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Celebration of the Young Adult's Body in Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

Dr. Hukum Thapa

Lecturer in English at Ratnarajya laxmi (R.R.) Campus, T.U., Kathmandu

Corresponding Author: Dr. Hukum Thapa, Email: hukumthapa1@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper studies the celebration of young adult's body in J.D. Salinger's The Catcher in the Rye. It analyzes why and how the young adult protagonist Holden Renaultin in The Catcher in the Rye celebrates the body since the young adults perceive their bodies as the means of power, change, conflict and solution. It argues that young adults like Holden celebrate their bodies to establish their identity, freedom and to demonstrate their maturity. They also exhibit their individuality through their celebration of the body. They desire to be noticeable and different from others by means of the body celebration. This paper contends that young adults celebrate their bodies by means of exercise, wearing different types of clothes, playing and dancing. For the analytical purpose, it basically engages with the critical insights of Judith Butler, Elinor Fuchs, Rush Rehm, Michel Foucault and Clinton Sanders et al. Finally, the study expects to open up a new approach in the study of body celebration of young adults and its consequences.

Key Words: young adult, body celebration, freedom, identity and maturity

Introduction

The term young adult, coined by American Library Service Association in 1957, bears multiple definitions. In general, the social sciences categorize the person from eighteen to twenty-five as young adult whereas the literature classifies the person from eleven to eighteen or nineteen as young adult as Michael Cart argues, "Literature for twelve to eighteen years olds or thirteen to nineteen years old could officially be described as 'teens'; and the books for eighteen or even sixteen to twenty five years olds could be categorized as young adult" (91). So the term young adult has debatable characterizations, however, literature employs the term to denote the readers or the characters from eleven to eighteen or nineteen years old. They are in general known as adolescents or teenagers.

Body celebration has been a subject in Young Adult narratives ever since the genre emerged in American literary scenario during 1940s. Body celebration generally concerns with love, embrace and importance to the body. Young adults emphasize on doing exercise, playing, beautifying, dancing, wearing stylish dresses, eating and sleeping for the purpose of celebrating their body. Therefore, Young Adult narratives, ironically the product of adult authors, present young adults celebrating their body. The young adult narratives refer the narratives written about and for eleven to eighteen or nineteen years old teenagers or the adolescents. In the same line, J.D. Salinger projects his young adult protagonist Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) celebrating the body by doing the different activities. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden largely celebrates the body by wearing a red hunting hat. Then questions arise in the mind of readers why the novelist presents his character in such condition and how the character looks different from others and celebrate his body in different ways. Therefore, this paper predominantly studies why and how Holden celebrates his body in *The Catcher in the Rye*. It contends that Holden celebrates his body in order to obtain freedom, identity and maturity. This paper primarily employs the perspectives of Judith Butler, Elinor Fuchs, Rush Rehm, Michel Foucault and Clinton Sanders et al. to analyze the body celebration and its consequences. It employs J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* as a primary text to unearth the context and reasons of body celebration.

Theoretical Framework

Body celebration refers to love and affection of an individual to the body. Body fluctuation and extension define the celebration of body. Moreover, the change of body shape through exercise and different gestures presented during winning or losing condition also indicate the celebration of body. Many theorists and critics have discussed about body celebration. These critics and theorists show significance of body for the various connotations of life activities. They claim that body rules the world to be identified as an important component of social phenomenon. Regarding these issues, Judith Butler in her book entitled *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* deals with the activities of the body in details. Butler explicates, "The body is not merely the source from which projection issues but is also always a phenomenon in the world" (Introduction, 17). Butler hints that body is a kind of trend. The body rules the world. The body itself exists in this world. The body is a necessary mirror to the world. People can gaze the different things through body.

The critic Chris Shilling deliberates enormously about body and society in *The Body and Social Theory: Theory, Culture & Society*. According to Shilling, body stands as a project. It divulges biological and social phenomenon. Shilling also puts forward the views of the reconstructing and celebrating the body. Shilling elucidates, "The projects of health, plastic surgery and body building are just three examples of how modern individuals are placing increasing emphasis on their bodies" (7). The plastic surgery, body building and health project emphasize on the reconstruction of body. Shilling emphasizes on the body modification. The modification of body derives the concept of body celebration. Young adults celebrate their body even to intimidate others and to display their superiority.

The body celebration expands its areas in the case of young adults. The body painting and tattooing embark commonly in the life of young adults. The body painting and tattooing induce the young adults to celebrate their body for their identity. Clinton Sanders et al. in *Customizing the Body* reveal the importance of tattoo. They clarify, "The tattoo becomes an item in the tattoo's personal identity kit" (41). The tattoo stands as a tool of an identity. The tattoo reflects the individual's identity. It remains as a marker of satisfaction. The shiny appearance of the individual

indicates the body celebration.

The critic Rush Rehm presents the relationship between space and body. Rehm examines the body by taking Greek reference. Rehm explicates, “Greek views that body constitutes the beginning and end of each person’s existence” (168). Rehm considers that body is an important factor to establish and transform space in the theater. The body of the actor plays a transformative role. Rehm takes the reference of Lefebvre. She defends “Each living body is space and has its space” (169). The body produces itself in space and it also produces space. The body uncovers the identity of the individuals. Finally, body creates reality. The relation between body and space obviously establishes the significance of body celebration.

Chris Shilling examines the body from the perspective of celebration in *The Body and Social Theory* (1993). Shilling alludes body “as a project” (5). He considers body as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon project. He emphasizes on the modification of the body by means of plastic surgery and others. Besides above critics and theorists, Michel Foucault stresses on the celebrating the body. At the end, young adults obtain their freedom, identity and maturity by means of politics of body.

All above critical insights of the different scholars pave the way to analyze the primary text *The Catcher in the Rye* from the perspectives of body celebration. These theoretical tools support for engineering the ideas of body celebration and to concretize the conclusions specifically and comprehensively.

Celebration of the body occurs in the different ways. Salinger presents his young adult protagonist Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye* celebrating his body by means of attire. Holden wears the red hunting hat in the most of the events. The red hunting hat for him stands as a symbol of individuality, youthfulness, revolt and confidence. Robert M. Slabey affirms, “Red Hunting Hat is an important symbol. Its redness and Holden’s wearing it backward symbolize his rebellion against society” (174). The wearing red hat does not only indicate body celebration marker but also the symbol of revolt against the existing norms to establish himself in the phony world. However, Holden often avoids wearing the hat in public, demonstrating his fear of being condemned for his individuality. He confronts with his roommate Ward Stradlater and neighbor Robert Ackley before leaving his Pencey School. Aftermath of his hostility with his friends, he decides to stay in New York. He intends to empower himself by leaving his friends and family. Then Holden reveals, “I put my red hunting hat on, turned the peak around to the back, the way I liked it” (52). This situation elucidates his intention to celebrate his body to impress others. Holden uses a red hunting hat as a means of power. Wearing the clothes contrarily by young adult reflects their desire to celebrate the body to look different and to establish their position in the society.

Young adults in general endeavor to celebrate their bodies through the physical exercise. They seem to be enthusiastic to vitalize their body to be resilient. They aspire to create their space in the society through their bodies as Rehm explicates, “Each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space” (169). The body possess twin roles. On the one hand, it is itself space and on the other hand, it also garners space in the social spectrum. In the same way, Holden attempts to embolden his body by means of physical exercises. The stout and healthy body stands as a means of celebration and attraction. He claims, “I am six foot two and a half and I have gray hair, I really do” (9) through the exercises. He further intends to celebrate his body by doing exercises at Gym. He remarks, “I have to go right to the Gym” (15). In both

conditions, he admires his body by claiming his height and good look. He expects to be different from others by possessing own space.

The body celebration does not remain only within a periphery of Holden. The American football produces many instances of the body celebration. Talking about American football or soccer, it is a cultural inheritance from England according to David Riesman and Reuel Denny who have written an article about American football. They have provided some glimpses of American football in “Football in America: A Study in Cultural Diffusion”. They believe, “Football, in its earliest form, was called the Dane’s head and it was played in the tenth and eleventh centuries as a contest in kicking a ball between towns” (311). Football playing started in England, in the medieval period, after the invasion of Denmark. It used to be called Dane’s head. The people coming from Denmark used to play it. The popularity of the football expanded rapidly. The football playing used to be between the towns. It was almost similar to Rugby. The body celebration starts in the football game after winning or scoring the goals. Some players raise their hands and some players take off their t-shirt. They display their body to celebrate their happiness which happens even in the modern football. According to Riesman and Denny, in colonial period and right down to the civil war, American played variants on the kicking football game on their town greens and school yards.

In Football in America stands as a major source of body celebration. Football provides the location and identity of the nation. Danielle Christensen Lindquist exposes multiple connotations about football in the article “Locating Nation: Football Game Day and American Dreams in Central Ohio” in 2006. Lindquist discloses, “Football is a particularly organized sports, one developed by social elites and characterized by an invariant structure and deference to authority often associated with ritual” (448). Lindquist categorizes football as an organized sports. The football in America unearths the identity of the nation and the ritual. Football is in the vanguard of the passion and fashion of the sports. American football history reveals the increasing influence of external supervisors. These supervisors encourage the players for the body celebration while playing football. Further, Lindquist explains, “Football can tell several overlapping tales of American success -that is economic and political power” (456). The football narrates the success story of America. The success of the football recounts how American economic and political power expand around the world.

In the same line of the American football, *The Catcher in the Rye* attempts to continue the football ritual in the school premise to remind the American football history and to assert the patterns of body celebration of the players while playing. Through the football playing, players present their body as a commodity. Holden narrates the activities of the football and the participation of his school Pencey. He alludes, “Anyway, it was the Saturday of the football game with Saxon Hall. The game with Saxon Hall was supposed to be a very big deal around Pencey” (2). Holden’s school participates in the football competition and the students get opportunities to demonstrate their skills in football and to celebrate their bodies while winning the game.

Adolescents and adults celebrate their bodies by decorating or painting and sometimes tattooing their bodies. Young adults are enthusiastic to decorate own and others’ bodies. They get satisfaction from decorating the body. Clinton Sanders et al. argue, “Wearing a tattoo connected the person to significant others who were similarly marked, made one unique by separating him or her from those who were too convention-bound to so alter their bodies, symbolized freedom or self-control, and satisfied an aesthetic desire to decorate the physical self” (45). Tattooing functions as a marker of freedom, satisfaction and recognition of the individuals. Holden decorates his body

by applying the picture or tattoo on his arm. Holden claims, “The picture on his arm makes him different from the Pencey” (76). He proudly admits that body celebration reaps recognition and satisfaction.

The nude body provides an impact for the body celebration perspectives. Mariela Pandolfi underlines the power of the naked body in “Body”. Pandolfi scans, “The naked body tends to acquire a power stronger than that of any government” (18). The naked body grabs more power than any form of government. Pandolfi believes that the naked body overtakes the government. Agreeing with Pandolfi, Rehm also contends, “The body when dressed or undressed evokes different spaces and different worlds” (170). Rehm claims that both bodies either nude or dressed have their space and they create their space. Like the contention of Pandolfi and Rehm, Holden “always walked around in his bare torso because he thought he had a damn good build” (26) and “running around the house naked” (32). Holden aspires to establish his space by demonstrating his nude chest and whole body. He believes he could gain more freedom and power by means of his body.

Young adults primarily ponder their body as a material. They consider their body can be commercialized for their happiness and for their identity and freedom. In the context of body celebration, body as material, Elinor Fuchs highlights the body as a material in “Staging the Obscene Body”. Fuchs asserts, “Own body as one of the materials” (33). Body is represented as an object. Fuchs provides an example of the artist Carolee Schneemann who displays the naked body. Schneemann paints flowers on her cheeks, breast and her overall body. Her body is covered with splashes of paint, grease and chalk. Schneemann’s body stays as a center of attraction. She celebrates her body by decorating her body. She demonstrates the power and meaning of life through the body celebration. As Schneemann, Stradlater in *The Catcher in the Rye* “started parting his hair all over and was putting on his tie, in front of the mirror” (32-33) to attract Jane Gallagher. Stradlater takes his body as an object. He considers his body as commodity to attract others and to gain more recognition.

The change in body shape and size accelerates the concept of the body celebration. Young adults prefer to modify their bodies to be noticeable and to enjoy their freedom. Fuchs further clarifies that weight loss or gain add an impulse on the body celebration. It makes the difference in body image. Salinger ruminates that young adults celebrate their bodies in almost every moment. They rejoice their body even in the dream. Salinger’s protagonist Holden dreams, “an attractive and strong body” (44) to entice the girls. Judith Butler also takes the concept of Foucault about body. According to Butler, Foucault considers body as an investment in *Discipline and Punish*. He underlines the significance of body to gain and lose the power. Foucault posits, “Body is a site of investment” (33). Foucault analyzes that body is a focal point in which soul acts as a power-laden schema that produces and actualizes the body itself. The body itself remains as a power center to explore its horizons of celebration. However, Foucault puts condition to become body a useful force. According to Foucault, body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive and subjected body. Body is the passage between subjection and productivity. Power acts upon the body. Body revolts against the coercion. Power forms, maintains, sustains and regulates the body. Body itself is the area where we can invest and can get benefit from that investment. The celebration itself is the investment. Adults and young adults who celebrate their body obtain satisfaction, power, individuality and freedom from their investment.

The continuity of body celebration persists in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger uses his protagonist Holden celebrating body by giving importance on physical appearance and body

alteration as Clinton R. Sanders et al. emphasize on the physical appearance and body alteration. Physical appearance of the individual communicates effectively. The physical appearance illustrates the recognition of the person pragmatically. Appearance ignites to interpret the behavior of any individuals and it supports to make decisions to coordinate social activities effectively. Attractiveness has considerable impact on social relationship. Holden mentions, “All I need an audience. I am an exhibitionist” (29) while shaving to his friend Stradlater. Holden claims himself as an attention- seeker. Holden intends to be different than others. Not only shaving, Holden “started parting his hair all over” (32). He cares and modifies his hair to look different and attractive. He aspires to present others how he looks like. Holden primarily focuses on the appearance of the body. Young adults aim to establish and maintain the craze of people by focusing on physical appearance and body celebration.

The body celebration mostly gets burgeoned by the clothes worn by the individuals. Salinger’s protagonist Holden often wears red hunting hat that plays a symbolic marker of body celebration. When Holden is ready to go New York, he “puts his red hunting hat on” (52). He expects to be in different look. Similarly, on the way to the hotel, Holden “takes his red hunting hat of his pocket and put it on” (88) to alter his appearance and to save his head from freezing cold. Toward the end of the novel, Phoebe, Holden’s sister “took out his red hunting hat and put it on his head” (212) to encourage Holden to be strong. His sister assists him to come out from depression and to face the looming hardships of adulthood. Holden wishes to save the childhood from ruin. He anticipates to come out of emotional turmoil. The red hunting hat supports him to enjoy the innocence of childhood and to tackle the challenges of adolescence. The reshaping and decorating the body make the persons especially young adults different, strong, and confident and increase the personality.

The physical body matters a lot in the consumer society. Salinger projects an impact of consumer society to Holden. The consumer society makes Holden as a product. Shilling posits, “The young, slim and sexual body is highly prized in contemporary consumer culture” (35). The consumer culture demands attractive body. This culture objectifies the body. Holden’s narratives start following his expulsion from Pencey School of Agerstown. On the course of storytelling, he narrates that he flirts with the women in their thirties. He especially looks for young, slim and sexually attractive women. Flirting and flirting with the sexually attractive women are the parts of body celebration. In this case, he wants to show that he is gaining his adulthood in spite of his immature circumstance. He shares his experience of the body celebration with the readers when he is at the Edmond hotel. Then he re-counts, “I started giving the three witches at the next table the eye again” (70). Holden claims that he gives them a cool glance although these three young women titter at him. Even he exaggerates the matter of marriage and body celebration by projecting his desire to “marry” (ibid.) them. This exaggeration of his bodily activities suggests for his intent for the body celebration. The activities done by Holden at the Edmond hotel strengthen the notions of the body celebration campaign of young adults. The expansion of consumer culture directly or indirectly impact in the varied facets of modern life. Holden stresses more on his body and look to unearth his foundation of identity.

Conclusion

Thus, Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* portrays the lives of American teenagers particularly with the focus on the body celebration. These teenagers tend to celebrate their body before their peer groups and society. They desire to establish their position in the peer group and society. People

with attractive appearance have chances of economic success and high moral character. Attractive appearance facilitates to be successful economically with high moral character. The attractive appearance supports to broaden their position in the society and the concerned group. Therefore, people are interested in body celebration to expand their social horizon. Tattooing, body piercing and body sculpting are the means of body attraction and body celebration. Holden in *The Catcher in the Rye* represent the body attraction and celebration.

The young adults use their body celebration perspective to be noticeable or look different from others as well. They employ the celebration of body to demonstrate their happiness. People construct their appearance in a wide variety of ways to control their social identities, self-definitions and interactional prospects. The painting on the body instills the vision of identity and beautification or to enhance attractiveness. Body art is primarily an aesthetic practice related to celebrating the human body. They consider the aesthetic practices and body celebration have same tuning. The aesthetic practices promote the celebration of body. For that purpose, hair styling and reshaping the body can be applied. The 'lotus feet' of the women in the Chinese culture and plastic surgery are the aesthetic practices to celebrate the body. The young adults by celebrating their body emphasize on the reshaping, restructuring, painting, hair style and power of body. Through their body, they intend to be noticeable, different, impressive, dominant and self-defining themselves.

Apparently, young adult heroes put themselves different from others and intend to establish their roles in the society. Holden's exaggeration of his bodily activities, wearing red hunting hat and becoming exhibitionist support him to be noticeable and to ascertain himself in the phony society. For that purpose, he employs his body to overcome intimidation, difficulties, bullying and abjection.

Therefore, body celebration stands as an agency for the young adults to attain their freedom, identity and power. Young adults celebrate their body on the different occasions. They generally celebrate their bodies when they win the competitions and feel happy. They do not hesitate to celebrate their body to manifest their emotions and desires among the friends and in the society. They also celebrate their body to overcome the intimidation, difficulties, bullying and abjection. The body celebration incorporates the various intents of the young adults and integrates the multiple facets of the politics of body.

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