

The Games Men Play: Madness and Masculinity in Post-World War II American Fiction,  
1946 – 64

by

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## Dissertation Abstract

### The Games Men Play: Madness and Masculinity in Post-World War II American Fiction, 1946 – 64

“The Games Men Play” examines the relationship between madness and the social construction of masculinity in the period following World War II. Through an examination of works by J.D. Salinger, Ken Kesey, Jack Kerouac, and Ralph Ellison, it focuses on how madness serves as a metaphor for man’s unwillingness or inability to attain a prescribed sense of masculinity. By providing close readings of the texts against the backdrop of contemporary socio-cultural artifacts, it demonstrates the ways in which literature provides invaluable social commentary regarding masculinity during this period.

More specifically, it argues that the literary texts of the post-World War II period emphasize madness to show that the rules governing the traditional views of masculinity exclude many males from achieving recognition of their manhood. Chapter One examines the transition from boyhood to manhood in Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* to show how a sense of disaffiliation and alienation led to a state of madness due to Holden’s reluctance to adhere to codes of masculinity. Chapter Two examines madness as an expression of irrational male fears regarding increased female independence in Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Chapter Three examines the ways in which a sense of cultural dislocation calls into question one’s masculinity and therefore drives one towards madness in Kerouac’s *On the Road*. Chapter Four examines three models of African American masculinity in Ellison’s *Invisible Man* to demonstrate how an adherence to codes of masculinity still results in the refusal to recognize the veteran’s claim to manhood.

Ultimately, this study provides a new understanding of theories of madness and their corollary relationship to theories of masculinity evidenced in the work of male authors during this period.

PREVIEW

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## Introduction

### Madness and Masculinity in Post-World War II America

What does it mean to be a man? How is manhood defined? These two questions provide the backdrop for the fictional output of many male authors during the post-World War II time period. When examining the ways males achieved a sense of manhood during a particular period, we must consider what role cultural definitions of masculinity played during that particular moment in history. In examining the fiction from this period, it is essential to recognize that the social constructions that define aspects of manhood have never been set in stone. Theories of masculinity constantly change because concepts of masculinity are constantly in flux. According to Michael S. Kimmel, a leading expert in gender studies,

Manhood is neither static nor timeless. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it's socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological constitution; it is created in our culture. In fact, the search for a transcendent, timeless definition of manhood is itself a sociological phenomenon—we tend to search for the timeless and eternal during moments of crisis, those points of transition when the old definitions no longer work and the new definitions are yet to be firmly established. (3)

Kimmel identifies the problematic nature implicit in establishing what makes a man a man. Without a transcendent, timeless definition of manhood available, contradictory

images and rules pertaining to the idea of what manhood should look like continuously confound males as they pursue ever-changing concepts of masculinity.

Since the codes of masculinity are constantly changing, an analysis of masculinity in American literature must locate the rules of masculinity during a specific time period. To better understand how literature explores the ways males attempt to adhere to codes and symbols of masculinity, this study examines social constructions of masculinity from 1946 – 1964, the period following World War II until the American escalation in Vietnam. Through an examination of works by J.D. Salinger, Ken Kesey, Jack Kerouac, and Ralph Ellison, the study focuses on how madness serves as a metaphor for the unwillingness or inability of male characters to adhere to prescribed codes of masculinity as they seek acknowledgement of their manhood. More specifically, it argues that the literary texts of the post-World War II period emphasize madness to show how the rules of masculinity exclude some men from being recognized for their manhood.

From 1946 – 1964, or “the long 1950s”<sup>1</sup> as defined by M. Keith Booker, an increased sense of nationalism, spurred in large part by the post-World War II threat of communism and the fear of nuclear annihilation, led to a growing sense of paranoia in our society. Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy, emboldened by the “Red Scare,” drew a link between Communism and homosexuality. McCarthy’s character assassinations profoundly influenced images of masculine behavior. The combined effects of McCarthyism and Cold War hysteria, for example, were in a large way responsible for

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<sup>1</sup> M. Keith Booker originally referred to the period extending from 1946-64 as “the long 1950s” in *Monsters, Mushroom Clouds, and the Cold War* (2000). In a footnote in *The Post-Utopian Imagination*, Booker contends “that it makes sense, in terms of periodization, to treat the peak Cold War years of 1946-64 as a unit (which I call the long 1950s), rather than arbitrarily limiting oneself to the 1950s proper” (197). In my study, I will be examining the same period and will use the terms ‘the 1950s’ and ‘the long 1950s’ interchangeably.



the reactive need for a more masculine, macho American male icon. Mickey Spillane, following in the footsteps of Dashiell Hammett, created the tough-as-nails detective, Mike Hammer. Unlike Hammett's detective, Sam Spade, Spillane's new model of detective "returned from the war with a darker, more sinister, and more sexual undertone in...the postwar era" (Kimmel 152). Mike Hammer stood guard against threats to America, protecting the innocence of women and children. The Mike Hammers of the world were streetwise, rough, and clever—what they lacked in intellectual depth was countered with a fierce pride and belief in 'traditional' views (Kimmel 141).

The end of World War II inspired drastically different views of masculinity. Dr. Alfred Kinsey, author of a widely-read and infamous sex study, unintentionally helped fuel the fire that McCarthy sought to stoke. Kinsey's study concluded that thirty-seven percent of American men had some homosexual experience and roughly four out of ten men were exclusively homosexual. During that period, homosexuals were viewed as the anti-Mike Hammers, representing weakness where strength was needed. Kinsey's study, combined with McCarthy's insistence that homosexual behavior and Communist beliefs were closely related, helped solidify an image of masculinity that favored external symbols of masculinity and demonized traits that were considered weak or effeminate. Kimmel argues,

In our stereotypic image, the 1950s was an era of quiet, order, and security. What we like to remember as a simple time, 'happy days,' was also an era of anxiety and fear, during which ideas of normality were enforced with a desperate passion....The 1950s was a decade of containment.... No wonder Senator Joseph

McCarthy so easily linked homosexuality and communism—both represented gender failure. (155)

While McCarthy's bombastic fraudulence was exposed and he quickly fell from grace in 1954, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), formed in 1945, had already produced the circumstances that allowed for the great anxiety these communist "witch hunts" generated among American citizens.

HUAC justified its actions for a variety of reasons. First, immediately following the end of World War II, the United States found itself embroiled in a number of precarious situations that theoretically—and, in many cases, realistically—threatened the safety of our country. The Cold War, which pitted the democratic ideology of America versus the communistic ideology of the Soviet Union, held sway over our national consciousness. Next, the Korean War was fought in an effort to prevent the "domino theory," which suggested that if one country fell to a communist regime, others would fall in succession. American involvement in a military action on the Korean peninsula increased tensions because there was the very real potential for the escalation of another massive war with even more drastic consequences. Finally, the threat of nuclear annihilation was considered a real possibility. Schoolchildren during this period frequently practiced air raid drills and more and more homes were constructed with bomb shelters in case a nuclear bomb was exploded. Even the tiny island nation of Cuba, with its ties to the Soviet Union and its revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, instilled fear in America as demonstrated by American involvement in the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. In *The Cold War: A New History*, historian John Lewis Gaddis notes,

Victory in World War II brought no sense of security, therefore, to the victors.

Neither the United States, nor Great Britain, nor the Soviet Union at the end of 1950 could regard their lives and treasure they had expended in defeating Germany and Japan as having made them safer: the members of the Grand Alliance were now Cold War adversaries....[W]ith the onset of McCarthyism in the United States and with irrefutable evidence that espionage had taken place on both sides of the Atlantic, it was not at all clear that the western democracies themselves could retain the tolerance for dissent and the respect for civil liberties that distinguished them from the dictators. (46)

The period, as Gaddis notes, was not nearly as calm and tranquil as images and memories of the period tend to suggest. There was a palpable fear about the threats to freedom. Booker, for instance, recounts how Tom Hayden, years after McCarthy but still in that dark shadow, drafted the “Port Huron Statement” for the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), “argu[ing] that radical action was needed because the popular American mind was so thoroughly in the grips of a conformist ideology that it was no longer capable of imagining alternatives to the status quo” (1). Booker makes clear that resistance to conformist ideology was not simply the product of the radical left, noting that neoconservatives such as social scientist Daniel Bell were making similar claims.<sup>2</sup> Ultimately, what America needed was men that *acted* like men and that could stare down Communist and nuclear threats.

Given the threats that America faced, it is surprising how optimistically the 1950s are recalled. Even those who grew up during this period often display a tendency to

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<sup>2</sup> According to Booker, “[Tom] Hayden and the founders of the SDS echoed the diagnosis of...Bell, who argued in *The End of Ideology* (first published in its original form in 1960 and in a revised form in 1962) that a principal phenomenon of American political thought in the 1950s was the ‘exhaustion of utopia,’ and indeed the exhaustion of ‘ideology altogether’ (1).

romanticize the 1950s. During the 2004 presidential debates, for instance, moderator Bob Schieffer began the debate waxing nostalgic, posing this question: “Senator [Kerry], I want to set the stage for this discussion by asking the question that I think hangs over all of our politics today and is probably on the minds of many people watching this debate tonight. And that is, will our children and grandchildren ever live in a world as safe and secure as the one in which we grew up?” While Schieffer’s sentiment suggests a supposed better time, it is hardly an accurate representation of this period in American history. Of course, there is always the possibility that those living in the moment failed to recognize just how close the U.S. and Soviet Union came to engaging in a nuclear war. Gaddis, however, suggests otherwise. Gaddis writes,

Totalitarianism was by no means the only thing the world had to fear as the global war came to an end in 1945. The very weapons that brought about the Japanese surrender—the American atomic bombs that really were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki—caused as much concern as they did exhilaration, for if it was now possible for a single bomb to devastate an entire city, what might that imply for future wars? (50)

Considering this very real fear, it takes little imagination to wonder why images of masculine, macho males proved necessary. Somebody had to protect the vulnerable.

Despite the threats that arose during the long 1950s, there is a solid explanation as to why this period is so romanticized: for those not old enough to have experienced the 1950s, our images are often formed by television reruns from this period. This is particularly important in understanding not only the cultural mood, but also how masculinity was being re-imagined. Kimmel, for instance, argues, “Television, the newly

created carrier of entertainment for the whole family, rushed in quickly to give dad a boost. In shows such as *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, and *The Donna Reed Show*, fathers were seen as nurturing, caring, and devoted to their children” (163). Fathers may have lacked the adventurous, brave qualities typically associated with masculinity, but they still represented the final source of power and control. These television programs helped promote the idea of stability then, and reinforce the idea of the ‘good old days’ now. More importantly, despite the father’s anonymous job, the impression remained that ‘father knows best.’ In the home, the father was all-knowing, all-loving, and still in control. “Dad” was *the* authority figure in the home.

These shows, however, effectively leave out important aspects of the daily grind. David Halberstam, author of *The Fifties*, explains, “By the mid-fifties television portrayed a wonderfully anti-septic world of idealized homes in an idealized, unflawed America. There were no economic crises, no class divisions or resentments, no ethnic tensions, few if any hyphenated Americans, few if any minority characters” (508). This sterilized vision offered on television, according to Halberstam, “reflected—and reinforced—much of the social conformity of the period. There was no divorce. There was no serious sickness, particularly mental illness” (509). As the critic Mark Crispin notes, “Since we almost never saw [dad] working, we had no sense that there was any class above his own, and he had no competition in the class below” (qtd. in Kimmel 163). Emphasizing the nuclear family, dads were portrayed as content men who had time to play with their children, offer useful advice, and occasionally help their wives with domestic chores. In addition, these television families all owned their homes. Viewers

never really found out what these dads did at the office, but they were apparently successful enough to own their home. Rather than delve into conditions within the workplace, these shows simply chose to ignore the issue and depict fathers as happy and successful.

Unlike television, the literature of the period did not stick to the script when it came to offering a simple, romantic view of the period. While television seemed intent on delivering its viewers the American Dream, literature often focused on what could be considered a national nightmare. Booker explains,

[I]dyllic television sitcoms and Disney animated films aside, the cultural products of the 1950s often took an extremely dark turn....Similarly, the comic style of the most critically respected American novel of the long 1950s, Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*,...belies an extremely dark narrative....Even if the protagonists of the decade's novels do manage to survive, they tend to do so in a mode of defeat or, at best, paralysis and stagnation. Ralph Ellison's invisible man is still invisible at the end of the text, [and] J.D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield is still an alienated adolescent. (2-3)

There are several other examples of dark narratives from the period. Sloan Wilson laments the loss of individuality in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*. Norman Mailer provides a searing depiction of the horrors of war in *The Naked and the Dead*. Richard Wright examines futility, desperation, and struggle in various models of African American masculinity in his work, *Eight Men*. What we find in analyzing the literature from the period is that a number of individual works, when examined in the context of masculinity in post-World War II American society, shed a light upon the deep, often

dark struggle males felt in their attempt to achieve a sense of manhood. Ultimately, the male struggle to be recognized as a man runs parallel with depictions of madness.

Where do masculinity and madness intersect? Ultimately, this is the question that drives this study. This is a thematic study that examines the definitions and applications of codes of masculinity as well as the corollary label of madness. This study does not profess to find a definitive response to the question, “what does it mean to be a man?” Rather, using primary literary texts from the long 1950s, this study examines the relationship between masculinity and madness to show how madness might be perceived, not as a mental illness, but as a symbol of gender failure. In this study, I am using literature to investigate definitions of madness and masculinity during this period. The literary texts are examined as cultural artifacts in comparison with other texts from this period in order to provide a context for the particular cultural moment from which these definitions and applications of masculinity arose. Literature provides an especially useful tool through which to do this, especially when set against various socio-cultural artifacts that also reveal dominant discourse of the time. These socio-cultural artifacts from the long 1950s include works by R.D. Laing, Philip Wylie, and William Whyte as well as *Playboy* magazine and World War II analyses on African American soldiers. In many ways, I share the same concerns as Alan Nadel, who expressed concern over the historical events he omitted in his study, *Containment Culture*.<sup>3</sup> Whereas Nadel focuses on historical events, I am concerned about the choice I was forced to make in terms of

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<sup>3</sup> In describing the contents of *Containment Culture*, Nadel writes, “There is no way, therefore, to escape the anecdotal quality of this book. Of the thousands of films and novels produced between 1945 and 1965, I discuss only a handful. For every privileged political event or trend examined in detail, I ignore countless more...” (8).

including culturally relevant artifacts for this study. In the end, I selected artifacts that provide both depth and breath in considering pop culture perspectives of the period.

In this study, Chapter One examines Holden Caulfield's transition from boyhood to manhood in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Salinger examines Holden's lost innocence and feeling of alienation as he attempts to adhere to codes and symbols of masculinity without sacrificing his sense of self. This chapter also explores R.D. Laing's "games theory" to demonstrate how madness and masculinity exist as social constructions. Chapter Two examines madness as an expression of irrational male fears regarding increased female independence in Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in conjunction with Philip Wylie's attack on "Momism" in *Generation of Vipers*. While Salinger's Holden Caulfield rejects the loss of innocence manhood implies, Kesey's R.P. McMurphy, a blue-collar type from the Pacific Northwest, laments the advances of technological society that have emasculated its men. Chapter Three examines the ways in which a sense of cultural dislocation – ethnically, physically, spiritually, and emotionally – calls into question one's masculinity and therefore drives one towards madness in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* while drawing upon William H. Whyte's sociological exploration in *The Organization Man*. Rather than settle into the type of middle class existence that Whyte's bestseller examines, Kerouac seeks alternative modes of masculinity through an embrace of rebellion, Buddhism, and jazz. Finally, Chapter Four examines how African American men are denied symbols of masculinity in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. In this chapter, by comparing and contrasting three models of African American masculinity, I examine how African American claims to manhood are ignored. The narrator, a boy on the verge of becoming



a man, serves as the witness to these models available to African Americans. Combined, these four chapters provide a new understanding of theories of madness and their corollary relationship to theories of masculinity evidenced in the work of these four authors.

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In order to analyze the connection between masculinity and madness during this period, it is important to understand the way that madness was re-imagined during the 1950s. Perhaps the greatest influence upon the cultural understanding of madness was Michel Foucault's re-conceptualization of mental illness in his 1961 work, *Madness and Civilization*. According to Roy Porter, an expert in the history of psychiatry, Foucault argued that mental illness "must be understood not as a natural fact, but rather a cultural construct....The history of madness properly written would thus be an account not of disease and its treatment but of questions of freedom and control, knowledge and power" (3). Foucault argues that "madness is the false punishment of a false solution" (33). Applying this to the symbols of masculinity in the post-World War II period, the mere idea that there are definitive and limited ways of entering into manhood is the false solution. Who is to say what it means to be a man? Can it be argued that one male is more of a man than another? These are difficult questions that do not yield simple answers. Foucault contends, "Madness was not what one believed, nor what it believed itself to be; it was infinitely less than itself: a combination of persuasion and mystification" (276). The literature from the period, for instance, demonstrates how men can be persuaded to *feel* inadequate in comparison to other men. "[M]adness," according to Foucault, "belonged to social failure, which appeared without distinction as its cause,

model, and limit” (259). The individual either recognizes his own shortcomings or others will be sure to point out his failures. In *Catcher*, Holden Caulfield struggles with his sense of masculinity. Holden internalizes this sense of inadequacy because he lacks the external symbols that he associates with manliness. In *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, McMurphy attempts to instill his concept of masculinity into the men on the ward who lack the ruggedness and vitality that McMurphy possesses. In *On the Road*, Sal Paradise actively pursues madness as a means of asserting his vision of manhood, content with feeling “dis-located” from society. In *Invisible Man*, three separate models of African American masculinity are defined largely by the way they respond and react to a white definition of masculinity, demonstrating how codes of masculinity are denied to members of this minority group.

Many male authors during the long 1950s wrote about madness in connection with the failure to achieve a sense of manhood. For males, madness has long been considered a form of gender failure—a sign of masculine weakness. Men needed to exhibit their masculinity. During the twentieth century, according to Kimmel, it became more obvious “that masculinity was increasingly an act, a form of public display....To be considered a real man, one had better make sure to always be walking around and acting ‘real masculine’” (69). Men who failed to demonstrate their masculinity were considered weak and often derisively labeled as feminine. Freud asserted that madness or hysteria was related to women’s inability to fully establish themselves within their gender. In the same sense, men who failed to understand and exhibit the traits that made them men suffered from “a similar inability to meet the demands of one’s gender” (Kimmel 90). As such, these men were considered failures and made to feel mad. Foucault argues that

the madman, as a human being originally endowed with reason, is no longer guilty of being mad; but the madman, as a madman, and in the interior of the disease of which he is no longer guilty, must feel morally responsible for everything within him that may disturb morality and society, and must hold no one but himself responsible for the punishment he receives. (246)

In this sense, the male who lacks external masculine codes earns the punishment of being labeled mad. In this study, I consider madness as the social construction related to a failure to measure up as a man. Within the context of the literature I am analyzing, I argue that the “symptoms” of madness are related to the pursuit of masculinity. In the fiction I examine, the male characters are not, from my perspective, clinically insane; rather, madness serves as the symbolic representation of their perceived shortcomings as men.

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Around the same time that horrific images of Nazi atrocities were reaching American readers, *Life* magazine began publishing images from inside American asylums. While I am definitely not drawing an equal comparison between the conditions inside concentration camps and the conditions inside mental health facilities, Robert Whitaker persuasively argues that the images of concentration camps made the American public more aware “of a lost world closer to home....The pictures seemed impossible: Mentally ill men huddled naked in barren rooms, wallowing in their feces; barefoot women clad in coarse tunics...and sleeping wards so crowded with threadbare cots that patients had to climb over the foot of their beds to get out” (67). Whitaker also makes the claim that a similar philosophy led to these two conditions. The belief in eugenics,

according to Robert Whitaker, was at the core of both the Nazi's despicable plan to eradicate Jews and other "undesirables" and also the basis for the institutionalized treatment of the "mentally ill."<sup>4</sup> The goal was to protect the larger society from those who did not fit in. As a result of this segregation of those considered 'mad,' Whitaker argues, "In the pecking order of social discards, asylum patients fell below criminals" (69). During this period, madness is viewed as an offense equal or worse than criminal behavior.

The codes of masculinity that confronted males during the long 1950s did not simply arise as a result of World War II; rather, these codes accumulated and developed over time. This is not to suggest, however, that World War II did not impact the definitions of masculinity. It did, but from the time Europeans first arrived in America, the American male was a work-in-progress seeking to establish himself as a man. The American man—defined and limited to white, European males—was free to redefine himself in this new country. In his 1782 *Letters from an American Farmer*, J. St. Henry Crevecoeur claimed that this new land allowed for a new type of man. Crevecoeur writes,

The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence. --This is an American....Men are like

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<sup>4</sup> In *Mad in America*, Whitaker writes, "At the turn of the century, there were 126,137 patients in state asylums. Forty years later, there were 419,374 patients in 181 state hospitals....However, the asylums were not filling up with an increased number of 'insane' patients. Society was dumping all kinds of 'misfits' into the institutions—alcoholics, epileptics, vagrants, the senile elderly, drug addicts, syphilitics, and the mentally ill. They were lockups for the 'social wastage' said by eugenicists to be plaguing modern societies" (68).

plants; the goodness and flavour of the fruit proceeds from the peculiar soil and exposition in which they grow. We are nothing but what we derive from the air we breathe, the climate we inhabit, the government we obey, the system of religion we profess, and the nature of our employment. (56)

While this romantic notion of men measuring their worth through toil and labor accentuated this sense of freedom, this feeling of absolute independence was short-lived. Identity, as Crevecoeur suggested, was intricately rooted to a 'peculiar soil' at a particular moment. Understanding the 'soil' of post-World War II America is an essential element in exploring the codes of masculinity during this time period.

Crevecoeur's observation describes men in a dominant position where they control power. This feeling of dominance, however, began to show some cracks in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. First, near the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concerns were raised that American boys were being feminized because women bore much of the responsibility in rearing and teaching them. Next, the Great Depression, to a large degree, had the effect of psychologically emasculating men as they struggled to support their families. Then, during World War II, women entered the workforce and when the war ended, many resisted returning to more domestic roles within the home. With gender roles shifting, many men considered themselves victims of an impending matriarchy. The combined effects of these occurrences led many men to feel that their position in society was being challenged and their power was being usurped. These changes raised questions about what it meant to be a man. This reaction, as men pushed back against this perceived threat, led to a stricter and narrower definition of manhood. In 1963, for instance, Erving Goffman, a sociologist known for his work analyzing human interaction, argued,

[T]here is only one complete unblushing male in America: a young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual, Protestant, father, of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a recent record of sports....Any male who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself—during moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. (qtd. in Kimmel 4)

In my study, the failure to measure up to these standards is symbolized as madness. Being a man during this time period, for the most part, meant falling in line with other men in attempting to adhere to these codes of masculinity. Kimmel, for instance, argues that there were limited options for men in this period because “the 1950s American men strained against two negative poles—the overconformist, a faceless, self-less nonentity, and the unpredictable, unreliable nonconformist” (155). A man could choose to rebel, but then he must also face the very real possibility that he will be pushed to the margins. The emphasis on conformity, according to Robert Whitaker, “led to a relative lack of tolerance in this country for nonconformist behavior” (169).

R.D. Laing, the well-known Scottish psychiatrist, raised many important questions regarding the existence of madness. Laing, who according to David Burston was the most widely read psychiatrist at his peak during the long 1950s, anticipates Foucault’s re-conceptualization of madness. In his analysis of Laing, Burston explains that “when people use the word ‘normal’ to describe a particular kind of experience, expression, or belief, they are usually operating under the naïve assumption that (1) people really know what the word normal means, and (2) that others understand their words in the same way they do” (101). Laing managed to stir up some controversy

the long 1950s by rejecting the idea that ‘normal’ behavior existed and arguing that madness was a social construction. While Laing’s argument against a biological link to mental illness lacks credibility in this day and age, his theories provide a useful tool for examining literature from the period. The historical context surrounding Laing’s “anti-psychiatry” viewpoints surfaced during a time when electro-shock therapy was rather common and a lack of depth and breadth in the psychiatric field led to unchallenged authority for those working in mental health positions.

Laing argues that rules, some of which are secret, dictate what is considered ‘normal’ behavior. Laing contends that society is structured as a game and ‘madness’ occurs when participants fail to recognize and/or apply the rules of the game. According to Laing’s theory, individuals must identify the rules of the game and then figure out how to follow the rules in order to prove their sanity. Laing explains this phenomenon through the construction of his “games theory.”<sup>5</sup> Laing contends:

In the idiom of games theory, people have a repertoire of games based on particular sets of learned interactions. Others may play games that mesh sufficiently to allow a variety of more or less stereotyped dramas to be enacted. The games have rules, some public, some secret. Some people play games that break the rules of games that others play. Some play undeclared games, so rendering their moves ambiguous or downright unintelligible, except to the expert in such secret and unusual games. Such people...may have to undergo the ceremonial of a psychiatric consultation, leading to diagnosis, prognosis,

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<sup>5</sup> While Laing is primarily analyzed in Chapter One in conjunction with Salinger, his “games theory” runs throughout the study. In each of the primary works I examine, the authors refer to the adherence to masculine codes as a game. As such, Laing’s exploration and explication of how these games work will serve as an essential component of this study.

prescription. Treatment would consist in pointing out to them the unsatisfactory nature of the games they play and perhaps teaching new games. A person reacts by despair more to loss of the *game* than to sheer “object loss,” that is, to the loss of his partner or partners as real persons. The maintenance of the game rather than the identity of players is all important. (51)

In Laing’s games theory, the idea of an anonymous struggle towards a similar pursuit is evident. The identity of players is inconsequential as the importance is placed on the continuation of the game. The goal is to get everybody on the same page, playing the same game, following the same rules. Essentially, conformity is the rule of the day.

While Laing’s theory provides an important intersection in examining the rules of masculinity described in all four novels, his theory is particularly relevant to my examination of *The Catcher in the Rye*. In *Catcher*, Salinger describes Holden’s transition from boyhood to manhood as a game. Holden recognizes the importance of the games being played and his greatest fear is that he will be unable to participate. Hesitant to become a non-participant and unwilling to develop his own “game”—or model of masculinity—Holden favors the disruption of games and he admires those who do the same. Holden serves as the fencing team manager and effectively prevents the team from participating in a meet by leaving their foils on the subway; he adores his younger brother, Allie, who read poems during baseball games; and he loves how Jane Gallagher refused to move her kings from the back row when playing checkers. In each case, the participant disrupts the game without ending it. These instances parallel Holden’s skepticism about applying the codes of masculinity. The transition from boyhood to manhood is a game that Holden dislikes and while he finds ways to stall this evolution,