hatred of the phony people and society as well as the harsh memories of the past, the death of his younger brother Allie, that causes him suffering from severe trauma and depression. Holden's negative attitude towards everything surrounding him seems to be originated in the death of his beloved younger brother. Some critics agree with this point of view about the origin behind Holden suffering and attitude like Carl F. Strauch who sees that Holden’s “withdrawal and aggression, guilt feelings, fantasies of mutilation, the death wish” relate basically in “the death of his brother Allie” (50). Additionally, he states that another reason of his negative behavior and attitude may “include

feelings of insecurity”(57). The critic E.H. Miller agreed with him, when he suggests that Holden's rejection of people and society is the “only means of dealing with his inability to come to terms with the death of his brother”(279).

In *Franny and Zooey* (1961) despite the reader is initially presented to a character named Lane Coutell, but this book in fact is about Franny herself. In this story, the main character Franny searches for her individuality and her own place within her society. She could not discover her real personality in the first part of the book, *Franny* but in the second half of the longer part of the book *Zooey*, she finds an answer for her question by the help of her brother Zooey. She seeks for her own values away from her society. However, the story of Zooey is the continuous of some of “account of specific events introduced in ‘Franny’” (qtd. in French 94). Zooey has a lot of resemblance in his feeling to Holden, both of them are confused and nervous. Thus, this novel also a story of the interior struggles of its protagonists and such struggles have turned into psychological sufferings.(Mîndreci101).

The Problem Statement

This study sheds the light on the psychosocial problems of adulthood and its impact on the mental maturation of adolescents. Such aroused problems are developed as new issues in the modern world. In modern fiction, these problems are tackled into account by pointing out to the main reasons behind them. Factors like familial, educational, religious institutions and many others have a close relation in raising problems related to maturity. Therefore, the study focuses basically on such factors and the way they have influenced teenagers' live. Therefore, the researcher points out to two notable works that deal mainly with the problems of maturation in which mental maturation is the main theme. It examines the causes behind the psychosocial problems that stand as an obstacle in the way of an adolescent's maturity and finding out suitable solutions for them with the help of the psychosocial theory's point of view.

Hypothesis of The Study

This study suggests that Psychosocial problems and the main factors behind them serve to show that adolescents could reach to a healthy mental maturation throughout their experiences that they acquire from their complicated journey from childhood to adulthood. This study assumes that this harsh experiences would give lessons for the coming teenagers throughout learning from the protagonists' mistakes, rather than living with the harsh memories and sufferings of the past.

The Aim of the Study

The problem of maturity and its impact on the mentality of adolescents, as discussed in the psychosocial approach by Erik Erikson, are controversial issues since they depict the fear of adolescents from glimpsing toward maturity and reaching the level of mental maturation because of their facing of psychosocial dilemmas and hardships that stand in their way of growing into mature adults. If they could triumph on all their problems, adolescents then come into a realization that they could be reliable and responsible adults figures about themselves and others. They would finally be able of living honestly in a corrupt world.

Methodology

This study depends basically on a thematic study through analyzing the concept of mental maturation that in turn depends mainly on psychosocial approach that is seen as a demonstration to deal with the problems of maturity or adulthood and finding out suitable solutions.

This study demonstrates the theme of mental maturation as a psychosocial study of J. D. Salinger *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Franny And Zooey*. The researcher would depend on MLA writing style in formatting this thesis. It is parted into chapters, sections, and subsections, and it depended on print books and electronic sources in documentation and citation.

1.2 Literature Review

During the modern age, specifically in the second half of the twentieth century, issues of adolescent have become so vital element in literary field. Teenagers books discuss themes of death and war since the nineteenth century but most of them did not depict such issues seriously as well as did not focus on the psychological impact of war on the coming generations. Major events like the first and second world wars, cold war, revolutions, Holocaust, and many others during the modern age have led to the occurrence of traumatic narrative. The horrific actions of war and other events paved the way for many writers to shed the light on their effect on the main characters to be ultimately futile and they focus mainly on its impact on their mentality. Authors show how these severe actions and dilemmas traumatize them severely and cause them suffering physically and psychologically. The impact of war and its harsh consequences have become a recurrent and notable issue in adult literature.

Carl F. Strauch presented an article in 1961 named *Kings in the Back Row: Meaning Through Structure – A Reading of Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye* and it is regarded as one of the most notable and benefit critical works on Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* because it has continued for centuries presenting connected insights to recurrent researches and theses about this novel. Strauch discussed in this article diverse aspects like Holden's inability of growing into a mature person, his hatred of the phony world of adulthood and his tendency of protecting the innocence of childhood. Strauch showed that Holden establishes a “private world of innocence” (7). This article is of a particular benefit for the recurrent study since the researcher depends on it in some occasions during the analysis of Holden's specific problem to

assume that his inability of communicating with all the surroundings is resulted from his traumatic experiences and sufferings.

Harold Bloom, an American literary critic and professor of humanities, presented a book that consists of a number of essays under the title of *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations, J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*(2014). This collection of essays presents a critical analysis of Salinger's novel as well as gives an introduction by Bloom about Salinger's personal life and a historical background about *The Catcher in the Rye*. Moreover, this collection shows that this novel is a well-made and useful for teenagers because of its usage of the colloquial speech. It is also understandable enough for adolescents since it gives lessons throughout the traumatic dilemmas and experiences of Holden. Additionally, it deals with diverse themes like alienation, the hatred of the phony world of adulthood, and as a post war fiction. This book enriches the researcher's understanding for the novel because of being a reliable source in making a critical analysis for this aroused thesis.

In Sarah Graham's book, *The Catcher in the Rye : A Guide For Readers*(2007), she gives an introduction about the text and context of the novel. Also, it offers multiple ways of thinking about this novel by presenting an analysis for readers and learners to have a deep knowledge about its history, language and literary approaches. Essentially, this book serves to be as a guide for readers about *The Catcher in the Rye's* historical, intellectual, and cultural context. Additionally, this book presents a critical analysis of its themes, style, and structure.

In his book, Cengage L. Gale presents a guide book that is named *A Study Guide For JD Salinger's Franny and Zooey*(2015). This guide borrows from Gale's novels for student series. In this abbreviated guide,

there is a plot summary for *Franny and Zooey*, an analysis of characters and the personal life of Salinger, historical background, questions about the study as well as recommendations for further studies and many more. This guide serves as a good source during the analysis of the current study.

Charles H. Kegel tackles a psychological method to *The Catcher in the Rye* in his article *Incommunicability in Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye* stating that the specific suffering of Holden is his inability of connecting with others. Kegel considers Holden's narrative as a quest to communicate with his fellow men, which he seems unable to achieve. Although Holden's main challenge lies in his inability to understand the adults in his life, he is also unable to get closer to people of his own age. According to Kegel, Holden needs someone to talk with him honestly and to listen to what he needs to say. Holden's inability to communicate with others is symbolized by the numerous phone calls and messages that are never completed. Kegel points out that Holden feels the need to give "somebody a buzz" (*The Catcher in the Rye* 59) on fifteen separate occasions, but he only dials a number four times, and each time does not bring him much comfort (Kegel 189). Furthermore, Kegel identifies the carousel scene as the moment when Holden reveals his newfound maturity. By refusing to ride the carousel with Phoebe, Holden finally allows himself to give up on childhood and assumes his new role as a young adult.

Multiple theses and dissertations shed the light on Salinger's work from tackling it throughout another angles. For instance, the thesis titled *An Analysis of the Adolescent Problem in The Catcher in the Rye*(2009) by Lingdi Chen from Dezhou university. This study basically addresses the problem of teenagers like maturity, the hatred of the phony world and

many others, during their severe transition toward maturity. It explores these basic problems throughout the main character Holden who hates the world of adulthood and searches for his uniqueness in that world by establishing his own world, choosing to save kids and their innocence from the harm of savage world of adulthood. This study suggests that Holden has a negative attitude towards all adults that influences him to the way of not being able to get into maturity.

Another thesis dealt with Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* that is under the title, *You can't ever Find a Place that's Nice and Peaceful : The Adolescent Identity in J. D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*(2015) by Whitney N. Thacker from Liberty University. In this study, Thacker suggests that the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye* is timeless and a representative voice of adolescents as well as atypical hero of American post war. Thacker suggests that Holden has a potency of establishing his own esteem away from the disturbance of adulthood. While attempting to establish a unique personality, he faces many dilemma and crises that prevent him of achieving his goal. Diverse factors stand behind his ability of creating his own esteem, among them the death of his younger brother Allie, the poor connection with his parents, the corrupt education system and many others. Thacker shows that all these factors stand in the way of his maturity. Accordingly, he faces identity crisis and suffers a lot during the process of forming an independent personality that starts with naiveté and maturity. Thacker concludes that Holden throughout his sever struggles and experiences would be able of finding out what is looking for. He also would be able of fixing his view on the world throughout taking lessons from hardships and problems.

While the researcher Taraneh Zohadi, from the university of South Carolina, deals in her thesis with Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* that is

under the title *Remembering Salinger's Franny and Zooey Through Pari And The Royal Tenenbaums*(2016). Zohadi explains the stories of two films depending in her analysis on the text of *Franny and Zooey*. In these films, there is a reflection of post war consequences on people generally and intellectuals specifically. Anderson's film *The Royal Tenenbaums* depicts alienation and segregation of post war America while *pari's film* reflects pains after the Iraqi-Iranian war. Such psychosocial sufferings in these two texts is similar to that of WWII and its influences on people, that are reflected in *Franny and Zooey*. This study focuses on the impact of war on intellectuals during the period of 1990s and the beginning of 2000s. while the current study focuses on the sufferings of adolescents after the second world war and its effect on their mentality.

Additionally, another thesis by Senol Bezci that is under the title *Youth In Crisis: An Eriksonian Interpretation of Adolescent Identity In Franny* (2008),the researcher depends on the psychosocial method by Erikson during the analysis of the selected work since Erikson is regarded as the main psychologist in the study of identity crisis and confusion. Basing on Erikson's views, the researcher analyzes that if a young adult fails in getting rid of his dilemmas and problems, he would suffer from personality confusion and crisis but if he triumphs on his struggles about establishing a unique personality for him, he would establish and own a healthy personality.

In Michelle Hadley Smiths Dissertation that is under the title *Personality, Disgust, and Dangerous Literature: A Hermeneutical Analysis of The Catcher in the Rye And The Chocolate War* (2015), he presents views and deep analysis about the use of the colloquial language in literature. He sees that the use of the informal language in literature would be unsuitable especially in books but it would be more appropriate

if it is used in educational institutions to provide learners with deep comprehension. In this case, the profane language is tackled by the researcher as a philosophical lens and a more appropriate literary tool within the text. This study shows that the use of profanity is significant to understand the realistic nature that is reflected in character's way of living, dilemmas and struggles. Otherwise the mentioned purpose, this study utilizes the use of the colloquial language in literature. So, the researcher does not intend to focus only on the use of the colloquial language specifically, but also discusses this issue during the analysis of the selected novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* by showing that Salinger uses the informal language in order to be understandable enough for readers especially adolescents who see that the main character of this novel as a representative voice for them. Furthermore, the researcher attempts in this study to show the teenager readers that the use of such kind of language in this novel is to help them avoiding the future problems by tackling lessons from Holden's experiences and to help them maturing mentally and avoiding psychosocial problems.

In the dissertation that is under the title *The Self Versus Institutions In J.D Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye*(2017) by Windrila Baroi from BRAC University, Baroi presents a comparison between the two texts *The Catcher in the Rye and Franny and Zooey*. It depicts the social shifts during the twentieth century. Also, it shows how teenagers are influenced by the social and economic shifts negatively. Moreover, it explains how many countries like the United States became financially rich and such shifts made such nations being materialistic ones. In response to all these sudden changes, that appeared due to the industrial revolution that has created a great economic bomb in poor nations, adolescents chose a life of alienation and segregation. This study reflects the negative attitude of

teenagers who refuse to grow up into matures while the current study shows how adolescent learn from their sufferings and tragic trauma and accept to grow up into becoming matures and accept people as they are with all their flaws.

In light of what has mentioned earlier in this section , the current study is different in its theme from the previous mentioned studies, theses and dissertations. It does not focus merely on the psychological impact on the mentality of adolescent but also on the sociological influences on them. It does not aims of reflecting the negative impact of psychosocial factors on teenagers mental heal and behaviors but it tends to reflect how adolescents tackle lessons from their hard circumstances and dilemmas and accept to endure any obstacles and hardships to reach to the level of being mentally matured, psychologically, and sociologically healthy personality. Additionally, the researcher after the deep investigation of these works, his study does not have any resemblance in its theme of mental maturation of adolescents. This study shows that the researcher has tackled the psychosocial approach by Erik Erikson to depend on it in the analysis of the two selected works by Salinger from another different angles that are totally different from the mentioned studies.