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How Attitude Affects Grieving and Maturation in The Road and The Catcher in the Rye

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There comes a time in everyone's life in which they experience loss. Whether the one lost is a family member or a close friend, each time someone passes away, those around them grieve their absence and must find a way to continue on without them. The Kübler-Ross Theory, more colloquially known as the Five Stages of Grief, created by Swiss-American psychologist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, details the many expressions one may experience during the coping process, focusing specifically on denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although her theory expressly names these five specific actions, psychologists stress that not everyone experiences all of them, thus emphasizing the many different types of grieving processes that people can go through.

Such varied grieving processes can be observed in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. *The Road*, a 2006 post-apocalyptic novel that follows a man and a boy as they try to survive in a world overrun by death and danger, exhibits the boy's path to maturation in the wake of his mother's death. Holden Caulfield, the protagonist from the 1951 classic *The Catcher in the Rye*, on the other hand, exhibits a far more violent and pessimistic coping process as he contemplates the death of his little brother during an extended stroll around New York City. Both the boy and Holden experience the death of a family member during their childhood and face the ultimate challenge of coping with their loss and moving forward. However, while the boy's thoughtful and empathetic outlook on life allows him to mature and move past his mother's tragic death, Holden's hypocritical nature and cynical world view chain him to both immaturity and the painful memory of his brother.

Before discussing the two protagonists' attitudes, it is worth examining how and when these attitudes were developed to gain insights into their motivations. The boy's main example of

moral correctness comes from his father, the only companion in his life. His father tells him stories of good versus evil, to assure that “[they] are still the good guys” and will “always be the good guys,” but these stories also play a significant role in the development of the boy’s world view (McCarthy 77). The father, with his stories, is creating a defined concept of true good and true evil. With the father’s reassurance of goodness within the boy, the boy begins to truly believe that he is one of the good guys who “[embodies] the values” of courage, perseverance, and hope, thus reinforcing feelings that “motivate and console them in their seemingly endless struggle,” and encourage the boy to keep moving forward (White 540). These stories present the boy with the encouragement and reassurance he needs to continue to develop his empathetic nature, and only exacerbate his hope for the future.

Not only that, but the man’s sole purpose for living is his son, and so he is always looking out for both of them. The boy, being in constant interaction with his father, “learn[s] and grow[s]” from his father’s moral “performance” and uses his father as a role model to learn that “hope is necessitated by passionate love for another” (DeCoste 73-78). By observing his father, the boy is able to shape his moral compass. Further inspired by his father’s defined good versus evil archetypes, he is also able to grow past his father’s own moral standards into the truly empathetic character that is displayed in the novel. The relationship between the boy and the father is one of the pillars of foundation for the novel, and the father’s influence on his son’s attitude is one of its more obvious conversations.

Holden Caulfield, on the other hand, does not have such a simply defined answer into the development of his attitude. Unlike the boy, he had no one immediately close to him to look at as a moralistic role model. Holden makes it fairly clear throughout the novel that he and his father

did not have a strong connection, likely leading to a feeling of neglect. The only person who may also fit the role model bill is Holden's older brother, D.B., but after going to Hollywood to become a film writer, Holden feels disconnected from him, too. Perhaps this is what sprouted Holden's distaste for the world: his role model abandoning him and leaving him with a neglectful father. It is also a possibility that Holden developed his terrible attitude after the death of his little brother, Allie. Holden describes the moments in his life before Allie died as pleasant and nearly every moment thereafter negatively, suggesting that his attitude shifted when the loss occurred. However, although the spark of creation for the boy's moral and empathetic nature can be traced directly back to the stories and actions of his father, there is no real subsistence to any particular cause that spurred Holden into his cynicism.

In both novels, the attitudes that have been adopted by the characters spurn their actions, but their differing views push them to opposite ends of the spectrum. The boy's good natured moral compass is what causes him to want to help everyone they come across on the road. Holden's cynicism prevents him from enjoying experiences, even when he is the one that elicits them. In both cases, the outcome of their situations is controlled by how they personally view the situations. With the boy, his belief in good and bad drives him to keep up the persona of a good guy by craving to aid others in similar situations to himself with the inkling that they could possibly be good, but Holden's distasteful outlook pushes him away from others and makes him believe that everyone is fake and not worth his time.

The boy's "spark that gives light" to the heart wrenching nature of the novel is his ability to "feel with other people" despite "the extreme vulnerability" of his state of life (White 532). Examples of the boy's empathy are prevalent throughout the novel and are explicitly seen every

time he begs his father to help another traveler. When the boy thinks he sees another little boy, he begs his father to let the boy go with them:

We should go get him, Papa. We could get him and take him with us . . .

We cant.

And I'd give that little boy half of my food.

Stop it. We cant.

He was crying again. (McCarthy 86)

Despite his starving state, the boy tells his father that he would share food rations with the little boy. This plea to help others is altruistic of the boy, and it comes from the central empathy of being a good guy. The man and the boy's situation is unpleasant, but the boy recognizes that the other travelers they meet on the road have experienced similar situations to their own. He knows what it is like to be a little boy in the desolate world, and so his immediate wish is to help the other little boy deal with the same circumstances.

A similar situation occurs later in the novel when the boy convinces his father to help an old man who calls himself Ely. Despite the danger that could unfold from helping the stranger, the boy nevertheless perseveres past his father's wishes to help, explaining that Ely is scared and that they should give him something to eat. The father is against the idea, but the boy's empathy is strong, so much so that the father gives in and not only lets Ely spend the night with them, but also gives him a can of food. The boy has been in Ely's situation before, and can understand his feelings of hunger and fear. So, ignoring the possible danger that could arise, he jumps in to help, just as he wanted to with the other little boy.

With the boy constantly empathizing with others that they meet on the road, the morality is “repurposed by the individual” so that he can “rationalize his . . . personal experience” (Almendinger 233). The boy is able to look at everyone and see a part of himself, and, since he himself is a good guy and is filled with hope, can see those qualities in all others. He is able to see the good in individuals and better understand their actions through the reflection of his own previous feelings, truly exacerbating his empathy for every person they meet along the road. This creates almost a new personal definition of morality for the boy, as the hope that he creates for himself comes from the knowledge that there are others out there who have experienced situations similar to himself and choose to still be good like him. Thus, with this personally interpreted morality, he is able to find himself in a continuously perpetuating cycle of empathy and reflection as he interacts with other people whom he can empathize with.

Holden is the exact opposite of this; he gazes upon the entire world with a derisive lens rather than upon individuals. Holden views the adult world as a society of fake people in which every “small-scale [case] of cruelty” is a portend to “large-scale menaces,” which only pushes him further into the hole of cynicism that the reader discovers him in (Tolchin 308). Oftentimes, Holden will seek out connections to others with the intention of having a good time and an intellectual conversation, but will leave the interaction he himself prompted feeling that “people are always ruining things for [him]” and that he made a severe mistake in seeking comfort in others (Salinger 114). Virtually any interaction Holden has with another person follows this line of excitement to disappointment, the transition caused by his inability to see any positives to the situation once he is involved in it.

Although Holden initially enjoys talking about ducks with a cab driver named Horwitz, by the end of the ride he feels as if Horwitz is “a touchy guy” and decides that “it wasn’t any pleasure discussing anything with him” (Salinger 108-109). Similar offenses occur with people that Holden has known for quite a while and actively sought out conversation with. Sally Hayes, whom Holden calls up and treats to a day full of shows and ice skating, is one such example. When Holden begins to go on a tangent about running off to the northeast, Sally responds negatively. In his recollection, he posits that “they both hated each other’s guts” by the end of the conversation and that he was “sorry as hell” that he had invited her out at all (Salinger 173). The rest of the day had gone rather smoothly, with Sally being excited to see Holden and be out with him, yet this singular occurrence is the one that Holden hyperfixates on. He completely disregards the success of the entire rest of the date to focus on the one disagreement and hyperbolizes its importance to the point of convincing himself that the two of them hate each other. Holden has no positive outlook on the situation whatsoever and views that one negative event as the primary dictation for their whole day, even though there were several positive aspects to it, illuminating his pessimistic outlook.

Towards the end of the novel, Holden grows angry and disgruntled while discovering lewd graffiti in Phoebe's elementary school. Although just a singular incident, Holden “takes the graffiti as proof that it is impossible to find a place in the world, without having to face man-made ugliness” (Tolchin 307). This small, common incident, follows Holden throughout the rest of the novel as he discovers similar graffiti in the museum and posits that he is certain that when he dies, similar graffiti will be written on his gravestone. Even if he was just reminiscing about positive memories he had in the museum, one tiny incident completely changes his attitude into

one that continually generalizes all of society as cruel. He is unable to acknowledge these positive moments that occur in his life, resulting in negativity that lingers in every action that he makes.

The boy, on the other hand, is unable, or at least unwilling, to view the overall world he is a part of as cruel. As established by his interaction with Ely, despite all of the real danger that he could potentially be in, the boy's empathy allows him to look past all of the hazards and see the good in situations. This empathy allows him to see the future more positively, maintaining hope, and additionally elucidates how rare this type of morality is within the boy's desolate situation. The knowledge that he is one of the few that contains the positive hope of living, solidifies the importance of his moral compass to him. He strictly follows the moral code that his father has instilled within him, always reaching out to others in crises because he knows that there are few others who would do the same. The positive traits that he is able to seek out in every individual help him to stay true to his moral beliefs without being swayed by the negatives of the outside world.

Even in the situations in which his father, the only other person in his life, has a different moral agenda than him, the boy holds true to what he believes to be morally correct. He has a developed empathy and moral compass that he truly believes in and that he truly believes is good, as is constantly reinforced as being good by his father's stories. The repeated motif of fire is one that he associates "with consideration of his father and himself being 'good guys'" (Temko). This motif is essential in reassuring the boy that he is on the morally correct side of the world, and so reinforces his moral actions. As he begins to develop his own moralistic ideologies, he sticks to them and holds them true, unwavering, even with his father's protests.

His actions follow what kind of person he claims to be, making him empathetically honest with others.

Due to the nature of Holden's cynicism he can also be disingenuous and hypocritical which are traits that contribute to his poor attitude. After lying to one of his former classmates' mothers on the train about undergoing an operation, Holden posits that the woman's apology was sincere and that he felt bad for lying to her. Despite this assertion, he continues to further his lie by claiming that the operation is for a "tiny little tumor on the brain" thus demonstrating his contradictory nature (Salinger 75). Holden himself admits to thinking one way and acting another, expressly admitting his own hypocrisies. This creates an image of Holden that is disingenuous and just as phony as the people he himself hates. These hypocritical actions occur again later in the novel, but are not acknowledged by Holden, suggesting that he may not realize the depths of his own phoniness and that it is a subconscious aspect of his attitude.

While he is out on his date with Sally, she runs into someone that she knows and proceeds to have a conversation that Holden deems as overly phony. Holden asserts that his main problem with the conversation was that "they both kept thinking of places as fast as they could" and then would switch to thinking "of somebody that lived there" in a sort of tangential dialogue that directly contradicts a later conversation he has with Mr. Antolini in which he talks about a speech class he was in (Salinger 166). During that conversation, Holden talks about how he enjoyed the tangents made by former classmate Richard Kinsella and wished that he had received a better grade in the class. This specific instance illuminates how Holden looks for the negatives of any current situation, as Sally's tangents were occurring in the moment while Kinsella's were a reflection of what had already happened. Holden is also guilty of this

tangential style of talking, as Sally mentions that it is hard for her to keep up with his conversation because he jumps from one thing to another. These jumps in conversation are what Holden found upsetting in Sally's character only a few pages earlier, truly elucidating his hypocritical and cynical nature.

Whereas the boy's empathy allows him to "feel with other people in spite of the extreme vulnerability" of his situation, thus resulting in a positive overall outlook that starts at an individual level and reaches out to the entirety of his world, Holden's narrow-minded cynicism causes him to only see the negatives of every situation (White 532). The boy empathizes with most of the other travelers on the road, and since he empathizes with them, he accepts them as good guys like him, resulting in the hopeful world view that he has developed. Holden looks for the negatives in all of his personal interactions, and when he finds it, uses it to generalize the entire adult world to match his negative experience. These two outlooks on life move in different directions, one positive and one negative, resulting in the two protagonist's ideas of the future diverging from one another. Despite both being young boys who have experiences with unpleasant people in their life, the lens at which they choose to view their situations creates the line between hope for the future and the development of suicidal tendencies.

The boy's empathy is one that fills him with hope, as he is able to have faith that there are other good guys out on the road somewhere. The boy's ability to emotionally connect with people creates a sense of optimism that he maintains regardless of the situation, as evident when his father insists that a group of people are bad guys and the boy suggests that they could potentially be good guys. Even though his father, who is a person he has a lot of trust in, shares a differing opinion, the boy maintains hope that they are good rather than bad. He chooses to look

at the positive before the negative. The stories presented by the father also encourage this idea of hope, as the good guys do what the man and the boy do: “They keep trying” (McCarthy 137). As long as the boy believes that he and his father are good guys, he will maintain that optimism and hope that there are other good guys out there who will triumph over evil and keep moving down the road.

Empathy is what allows the boy to maintain hope, even in the darkest. In the finale of the novel, “he finds another family, a foursome” whom he believes are “also carrying the fire” and “joins them on the road forward,” not allowing his father’s death hold him back from continuing forward with his life (Railton). Without the empathy that allows him to so easily connect and care for others, it is likely that the boy would not have been able to trust the family he comes across. Thus, with this empathy and the optimism that comes from the knowledge that there are other good guys out there moving down the road themselves, the boy is able to accept the family’s help and continue living, despite his father’s death. The empathy that he maintains gives him hope in a moment of loss and allows him to accept the family’s assistance, in turn giving him a chance to keep growing and moving.

Holden, plagued by cynicism and negativity on the other hand, creates for himself a headspace that is so depressing that he develops suicidal tendencies and a distaste for the future. This theme of wishing for death is prevalent for the entirety of the novel, even from Holden’s beginning fight with his roommate Stradlater. After this fight, Holden asks neighboring classmate Ackley if he would let him stay in his room and “almost [wishes he] was dead” when his request is denied (Salinger 62). Even though the reason that Ackley gave was legitimate, that reason being he was unsure when his roommate would return, due to Holden’s ability to only see

things from a negative perspective, his immediate solution for the pain of rejection is death. A similar occurrence happens later in the novel after Holden is robbed of five dollars by the prostitute Sunny and the elevator boy Maurice. They leave the room and Holden recounts that he “felt like . . . committing suicide” and “jumping out the window” (Salinger 136). Although this interaction is genuinely more harrowing and traumatizing than being denied staying in a neighboring dorm room, Holden still refuses to see any positive illuminations. He could be thankful that they only took five dollars or that they were finally gone, but instead he fantasizes about jumping out the window as a way to fix his problems.

This constant mantra of wishing he were dead is directly influenced by his negative outlook, as he feels as if “he can incorporate nothing” and that “there is nothing for him to incorporate” in the world (Miller). The instances in which Holden is “obviously lonely and depressed” often follow a negative observation of a situation, which sparks the idea of death and pain in Holden’s mind, with suicide being the only method of escape he can come up with (Bushnell). By only seeing the negatives in every situation he comes across, Holden sees no reason to look forward to anything, as he knows he is only going to be disappointed or saddened by it. Since he is constantly conjuring up these negative thoughts, a feeling of hopelessness is created within him, so much so that the only method of escape he feels is worthy of consideration is suicide.

Death surrounds both of these protagonists, the boy’s in a more physical sense with literal bodies around him and Holden in a more mental state as he constantly romanticizes the idea of suicide in his head. Just as death is prevalent in both their lives, they both have lost a family

member that had a great influence over them. For the boy, it was his mother, who was the only other person that he was traveling down the road with, besides his father, before her suicide. Holden's loss came from the death of his younger brother Allie, who died of leukemia when Holden was thirteen. Both the mother and Allie were major influencers of the boy and Holden's lives when they were physically present in them, but even after their passing, they still maintain a tight hold.

Even though the primary relationship that is focused on in *The Road* is that between the boy and his father, there are still lasting traces of the mother's influence on the boy. In a world in which most people are either dead or converted into cannibalistic murders, having a family travel together would need them to have strong bonds and trust. The only people that have traveled with the boy at any point in his life are his mother and father, and they are also likely the only people that the boy completely trusts. The boy was born sometime close to the world-ending event, whether it was during or after is never specified, and likely has only interacted with his parents, thus creating a strong bond between all of them. Despite this bond, however, the mother still chose to commit suicide, as she believed that dying was better than continuing to live in their desolate world. However, this choice was not done with ill-intent towards the boy; it was done solely out of what she believed to be the correct thing to do.

As she leaves to end her life, she is quite cold to her husband in their discussion about what she was planning on doing. However, this coldness does not reach the boy and she posits the sentiment that she would "take him with [her] if it werent for" the man stopping her (McCarthy 56). The woman truly believes that in their current situation, death is the best option. She fears what will happen if other people catch them on the road and mentions her concerns

about what will happen to the boy specifically as part of her argument to the father, thus sparking her to mention that she would take the boy with her. The mother has reached a point where she believes that “despair is the deadly fruit of indifference” and that death will hold more for her than life, and her concern for her son prompts her to want to take him with her (DeCoste 78). In this way, the mother claiming that she would kill the boy if the man would allow her to is her way of expressing that she wants what is best for the boy, illuminating her care for him and his safety.

Further concern for the boy is expressed after the man’s negative reaction to his wife’s coldness. As an explanation, she mentions that her “heart was ripped out of [her] the night he was born” (McCarthy 57). At this point, the world ending event had already begun, as established by the father’s recollection of the fires burning outside on the night of his son’s birth. The mother’s comment about her heart is likely referencing her heart breaking at the thought of having to raise their son in such a terrible world, which is a realization that could have occurred during the already intense experience of childbirth. Regarding the death of herself and her son, she tells her husband that “should have done it a long time ago” as she has known all along that living in the destroyed world is worse than death (McCarthy 56). So, although the mother is cold and stubborn when it comes to the topic of death, her assertions that she wants to take her son with her are not ones of malintent, but rather of deep caring and concern.

In Holden’s case, based on a diversion from his usual attitude, it is clear to see that Allie was truly a bright part of Holden’s life and that he cared about him greatly. In the novel, one of, if not the only thing, that is ever described in a constantly positive light is Allie. When Holden first talks about Allie, he says that Allie was “terrifically intelligent” and that teachers always

truthfully talked about how much of “a pleasure it was having a boy like Allie in their class” (Salinger 50). This is an unusual sentiment from Holden, who usually discredits anything someone in a position of authority says, yet here genuinely asserts that when the teachers were complimenting Allie, they were being genuine. This belief in the adults’ genuinity likely is due to the fact that their opinions align with Holden’s own, as he too believes that Allie was a wonderful person.

When Stradlater asks Holden to write a description based paper, Holden decides to write it over Allie’s left-handed baseball mitt that was covered in green-inked poems. As Holden reminisces about all of the poems on it, he concludes that he “sort of liked writing about it” (Salinger 51). This is a positive reaction, uncharacteristic of Holden. Even further uncharacteristic is that Holden does not later rebuke his enjoyment of the activity, like he does with his outings with Sally Hayes. All of the cynicism and hypocrisies that are so prevalent in Holden’s everyday life virtually disappear when he thinks about his younger brother. To be able to break through the layers of negativity and cynicism that are pushing Holden towards suicidal thoughts implies that the two had a close relationship that Holden greatly valued. Any time Holden talks about Allie or things that remind him of Allie, he no longer acknowledges the negatives of his situation, thus illustrating just how happy Allie made him and how close Holden felt they were.

In a later interaction with his sister Phoebe, it becomes evident that Allie may be the only thing in Holden’s life that he genuinely likes. When Phoebe implores him to say one thing that he likes, he bluntly tells her that “[he] like[s] Allie” and then can not name any other answers (Salinger 222). The bluntness of his answer is especially telling, as when Holden normally

mentions that he likes something, he adds a negative counterpoint or a reluctant admission like “I guess” to undermine his true feelings. The bluntness in his admission to liking Allie is indicative that they are his true feelings, with absolutely no reservations. Additionally, his inability to find another answer to her question further solidifies how close Holden felt to his little brother, as even after his death he is the only thing that Holden genuinely likes and can see in a positive light.

The boy, too, still feels close enough to his mother after her death to be influenced by her beliefs. Although within the novel itself there are only brief mentions of the mother, and no discussed interactions between herself and the boy, she was still able to influence her son by leaving her beliefs of death ingrained in his mind. The morning after she committed suicide, the boy asked if she was gone, with a seemingly sad disposition. This is to be expected of a child who just found out one of their parents committed suicide, but also does confirm that the boy cared for the mother even if the two of them never interacted in the novel.

The lasting impact of the mother’s beliefs of death are still prevalent long after her suicide, as the boy mentions one day that he wishes he “was with mom” even though as far as the reader has been with them, the mother has not been present (McCarthy 55). Although it is impossible to tell how long ago the mother’s death actually happened, it can be inferred that it was relatively recent, as the father still is carrying around her picture in his wallet, but long enough ago that she was not alive by the time the reader began following the man and boy’s journey. Even after her death, the boy is still thinking about her and missing her, which is admittedly normal after the death of a loved one. What is a bit more unusual, however, is the boy’s confirmation to his father that his admission of wanting to be with his mother is equivalent

to wishing he was dead. Even in death, the mother's own opinions and beliefs are still held inside the boy to some extent. As previously established, she believed that death was the only true way to "survive" in such a terrible world. Here, by saying that he wants to be with her in death, the boy is supporting her beliefs even long after her suicide. Although it is difficult to confirm the amount of influence the mother had on her son due to her absence in the novel, it can reasonably be said that in terms of beliefs about death, she was able to influence her son's thoughts on the subject.

A far more obvious control from the dead is seen in Holden, as he continuously talks to and is influenced by his dead brother. After being attacked by Sunny and Maurice, and after the admission of his wish to jump out of the window, Holden still feels shaken up and depressed. So, to calm himself down, he begins talking to Allie. As he does so, Holden mentions that he does "that sometimes when [he] gets very depressed" which implies that the need to talk to his dead brother is a recurring element in Holden's life (Salinger 129). Despite his brother having been dead for around three years at the time of this event, Holden's "desire for sanctuary" and security causes him to reach out for a symbol of that from his childhood: Allie (Tolchin 307). Allie's beacon of positivity in Holden's adolescent life is still strong, long after his death, to the point that Holden only feels that he can get out of a depressive episode by having a conversation with him.

This desperate grasp upon Allie is reinforced during the climax of the novel when Holden is on the verge of having an emotional breakdown as he wanders around Sixth Avenue, fearful of disappearing, with only Allie's personified presence giving him comfort. As Holden walked around, "every time [he'd] get to the end of a block" he would pretend to be talking to Allie,

begging him to “not let [him] disappear” (Salinger 256-257). Despite Allie being dead, Holden still talks to him in times of trouble as if he is still alive and with him, and even genuinely believes that it is thanks to Allie that he does not disappear between blocks, as evident by Holden thanking his dead brother every time he safely makes it to the next block. Allie has no control over whether Holden disappears or not, because he is dead, but Holden is so greatly influenced by Allie that he believes he is the only reason he is safely walking down the street. In his times of loneliness and fear, Holden turns to Allie as an escape from reality and a sanctuary, as “Holden himself has not been kept safe” and is relying on Allie to provide him with that sense of security, even though he’s dead (Tolchin 307). By thanking Allie for helping him safely reach the other side, Holden is using Allie as a borderline coping mechanism and is letting his action be influenced by Allie’s imaginary presence.

Both of these dead family members influence their respective youths, but it is interesting to note in which direction they do so. The boy, who is empathetic and optimistic for the future, is influenced to romanticize death by his dead mother, while Holden, who is filled with cynical remarks and distaste, is given solace by imagining his dead brother around him. Regardless of direction, both the mother and Allie hold great amounts of influence over the boy and Holden respectively. However, only one of the protagonists is able to truly cope with and mature in the wake of their family member’s death while the other is stuck chained to immaturity and his deceased loved one.

The boy’s optimism and empathy continue to evolve throughout the course of the novel, allowing him to move past the death that surrounds him. His first major instance of empathy is

presented when he and his father come across the man struck by lightning in the road. The boy asks his father “if [they] can help him” and only cries while the father drags him away (McCarthy 50). At this point the boy’s empathy is only strong enough to recognize that he wants to help the man, but not strong enough that he actually goes forward to help him. This is the first parting of the boy being influenced by the mother’s ideas surrounding death. While she had instilled within him that death is a better option than continuing to live, he observes that the man does not hurt them in any way, which follows his father’s reassurances that there are other good guys out there. His optimism and hope strengthens with this observation, and is demonstrated to be more influential on his actions in future interactions.

The next step up morally for the boy arises in his interaction with Ely. Again, the boy immediately wants to help Ely and posits to his father that “maybe [they] could give him something to eat” (McCarthy 163). Whereas before he was unable to convince his father to actually help the man, with Ely the boy holds fast and refuses to back down until the man agrees to give him some food. Before, the boy did not have the conscience to actually fight his father for what is morally correct, but now he is able to coerce his father into following his moral compass, extending his evolution of empathetic action. Additionally, this interaction further separates him from the beautiful embrace of death that his mother’s beliefs planted in him as they are in close contact with another person who is not a part of their usual traveling group, but they do not attack them, unlike what she claimed. This is further corroborated when the father mentions that he does not understand the boy’s motivations for helping Ely, as the father does understand that his wife believed death was the only acceptable option. This admission of mystery suggests that

the boy is separated from his mother's beliefs about death through the feeling he has that tells him to help others.

The final evolution of the boy's moral compass is exhibited when a thief steals all of their food and supplies towards the end of the novel. After the father makes the cruel decision to force the thief to strip and remove everything he had, the boy begs for them to "just help him" claiming that because of them "he's going to die" and, as a result, turn the man and boy into bad guys (McCarthy 259). From there, the man is actually convinced to go back to where they last saw the thief and return his clothes. Whereas in numerous events prior, the boy was only able to beg and plead for his father to help someone who has done no wrong to them, here he is able to convince his father to show empathy towards someone who has explicitly wronged them, and is arguably one of the only characters in the novel who the father would be justified in having a wrath against. The empathy that the boy is displaying has grown throughout the novel, as he learns that the world does not align to his mother's beliefs, largely in part due to his father's stories, which allows him to continue his evolution as a good guy with a strong empathetic moral compass.

Holden, on the other hand, shows no development in his attitude whatsoever, despite the retelling of the story occurring nearly a year after the original events being discussed. Regardless of everything that occurred, both in the story that Holden tells or an event that occurred after that may have landed him in a psychiatric institute, "Holden's voice is the same at the end of his retelling as it is at the start" with all of the hypocrisies and beliefs he had during the time of the events still holding true, leaving it clear that Holden "seems to have learned very little" and that "his feelings at the time of the events he relates appear to be his feelings now" (Brooks 301).

Even when he is retelling the events of his own story and his own actions, Holden finds faults to pick apart, illuminating that he is still as cynical and hypocritical as he was during the time of the events told in the book.

The fundamental difference in the evolution of attitude between the boy and Holden is that the boy is able to use the experiences in his life to grow and adjust his moral compass justly. When he meets people on the road that do not harm him or his father, he is able to use his interactions with them to generate a hope that there are others out there like them. Others that are not inherently bad. The boy is able to use his understanding of others in the world to better his outlook and grow from his experiences. Holden is unable to do this, as when given the opportunity to truly accept Allie's death in his life, he is unable to. While in Phoebe's room talking about things he likes, Holden admits that Allie is dead. This could be a turning point in which, through his auditory admission, he is truly able to acknowledge the pain he has been in and grow, but instead he refuses to accept it.. Holden could use admission to better himself, get over Allie's death, and begin seeing the future in a different way, like the boy does, but instead he refuses to accept Allie's death. He can not let go of Allie, and is thus unable to change his attitude.

Similarly to how he is able to adapt his attitude based on experience, with his continuously evolving empathy, the boy is also able to continue his process of maturation despite his mother's death. For the majority of the novel, the boy is anxious about finding dead bodies or interacting with them in any way, but as their journey together is nearing its end and they come upon several corpses on the road, the boy says that "it's okay" that they are there and that they should "just go on" (McCarthy 191). The man even notes that the boy is acting strangely when

they come across the bodies, that queerness stemming from the boy's seemingly unconcerned nature around the corpses. The father is noticing the maturation occurring in his son with this acknowledgement, as the boy has matured into a state where he no longer fears death and accepts it as a part of their life that exists. A sense of maturation past the idea planted by his mother that he should welcome death has occurred, and this belief no longer affects him, allowing him to move on with determination.

Additional maturation occurs when the man and the boy swap caretaker roles. Throughout the novel, the man is in charge of caring for the boy, as expected from a parent and child. However, when the man's sickness becomes too much for him to handle, the two stop and the boy begins to take care of his father just like his father used to take care of him. The boy undergoes all the actions that the father used to take for him, such as fetching water and pitching the tent, which he had never been allowed to do before due to his role as the child. This change from the one being cared for to the caretaker is indicative of a change in the boy, as he likely would not have been able to successfully take on this role at the beginning of the novel. This swapped roles situation is also symbolic of how the boy no longer needs a parental role to take care of him. This knowledge is probably what allows the father to finally pass on, but can also apply to the boy's mother; he no longer needs any adult influencing his decisions, as he matured to the point where he is able to take charge of his own life and live for himself.

Further evidence of this maturation past the need for a parental figure is exemplified as the man and boy sit on the shore, staring out at the ocean. The boy questions the father on whether he will allow the boy to go for a swim in the ocean as well as if the father thinks he should. Though a simple question, it truly illuminates just how far the boy has come in terms of

his maturity. With this question, there is an acknowledgement that the boy is able to recognize that although “his own ethical code and his father’s do not coincide exactly” he should take his father’s “opinion into account in his decision-making” (Temko). Before, the boy was completely dependent on his father’s opinions. His whole moral compass is established on his father’s stories and on what his father deemed good and bad, but here the boy has come to recognize that his and his father’s morals no longer align. The comparison of his own thoughts to his father’s is an evolution in which the boy moves from an “absolute dependence on his father” to an “independence of mind and reasoning” in which he feels that he can make his own decisions based on his own code of ethics, furthering solidifying the boy’s maturation past the point of needing a caretaker (Temko). The boy’s cravings for death, shown in the beginning when he mentions wanting to be with his mother, are nonexistent by the end of the book as he transitions into an independent being and moves forward after the passing of his father. He has truly been able to mature in the wake of his mother’s death.

Holden, on the other hand, readily brags about his lack of maturity from the moment the reader is first introduced to him. He admits that he “sometimes acts like [he’s] thirteen” even though he is seventeen, and also mentions that he “was only thirteen” when his family was going to first have him psychoanalyzed, as a result of breaking all of the garage windows (Salinger 13, 50). Holden broke the garage windows after he found out about Allie’s death, creating an interesting connection between the level of immaturity that Holden himself claims to still be at and a traumatic event that may have caused his decrease in maturation. This simple detail implies that Holden has not been able to move on and mature since Allie’s death. He has had no room to

mature because he wants to stay connected to the most important member of his adolescence, and so has instead chosen to remain childish and immature like nothing has changed.

As explored previously, since the events that occurred within the novel, as well as a possible emotional breakdown that landed him in a psychiatric hospital, Holden still has not matured from any of those experiences. Holden “seems to have learned very little” and “his feelings at the time of the events he relates appear to be his feelings now” (Brooks 301). Holden is retelling the events of the novel, and since his feelings during the retelling align to his feelings during the actual events, it can be concluded that he has learned little to nothing at all from his experiences. Despite all of the opportunities that were presented to him to mature and act like an adult, he refused to learn and did not “reflect very deeply” on any of the negative choices he made (Brooks 301). Holden has not matured whatsoever, and maintains his cynical and hypocritical tendencies throughout the entirety of the novel, regardless of all the learning experiences that have been presented to him.

Whereas Holden is still immature and unwilling to reflect on his actions, the boy’s empathy and hope continue to grow with him until he is truly able to move past his mother’s death and mature as a person. His desire to keep living, the opposite of his mother’s desire, is inspired by the hope that his father’s stories and his interactions with other travelers have instilled in him. These stories that the boy has so frequently been told are what “[motivate] and [console]” him in his “struggle to keep moving down the world” (White 540). Even as the father passes, and the boy will truly be alone, he assures the boy that they can still talk to each other and that the stories he has created for the boy will still be there for him. This reassurance is then

immediately followed by an assertion for the boy to keep moving on and not give up, forever tying the stories and the boy's hope for the future together.

This hope is then immediately put to the test after the father passes, as the boy must extend his trust to a man that approached him. Without his empathy and his ability to see good in others, the boy would not have been able to make the decision to trust the man and go with him.

However, spurred on by the hope and optimism that his father has instilled within him, along with his newfound independent maturity, the boy is able to accept the man's help. Had the boy still been following the idealizations of his mother, with death being a release the primary topic, the loss of his father would have likely resulted in the ending of his own life. The hope created from his moral compass and optimism of good in the world is what allows him to move on and break free of his mother's implanted ideologies.

The boy's main influence left by his mother was the concept of death being a release and a mercy in the world they live in. The boy's ability to continuously mature his moral compass and place trust in others allows him to disprove that effect from his mother, resulting in his complete coping with her loss. With the hope and empathy that he has gained throughout his time with his father, he no longer believes that dying is what should be done in his situation and understands that persevering and moving forward is the correct course of action, as expressed by his acceptance of the man on the road's invitation. This empathy and hope, inspired by his father's stories and his understanding of good out in the world is what helps him accept his mother's death and destroy her influences that kept him from maturing.

Holden's immaturity leaves him in the exact opposite situation; he feels guilty that is growing up without Allie by his side and so rejects anything that has to do with the adult world

or growing up. Holden's rebelliousness is only a "means of dealing with his inability to come to terms with the death of his brother" as he attempts to create a world that is correct or happy without Allie in it (Miller). He is unable to do this easily, as not only does he have to think about how he had "to bury Allie before he can make the transition into adulthood," he also is facing normal adolescent adjustments that every teenager must make (Miller). His guilt and the stress that comes with growing up do not pair well together, leaving Holden to examine aspects of the adult world through a negative lens. The guilt and stress corner him into hating every aspect of adulthood, as he feels it is wrong that he gets to grow up while Allie had to die.

Holden is unable to get past Allie's death, continuously talking to him and thinking about him, as he feels that his death proves that the world is cruel. Holden briefly mentions Allie's funeral, which he did not attend, and how upsetting he found it that a bunch of family members came into town for it. Holden talks about how his family members were a "stupid bunch" that talked about "how *peaceful* [Allie] looked" in his coffin and completely disregards everything they said as fake (Salinger 201). Holden believes that, since they are adults, these family members, like their "uncaring society" are "indifferent to sensitive souls" and have no right to make assumptions about Allie since they did not truly know him like Holden did (Shaw 224-225). This event in particular may have contributed to Holden's hatred for adulthood, as he felt that it was wrong of people who hardly knew Allie to make assumptions about him. It is also possible that Holden refuses to believe their assertions that he was peaceful because he himself has not felt peace nor security since Allie's death.

Since Holden feels as if Allie is the only one who truly understands him, he is unable to form connections to other people, as he assumes that they are all fake or boring. Holden will be

unable “to connect with anyone in any way until the burden of Allie’s death is lifted” and he no longer feels guilt or anger (Miller). He does not want anyone to replace what Allie once meant to him, so he pushes them away with harsh words or by convincing himself that they are not worth his time. By maintaining his cynical outlook, largely in part due to the unfairness he feels went into Allie’s death, Holden is unable to properly cope with the loss of his brother and instead shuns the adult world, leaving him immature. Allie’s death “exacerbates rather than constitutes Holden’s adolescent crisis” and Holden’s inability to move on results in an “excessively prolonged ‘moratorium’ of growing up” that he will never be able to move on from if he maintains the same cynical outlook and refuses to look for the positives of adulthood (Shaw 225-226).

Although both the boy from *The Road* and Holden Caulfield experience the death of a loved one that was dear to them, their differing outlooks on the world caused their paths of coping to diverge from one another. The boy’s empathetic and optimistic nature allows him to become free of the chains of his mother’s death and continue forward with hope in his heart, while Holden’s cynicism towards adulthood and his inability to let Allie go creates a continuous cycle of immaturity and depression. The attitude of each boy greatly affects their journey, and can serve as an example for the differing grieving processes that people can go through in the wake of death. It is important to have time to grieve the one that has been lost, but they should not be dwelled on for too long. Looking at the world through a positive lens, having hope for the future, finding goodness in others, and enjoying what is still present can help ease the pain of death and allow for personal growth through loss. Choosing to look at everything cynically will only perpetuate a circle of hate and depression that will inevitably result in an inability to move

on and begin life again. Every coping process is different, but making the decision to be optimistic over pessimistic can make the eventual acceptance of death come more easily, allowing for an easier transition into a life without the lost one.

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