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DaSilva: Trusting Your Voice: A Coming of Age Novel

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Trusting Your Voice: A Coming of Age Novel

Growing up is hard to do, but everyone has to do it. This commonality is what draws readers to the coming of age genre. From novels as well-known as *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Secret Life of Bees* to lesser known novels like *I am the Messenger*, the coming of age genre finds different ways to say the same thing. Each of the novels that I will be discussing has their own unique storyline but all strive to reach the same conclusion; each protagonist must learn to trust their own voice and instincts. Parents obviously play an important role in helping their children learn to grow and find their voices. However, children must eventually learn to trust their own instincts. The first stages of growing up is finding your voice, then learning to trust it. Each protagonist in their respective novels will find their own voice and learn to trust themselves through the various obstacles they must face in life. While all the obstacles are different in their respective lives, the characters must look inward to find the answers they seek. Trusting in one's own voice is an important part of growing up and the authors try to capture this moment in life within each of the protagonists.

An important part of growing up is becoming a part of a group of friends, or even being able to look to your family for inclusion. In these friends and family groups, young adults are able to form their social identity, "Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership(s)" (McLeod). The protagonists in the novels that will be studied in this paper are mostly thought of as outsiders. They rely almost entirely on themselves and have

formed their social identity based on their lack of connection to other people. Holden Caulfield, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, prefers to be alone as other people annoy and distract him. And while both Lily Owens and Ed Kennedy, from *The Secret Life of Bees* and *I am the Messenger* respectively, each have only a handful of people they interact with on a friendly level. It is because they are outcasts and alone in the world that they must truly trust themselves. Without trusting their own voices, they would never make it through the difficulties in their lives.

Kenneth Millard is a scholar in the topic of coming of age novels. In the conclusion of his book, Millard states what he believes the use of the coming of age novel is:

“The coming-of-age genre will always be employed by American writers who are looking for a narrative voice that can be used as a vehicle to express social disaffection, and to offer a critique of forms of American socialization. These narrative functions make the genre amenable to a variety of social and political interpretations while still preserving a space for an individual voice that is unique and compelling.” (Millard 2)

Millard simplifies the genre while still capturing its importance. The novels that will be discussed touch upon all the points that Millard comments on. Each protagonist has a uniquely individual voice that makes them stand out, while they also critique the socialization standards they are forced to be a part of in society. Socialization a continuing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behavior, and social skills appropriate to his or her social position (“Socialization” definition). The coming of age novels are needed to show how even though things are constantly changing we must all grow up and learn to trust ourselves.

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

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The Catcher in the Rye is a novel written by J.D. Salinger, which follows a 16-year-old boy named Holden Caulfield. Holden is telling his story from what is believed to be some type of rehabilitative therapy home. He is sharing his story of how he came to end up at this place. It begins with Holden getting kicked out of his fourth prep school, Pencey Prep, for failing four out of his five classes, the only class he passed being English. The reasons for him failing is not because he isn't intelligent but because he fails to apply himself in class and do the work. Since Holden has been kicked out of the school he decides to leave for home earlier than planned, to spend some time with himself in New York City, before his parents know he's home.

Holden arrives in NYC and finds a hotel to stay at. The rest of the novel takes place over the course of his three days before his parents expect him home. While wandering in New York City, Holden begins to realize that he is alone. He can't contact his little sister Phoebe, whom he cherishes because of her innocence, because his parents can't know he is home yet. He can't call his old friend and love interest, Jane Gallagher, because she is not yet home for winter break and Holden doesn't want to talk to her parents. Instead he calls people whose company he doesn't enjoy. He calls Sally Hayes, a girl who he used to date who he now finds annoying, and an older student that graduated from one of Holden's previous prep schools. Holden wanders around the city much like he has been wandering around in his life; without any real direction or purpose.

Along the way Holden finds himself dealing with a prostitute and her pimp. This interaction shows how Holden fails yet again to connect with others. Once the prostitute, Sunny, arrives Holden realizes that he doesn't want to have sex with her and just wants to talk. This shows how confused he can be, as he changes his mind in minutes and can never explain his mood swings. When Holden tries to pay Sunny there is a conflict on what the price for the night

would be. Sunny brings in her pimp, who beats Holden enough to knock the wind out of him and take his money. This interaction only takes up a few pages in the novel but at its core shows Holden's inability to keep to the decisions he makes. Throughout the novel, Holden struggles to make a decision, which can be seen while he wanders the city.

One night he returns to his parent's house to see Phoebe, whether or not he was truly hoping to get caught by his parents is unclear. Holden visits Phoebe to tell her that he plans on leaving New York City and moving out west to be a catcher in a field of rye, making sure children don't fall off the cliff that the field is on. This strange dream job that Holden wants shows that he is disillusioned by what is happening in the world. He wants to protect children's innocence by catching them in the field, but he doesn't realize that in the real world children cannot keep their innocence forever. Holden distances himself from most of the world because he believes that other people are "phony" and not living their real lives. For Holden, growing up and trusting his voice comes when he learns that being "real" or "phony" is just something he made up, and when he stops being so apathetic in his choices in life.

An important characteristic note about Holden is that he wants to protect the innocent. He believes that the world can be ugly and cruel and he wants children, like his sister Phoebe, to stay innocent for as long as possible. As he traveled through the city he visits his old school, where Phoebe now attends and noticed the words "Fuck you" on the wall, "It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it...I kept wanting to kill whoever'd written it" (260). This extreme reaction show just how strongly Holden believes in protecting children. He goes on to say, "if you had a million years to do it in, you couldn't rub out even *half* the "Fuck You" signs in the world. It's impossible" (262). While at first he was so angry he claimed he wanted to kill someone, now he has resigned to apathy. He claims that if

the task is impossible it isn't worth doing at all. His apathetic behavior is a result of the constant change in his life that he cannot control. Holden believes that if things can't be changed, it's not worth the effort to do it. One thing that didn't change for Holden was the museum that he often visited when he was younger. When he went again to look for Phoebe he walked around the museum noticing that nothing had changed, "The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move" (157). Holden emphasizes the fact that he doesn't like change because of his lack of control in the other aspects of his life.

Another important trait of Holden's is his apathy. Many times throughout the novel Holden has no drive within him to do either what he wants or what he is supposed to do. Like the other protagonist, Holden finds it difficult to make a decision and stick with it. While there are many scenes in the novel that show Holden's apathy, there is one that slaps him in the face and makes him listen. When Holden sneaks back into his parent's home it is just to see Phoebe. During their conversation about how Holden was kicked out of yet another school, Holden tries to defend himself by saying he didn't like the people there. Phoebe then points out that Holden doesn't like anything, "You don't like *anything* that's happening" (220). Though she is only ten-years old, Phoebe can communicate with Holden and understand him in a way no one else can. She calls him out on his apathy, claiming that there are many other people who don't like certain things but they do them because they have to, sometimes it happens in life. Phoebe threatens him, asking him to name one thing that he likes and he struggles to come up with anything, instead he kept thinking of things that he didn't like or didn't make sense, "The trouble was I couldn't concentrate too hot. Sometimes it's hard to concentrate" (220). Holden says he cannot concentrate then continues to go on a rant for two pages, concentrated specifically about these

random people that he either just met, or didn't even really care about. Phoebe was unsatisfied with his inability to answer.

It in this conversation about apathy that Holden tells Phoebe his fantasized dream job. The idea came from the poem by Robert Burns, which Holden remembers it incorrectly, but the line he remembers, correct or not, is that he what inspired him to imagine being the catcher in the rye:

“...I keep picturing all these little kids playing some sort of game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids and nobody’s around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I’m standing over the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they’re running and they don’t look where they are going I have to come from somewhere and *catch* them. That’s all I’d do all day. I’d just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it’s crazy, but that’s the only thing I’d really like to be.” (224-225)

There is no part of this dream that is based in reality, in other words, there is no chance that Holden can be the catcher in a field of rye that he wants to be. Instead this dream job is a way for Holden to express his concerns. He wishes to protect children from falling off the cliff, away from safety and into the cruel and ugly world. Holden is not unintelligent, he understands that this is not a job that he can plausibly do, but the imagination of it shows what he truly cares about in a sea of apathy.

“Optimism, Innocence, and Angst in *The Catcher in the Rye*” is an article by Karen Tolchin, and focuses on Holden’s search for knowledge as he wanders through New York City, and how he becomes exhausted, both mentally and physically and what it means, while roaming the city. After stopping by his house to visit Phoebe, Holden goes to stay with a former teacher

of his, Mr. Antolini. This teacher is different than all the others he has had because Holden fully listens and respects Mr. Antolini. In the novel, the reader is let into Holden's mind and is able to hear his personal internal thoughts. Many times throughout the novel, when authority figures are trying to help Holden he shuts them out. He pretends to be listening while truthfully he is thinking of something else, "*The Catcher in the Rye* features the immediate discrediting of most authority figure. In other similar scenes with would-be mentors, Holden's interior monologue automatically corrodes the impact of the advice proffered, in large part because the advice itself hovers on the level of the cliché" (Tolchin 2). A big part of Holden tuning out the adults is the clichéd nature of their advice. Holden believes that clichés are not the real truth, in his eyes they might as well be lying to him. To Holden being true to yourself is the only way to live, even though Holden lies to himself for most of the novel.

After Holden gets to Mr. Antolini's place he begins to see how tired he truly is after his constant roaming of the city. Much like his wandering thoughts, Holden physically wanders the city, restless and apathetic with no direction. When he finally gets his chance to rest his former teacher, Mr. Antolini tries to help him. Unfortunately, in his exhaustion Holden begins to yawn and drift in and out of sleep, which leads him to not really listening or understanding what Mr. Antolini is trying to say. Holden usually discredits authority figures and this lack of basic authority pushes Holden into solidarity in which he must find himself and trust his instincts. Tolchin argues that while Holden yawns in the middle of Mr. Antolini's speech, it is not disrespectful but rather shows Holden appreciation for his teacher:

This [yawn] may appear to devalue Mr. Antolini, but it actually lends authenticity to Holden's high regard for him. Holden is able to be authentic with him and reveal his profound exhaustion. For once Holden does not feign interest while

systematically rejecting an authority figure's advice in the privacy of his own thoughts. (2)

When he falls asleep, Holden letting himself be nothing but authentic and in his authenticity Holden can trust himself enough to fall asleep. Leading up to this point in the novel Holden was calling everyone a “phony” while he himself was lying to himself and all authority figures that interacted with him. As Holden learned to trust himself and his own gut, he must also being to trust the outside world, that is how he grows.

The entirety of the novel is Holden's internal monologue. This constant rant about what he believes is wrong with the world is how Holden tries to get out of his own head. “He [Holden] delivers the ranting monologues that is *The Catcher in the Rye* because he experiences pain and feels compelled to articulate it, not because he wants to be the center of attention...Holden is too much even for himself” (2). Deep inside Holden knows that he had lied to himself before. The anger he experiences is caused by the disconnect between reality and the dream world he wants to live in.

The harsh reality of the world confronts Holden head on near the end of the novel when he goes to visit Phoebe's school. Holden finds graffiti in the school that says “Fuck You”, this bothers him greatly because it's words like that that he believes are robbing the innocence from the children, “...He takes the graffiti as proof that it is impossible to find a place to be in the world without having to face man-made ugliness” (3). Holden doesn't trust the world and therefore hates parts of it, like the ugliness he believes exists. In order to trust the world he must come to terms with the inevitable; that phonies exist, that death exists, and that we must all grow up eventually. For Holden trusting his own voice means understanding that he has lied to himself and to believe that the inevitable will happen.

THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES

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The novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, by Sue Monk Kidd follows Lily Owens as she runs away from home to find the truth about her mother's death. The story takes place in the 1960's and racism is one of the obstacles that Lily notices more and more in her journey. Lily is white and lives with her father, T. Ray, who could care less about her, and her black nanny and housekeeper, Rosaleen. Lily is a 14-year-old girl, who believes that her father doesn't love her, and that she accidentally killed her mother when she was only four years old. Throughout the novel Lily has flashbacks to the day her mother had died. The memory is hazy but it is believed that Lily found a gun on the floor and had accidentally shot her mother. This is something that Lily must overcome in order to truly trust herself.

The main reason Lily runs away is because of her father, T. Ray. She doesn't even call him dad or daddy because of how he treats her. Every night bees fly around her room and she feels connected to them. One night she puts some bees in a jar and the next day they escape which she takes as a sign to leave her abusive home. Another main factor in Lily running away is Rosaleen. One morning Rosaleen wants to register to vote in town and Lily goes with her. When Rosaleen is harassed by three white men she defends herself and ends up getting both Lily and herself in jail. T. Ray bails Lily out, telling her that the white men Rosaleen fought would likely kill Rosaleen, which upsets Lily. Lily goes to visit Rosaleen in the hospital, and it is then that she decides they need to run away from home to save herself and Rosaleen. Lily decides to go to Tiburon, South Carolina, which was the town name on the back of a picture of black Mary that belonged to Lily's mother.

It's in Tiburon that Lily and Rosaleen meet the Boatwright sisters, August, May, and June. Lily hopes to find some connection to her mother through living with at the Boatwright

house. Lily soon joins the community of black women there and finally feels like she has a home. While there, Lily struggles with telling August, the head of the house, about her mother and whether or not her mother had once lived at the Boatwright house herself. At the house, Lily had learned about the struggles that are faced by the black community. In these difficulties, Lily must find her own, truthful voice and trust it. To Lily, learning to trust her voice is about learning the truth about her mother.

There is a clear progression of Lily's character that can be seen in the novel. She begins by telling the reader all the reasons that one day lead her to running away from home. Her father can be abusive, she believes she killed her mother, and finally the only person that truly cares for her, Rosaleen, gets beaten and sent to jail. All these different reason connect in Lily's mind and she decides it's time for her to run away to protect herself and Rosaleen. When her father, T. Ray, tries to threaten Lily to stay, it pushes her into the decision to run, "*Then I'll find another roof, I thought*" (Monk Kidd 26). Running away from home is the act of Lily trusting herself although she doesn't know it yet.

One thing that gives her the courage to trust her instincts and run is her lack of authoritative figures in her life. T. Ray mistreats her, and the cop that arrested both Lily and Rosaleen did nothing to stop Rosaleen from getting beaten. When Lily asks the police officer to protect Rosaleen in jail he laughs at her, "His smile appeared in the rearview mirror. 'I can't say what men riled up like that will do'" (35). Lily learns that she cannot trust authority. The only person she can trust is Rosaleen and eventually herself. She must learn to trust herself in order to change her life.

After running away from home, Lily begins to function almost completely on her own instinct. She does not fully trust herself, she simply wants to find a safe place to live and to find

the truth about her mother. For Lily finding the truth will lead her to trust herself more fully.

While Lily struggles with trusting her own voice, she spends most of the novel lying to find out the information she wants. When she first enters the Boatwright house she said she had a feeling in her body that her mother had been there, “I was wondering what my body knew that I didn’t” (69). This feeling shows that she does not fully trust herself, as she doesn’t understand her own body’s reaction. Lily will grow up when she stops lying and learns to trust herself.

Living at the Boatwright house with the August, May, and June, helped Lily learn about life and growing up, while she also tried to learn about her mother’s life. August teaches Lily how to be a bee keeper and imparts wisdom on her anyway she can. One thing August preached about often was love, both giving and receiving:

“She reminded me that the world was really on big bee yard, and the same rules worked fine in both places: Don’t be afraid, as no life-loving bee wants to sting you. Still, don’t be an idiot; wear long sleeves and long pants. Don’t swat. Don’t even think about swatting. If you feel angry, whistle. Anger agitates, while whistling melts a bee’s temper. Act like you know what you’re doing, even if you don’t. Above all, send the bees love. Every little thing wants to be loved”. (92)

Lily wanted to be loved but she believed that T. Ray never loved her, and that her mother had loved her but died when she was young. But the only person who had really cared about her for most of her life was Rosaleen. This lack of love or real social connection helped form Lily’s identity which pushed her into running away.

An important part of self-trust is self-respect or self-esteem. In the article titled “Self-trust, Self-respect, and Self-esteem” written by Trudy Govier, the author discusses how self-trust is critical in how we value ourselves and make us who we are. Govier speaks directly about self-

trust and how it is a necessary part of ~~finding owns on voice~~ and growing up. “To have self-respect, we must value ourselves as people. We must regard our own interests, values, beliefs, and goals as important and see ourselves as people with dignity and moral worth” (Govier 1). Lily believes herself to be worthless, and because of that she believed that she would amount to nothing. However, living in the Boatwright house helped Lily feel loved and a part of something special. Govier states that treating others with love helps build their self-respect which leads to self-trust, “Treated as lovable and valuable by those closest to him or her, such a person will naturally gain a sense of himself or herself as a worthy person meriting respect” (4-5). Lily needs to feel love and find the truth about her mother in order for her to trust herself and her own voice. Before meeting the Boatwright sisters and truly feeling loved, Lily believed herself to be worthless, and without self-respect. Without the self-respect she found, there would be no way that she would find a way to trust herself.

At the Boatwright house there was a statue of Mary that helped the women of the house pray. Lily believed that there was a strength connected to the statue, but one night August tells Lily that the strength doesn't come from the statue but rather from inside yourself, “Our Lady is not the same magical being out there somewhere, like a fairy godmother. She's not the statue in the parlor. She's something *inside* of you... You have to find a mother inside yourself... *Your own heart*” (288). August comes right out and tells Lily that she must look inside herself to find the truth and trust herself. Govier states, “Core self-esteem is our sense that fundamentally we are acceptable persons” (Govier 2). This can be seen once Lily believes that she is an acceptable person, not just someone who wandered into the house. Once Lily learns the truth that she is seeking she will be able to trust her own voice and instincts.

Eventually T. Ray finds out where Lily has run to, and shows up at the Boatwright house. When Lily refuses to go back home with him, he falls into a fit of blind rage, believing that he is speaking to Lily's mother, Deborah, instead of Lily herself. After his outburst T. Ray, realizes what happens and lets Lily stay. Lily then confronts her father about the truth of her mother's death and finds out that she did in fact kill her mother. In Lily's case this truth finally sets her free and allows her to believe her flashbacks and trust herself. After T. Ray left the Boatwright house, Lily looks back at the new family she has made, "...I remember the sight of them standing there waiting. All these women, all this love, waiting" (299). For many years Lily believed she was worthless and unlovable and believing that about yourself undermines people's self-worth and self-trust. In Govier's article she states, "...our fundamental sense of self-worth, our basic internal conception as to whether, fundamentally, we are worthy and adequate persons, regardless of how we compare or fare under competition with other people" (Govier 4). Govier argues that once we believe we are worthy, we can accomplish almost anything. Once Lily believes that she is loved by the community of the Boatwright house she is able to accept her mother's death, and trust her own voice saying it.

Govier continues her article by claiming that "Self-trust is necessary to maintain our self-respect. It is also basic in connection with self-esteem" (2). Self-trust, self-respect, and self-esteem are all connected and without one or more it causes people to be apathetic in their life choices because they don't believe in themselves or trust themselves. In the novel, Lily slowly builds up the ability to tell August the truth about running away from home and who she was. Over time Lily became more confident in her actions and thoughts. This is related to her self-esteem and eventually it can be seen in the change of her self-trust.

I AM THE MESSENGER

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Ed Kennedy is a 19-year-old cab driver living on the outskirts of town; he is also the protagonist of the novel *I Am the Messenger* by Markus Zusak. Ed lives an uneventful life and without any real life goals for his future; his life stays the same day in and day out. One day Ed and his friends, Audrey, Ritchie, and Marv, end up in a bank robbery. Instead of being afraid, Ed and his friends give the bank robber attitude, even going so far as calling him useless. When the bank robber tries to get away Ed runs after him, picks up the dropped gun and aims it at the robber who is getting into the getaway car, while he does not shoot the bank robber he hits the car, which stalls the bank robbers exit so the police could show up. Even though it is only the first chapter of the novel, the reader can see that this is something complete out of character for Ed.

Since the bank robbery, Ed's life changes. He becomes a local celebrity for a time, and when he goes to court to testify against the bank robber, the bank robber threatens Ed's life. Ed considers this an empty threat because he doesn't have much of a life to begin with. After the day in court, Ed receives a mysterious package in the mail that only has the Ace of Diamonds with three addresses and times written on it. He eventually figures out that he needs to go to these addresses. The first house that Ed visits is a drunk man who comes home every night and rapes his wife. That first house disturbs Ed and rightfully so, however not all the addresses have such horrific tasks. One has a lonely old woman that needs a companion, the other is a 15-year-old girl that needs confidence to run the way she wants. Eventually Ed builds up the courage to go back to the first address and help the woman in a way he sees fit. Over time, Ed realizes that he has been sent these cards to help these people in whatever way they need.

During the course of the novel Ed receives a total of four Aces and a Joker in the mail, each one with its own obstacles and people who need assistance. While Ed is helping these people, he learns to trust his gut instinct. With each task Ed begins to trust himself and what he needs to do for each unique assignment that comes with every Ace. Ed begins to trust his own voice when he no longer questions every move he makes to accomplish his missions, and when he believes in what he needs to do confidently.

Ed spends a decent portion of his time talking directly to the reader. He openly states facts about himself, telling the reader just what he really thinks of himself, which is not much. “My full name’s Ed Kennedy. I’m nineteen. I’m an underage cabdriver. I’m typical of many of the young men you see in this suburban outpost of the city—not a whole of prospects or possibility. That aside, I read more books than I should, and I’m decidedly crap at sex and doing my taxes. Nice to meet you” (Zusak 7). Within the first chapter of the novel the reader is thrown into a full description of how Ed sees himself. This is an important passage because this is the starting point of Ed’s growth that will be seen throughout the plot. Ed Kennedy believes himself to be ordinary in most everyway. When he is describing himself there is nothing that stands out, or that he claims he is even good at. He even states that he is “typical of many of the young men” that are in his town. It is important to note that Ed thinks very little of himself and where he comes from, firmly believing that he will never amount to much. This is the beginning of our coming of age protagonist, an average unexceptional character who will find a way to trust themselves.

Ed’s personality is not only shown by his bluntness to the reader but also in his actions throughout the story. Ed tends to be sarcastic and has a very dry sense of humor. He uses his humor to keep from thinking too much about his current situation in life. He knows that he isn’t

really going anywhere in life since he hasn't accomplished much. He even goes on to list how at the age of nineteen "Bob Dylan was a seasoned performer... Salvador Dalí had already produced several outstanding artworks of paint and rebellion... Joan of Arc was the most wanted woman in the world, having created a revolution" (15). He spends most of his time in the beginning of the novel almost trying to convince the reader that he shouldn't be the protagonist of the novel. "No real career. No respect in the community. Nothing. I'd realized there were people everywhere achieving greatness while I was taking directions from balding businessmen...and being wary of Friday-night drunks who might throw up in my cab or do a runner on me (15). Ed looks down on himself and his place in life. He's an intelligent person who has read many great novels and can be empathetic, however to him that is not enough. Ed understands that if he put some effort in he would be able to move on and out of that town, but he stays in place, not improving his life.

The first step in Ed changing his life comes without warning or planning. When the bank robber is getting away Ed follows him out the door, "For some reason I'll never understand. I run out, picking up the gun along the way. When I cross the road, I lock eyes with the gunman. He attempts to get out of the ca, but it's too late now for that...I have the gun pointed at his eyes...He tries to get out and run, and I swear I have no idea I'm firing the gun until I've stepped toward him and hear the glass shatter" (10). This is the beginning of Ed realizing he really can make something of himself. At this moment in the story, Ed doesn't realize that he is changing himself, he even declares that he does not understand his choice of actions. This shows that there is something deep down within him that wants to change and can better himself. After the years of constantly putting himself down, Ed believes deep down that he can change himself and his circumstances by pushing himself. The bank robbery and stopping the bank robber is just the

first step in many that will push Ed into growing and learning to listen and trust the voice inside of him.

Part of what makes someone who they are is where they came from like their parents. Ed says his parents are typical to the area where he lives. His father was a deadbeat and his mother is less than charming. Ed's father had passed away six months before the beginning of the novel. While Ed considers his father a deadbeat he still respected him and when he spoke of him it was both the negatives and the positive attributes, "He was a lonely, kind, quiet, hard-drinking deadbeat" (19). Ed takes both sides and realized people are more than just one part of themselves, this shows that he has a high level of emotional intelligence and is observant of the world around him. His mother constantly tells Ed that he never amounted to anything, unlike his siblings who all moved out of town. For most of the book the readers believe that his mom might truly hate him, however we find near the end that she wanted what was best for him, "Believe it or no—it takes a lot of love you hate you like this" (245). His mother was actually on one of the aces, which shows how even though Ed needed to trust himself, he needed a push from the cards to get him to speak to his mother. After their fight his mother says she wants him to make something of himself and that she loves him. As someone who had never really had parents to rely on Ed this push from his mother had a profound effect on him. In her article Govier states that, "Self-trust requires and is required by positive relations with other people" (Govier 7). Not only does Ed need to rely on his friends but also his family, and this is the first time it was possible.

Before the first card appeared in the mail and changed the course of Ed's life it was an ordinary day. So ordinary that the card showing up at his door was the "strangest thing", "It is without a doubt the strangest thing that's ever happened to me" (Zusak 26). From this point on

Ed begins to trust only himself, as the only other person who knows he is doing the tasks on the card is Audrey. While Audrey knows, Ed completes each task on his own, no matter how terrifying or painful or happy. As he begins to understand what he needs to do for each card and task he learns to trust himself. When faced with a challenging card he doesn't look to other for help instead he believes that he can figure it out on his own, "I don't know what to do there yet, but I'm pretty confident by now. It'll come" (216). This line comes from the third ace that Ed receives, meaning at this point Ed has completed nine or ten other tasks already. At the time he gets the third ace he has trusts himself more and more.

Most of Ed's self-trust comes from success in completing the tasks on the cards delivered to him. "...self-trust is founded in part upon experiences" (Govier 5). However, he also believes he is having a positive influence on these people, and they are doing the same to him. It is in this combination that he is able to achieve self-trust and trust in his voice. "We come to trust ourselves to trust ourselves as capable and worthy persons because we have evidence that we can accomplish our goals" (5). Once Ed learns that he is capable of changing other people's lives he understood that he could change his own. The last card he receives in the mail is a Joker, with his own address on it. For the last card Ed must look into himself more than he has the entire novel.

This last card makes him question yet again who could be sending him the playing cards, he hopes that is it just Audrey trying to help Ed become something. He even asks her, pleading with her that she wanted him to become better, "Make *myself* better—make me worth something" (344). He wants to believe that it's her, but it isn't. When Ed finally finds and confronts the man who has planned this whole thing, Ed asks him why he did this, his answer was simple, "I did it because you were the epitome of ordinariness Ed" (353). The man who

planned each step of this journey for Ed knew that without some sort of outside push Ed would have died without living up to any of his potential. In the end Audrey reminds Ed that he is important and can be capable of greatness, “If a guy like you can stand up and do what you did, then maybe everyone can. Maybe everyone can live beyond what they’re capable of” (357). If Ed, the “epitome of ordinariness” can change, anyone can. At the end of the novel Ed realizes that he is his own message, that everyone has the potential to change and learn to trust themselves like he did.

Ed first believes that whoever sent the card was mistaken, because he would not be capable of helping change anyone’s life, considering that he cannot change his own. Govier points out that unless we believe we are capable of achieving our goals then we will face them, “In any endeavor there are obstacles; if we do not regard our pursuits as worthy and achievable, we will soon give up” (Govier 1). In Ed’s case he needed a push to start not only changing the lives of those in the community around him but also change his life and the lives of his friends. Govier also believes that “Self-respect and self-trust are necessary for achievement and success” (1). As he completes each task along his journey, Ed respects himself and what he does more and more. This appreciation for what he has been told to do helps Ed ultimately trust himself.

In an article titled “Social Identity in Construction” looks into different ways that people try to identify themselves, whether it is social identity or personal. Social identity is defined as, “that part of individuals, self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Lowstedt and Raisanen 2). This can be more easily seen in the novels. The protagonist in each novel as formed their identity based on their group of friends, or lack of. Along with social identity is personal identity which can be defined as, “unique to the individual

and which distinguishes one individual from another” (2). We, as humans, use both to form our identity and both of these ideas can be seen within the novels.

This article not only looks into how people form their identities but how identity is formed. The authors argue that identity is constantly being created and is an ongoing process, “In other words, we should start viewing identity/ies as an ongoing dynamic process that unfolds (variously) in organizational practices” (1). Identity isn’t something that is defined by one moment or action in one’s life, it is continually being defined and changed. In the novels, the characters are growing and constantly trying to find their independent voices. Defining their identity comes with trusting their own voices. The article goes on to say that questions like “‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who do I want to become?’” (2), are important questions to ask to find one’s own identity when growing up. As previously stated, identity is not defined by a single moment or simply asking questions but rather an “ongoing cyclic interaction between narration and action” (2), it is how people act on the questions they ask themselves. “So, instead of ‘identity’ ...we should only talk about ongoing and open-ended processes of ‘identification’” (2). The main point that the article wants to get across is the fact that identity is continually growing while we are ourselves continually growing. This idea of continually changing and growing identity is an important idea that is the backbone of the novels that have been discussed.

Trusting your own voice and instincts is important not only to growing up but also to finding your identity. Finding one’s identity can be called “identification”, “Identification, ‘is the process by which people come to define themselves, communicate that definition to others, and use that definition to navigate their lives, work-wise or other’ (3). In identification it is important that we look to the friends and family that are included in the lives of the subject. In this case the protagonists of the novels tend to be loners. Being alone impacts identification as

much as a large family would, it would just impact them differently. As was similarly stated earlier, identification is something that continues to change and grow over time. The article discusses how as it continually changes so does people's effect on one another, "Social identity could therefore be viewed as a linking construct between the individual level, the group level, and the organization level of analysis" (2). Identity is effected by time and relationships between people, and this can be seen throughout all three novels.

When talking about how insecure teenagers need to look outside their family for other examples of self-trust, "In the sensitive phase of adolescence, friends are crucial...self-confidence and self-esteem require acceptance and success outside the circle of family and intimate friends" (Govier 5). This is an important fact because coming of age novels are focused on teenagers; Holden is 16, Lily is 14, and Ed is 19. While there is a difference in age between them, they are all struggling to find their voice and trust themselves. Each of their respective stories show them on journeys in which they have to do just that. Over the course of their journeys and with each obstacle our protagonists face they learn to trust themselves. Each new problem in their way gives them another reason to look inward, to find the answers within themselves. Govier makes the point that "If we doubt or distrust ourselves, we see ourselves as ill-motivated, incompetent, and unable to act independently" (1). While the novels may start with the characters being unmotivated to change their situation, they all end with each protagonist ending in a better place or state of mind than how they started. This end result could only be achievable if they learned to trust themselves.

An important part of growing up is learning to find your individuality in your voice and in time trusting your voice. The coming of age genre takes different unique novels and ends at a similar conclusion. The novels that have been discussed show that while they all have different

stories and protagonists of different ages or sex, the journey they must go on is similar. They begin their novels stuck in some unhappy point in their lives until they make an effort to change it. Once they complete the first step they learn that they can trust themselves more fully and continue to do so throughout the novel. Trusting in one's own voice is an important part of growing up and the authors try to capture this moment within each of the protagonists. It is in learning to trust themselves that the characters are able to change themselves and the world around them. While all coming of age novels tell a different story, they all share the same message: you only need to trust in yourself and your own voice.

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