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Freshman Composition

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The Enigma of Holden Caulfield's Depression

July, 1946, an adolescent with a streak of gray hair was to be my first patient at the mental hospital that day. I have been given orders to keep Holden Caulfield inside room 1A until significant progress is made in resolving his depression. To even start with decrypting the enigma that is his depression, I began by asking him to explain how he ended up here. It surprised me that Mr.Caulfield began to retell the entire story in vivid detail starting from when he left Pencey. My current diagnosis of Mr.Caulfield is that he has chronic depression that I believe to be deeply rooted in his childhood misfortune, lack of self-esteem, and his lack of direction, all of which has led to Mr.Caulfield's downward spiral to where he is now.   
 Mr.Caulfield's recollection of his childhood has led me to believe that the depression he experienced is partially­­­­­­­­ caused by his childhood misfortune. One such example is that of his younger brother, Allie, who died of leukemia. Mr.Caufield directly states that '"My brother Allie...got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but about fifty times as intelligent..."All right, give it (the report on Allie's baseball glove) back to me, then," I said. I went over and pulled it right out of his goddam hand. Then I tore it up,"' (43-47). Mr.Caulfield has fond memories of his younger brother, but it does not seem to have come to full closure with his brother's death. He ripped a report he wrote on his brother's glove right out of his roommate's hand. This eventually led to a fight with his roommate. Mr.Caulfield's anger and sensitivity had gotten the better of him in that situation.   
 Secondly, Mr.Caulfield's self esteem is in need of repair. He told me that "... I get bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age. Sometimes I act a lot older than I am—I really do—but people never notice it. People never notice anything," (11-12). Mr.Caulfield has been told to act more mature, but he is not noticed when he does. This may contribute to a sense of hopelessness even if he himself improves. Another statement that shows a damaged self esteem is from Spencer, who started the following conversation : '"Life is a game that one plays according to the rules." "Yes, sir. I (Holden) know it is..." Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right—I'll admit that. But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game," (11). My patient has admitted to being on the losing side of life. I am forced to conclude that Mr.Caulfield has a damaged self esteem.  
 Thirdly, Mr. Caulfield does not have direction or guidance. During his encounter with the prostitute, he stated "I know you're supposed to feel pretty sexy when somebody gets up and pulls their dress over their head, but I didn't. Sexy was about the last thing I was feeling. I felt much more depressed than sexy... "What's your name?" I asked her.."Sunny," she said. "Let's go, hey." "Don't you feel like talking for a while?" I asked her. It was a childish thing to say, but I was feeling so damn peculiar," (104). Mr. Caulfield hired a prostitute on a whim. However, he stated himself that he was feeling more depressed than wanting to have intercourse, even suggesting to talk. At this point, Mr. Caulfield was paying for an illegal service just to have someone to talk to. Frankly, Mr. Caulfield needs some sort of direction.  
 To conclude, the foundations of Mr.Caulfield's depression is his childhood misfortune, lack of self confidence, and lack of direction. What Mr.Caulfield needs to stave off his depression is someone successful who has gone through the same situation Mr.Caulfield is going through right now. This person will have to give hope and guidance for Mr.Caulfield. If this works, then my patient will be out of this hospital in three days.