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In Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye", Holden is portrayed as an adolescent who is reluctant to become an adult, and his fear towards the complex adult world is evident throughout the novel. He has the astonishing ability in finding events or environments that depress him. Without a doubt, his high unrealistic ideals are the core of his trouble, and nothing but himself is the real cause for the depression that he suffers – he is, in fact, the one who has an "inferior complex".

Although the readers can probably guess what kind of maladies can drive Holden into deep despair based on his character, Salinger also carefully describes the specific events that impact the protagonist's psychological condition. The most catastrophic case is the death of Allie, Holden's beloved brother. The fact that "<he> tried to break all the goddam windows with <his> fist" strongly suggests the importance of Allie in his life. Holden compares everyone to his brother, and in the eyes of Holden, Allie is one of the few who is not "phony". The innocence that Allie has is highly praised, and Holden is frequently depressed by any adult who does not have matching qualities – including Holden himself.

Holden knows that he is imperfect, and his own character saddens him. The cold weather reminds him of the "swiping of <his> gloves", and he admits that he is "yellow" – he often succumbs to his cowardice. Because of his own flawed character, "the more <he thinks> about <his> gloves and <his> yellowness, the more depressed <he gets>" – he does not meet the standard he set up for himself. Holden does not only hate himself, Jesus' disciples, and the prostitute disgust him as well.

"<Holden> almost <wishes> he <is> dead" when he meets Sunny. The prostitute is particularly depressing for Holden because she is about his age. Yet Sunny has to act as a prostitute, while Holden can live in a wealthy family. The misfortune of others often saddens him, and he strongly feels that he is not justified to live the life he has. The nuns that Holden meet have similar effects on his state of mind. The image of poorly dressed nuns asking for donations prompts into his head immediately, and such image distresses him for the same reason – he believes the nuns do not deserve to suffer and beg for money without dignity.

Furthermore, Holden finds Jesus' disciples extremely annoying, and this shows that he does not merely believe modern men are not perfect, he also thinks that some Saints in the Bible are corrupted and foolish. Interestingly, he loves the lunatic that "keep cutting himself with stones", and considers other things as sources of his depression.