The Autistic Reader in Higher Academia:

Neurodivergent Theories as an Emergent Interpretive Lens

Noah Mahoney

Department of English, University of Colorado at Boulder

Defended April 10th, 2023

Thesis Advisor:

Dr. Nicole Wright, Dept. of English

Defense Committee:

Dr. Emily Harrington, Dept. of English

Dr. Abby Hickox, Arts and Sciences Honors Program

The Autistic Reader in Academia: Neurodivergent Theories as an Emergent Interpretive Lens

Part 1: Conceptualizing the Neurodivergent Theoretical Perspective

Literary theories and analyses are shaped by a multitude of socio-cultural demographics, but the one factor that determines all interpretations of a text on the most fundamental level of all—though it is relatively unexplored as a critical perspective in its own right—is the reader's unique neurochemistry. This aspect of sociocultural identity influences every aspect of an individual's life, in real-world social and interpersonal situations as well as in critical reading and theoretical interpretation of works of fiction. For this reason, I am writing my undergraduate thesis as a celebration of neurodiverse processing styles in higher education, more specifically of proud and unfiltered autistic self-expression. Throughout my time as a student of English literature, my work in both writing and critical reading have been highly informed by this aspect of my identity, which has historically been pathologized and positioned in the popular discourse as a deficit in "normative" neurocognitive function. After recognizing this fact, I began the journey of formulating a critical literary perspective based on the autistic processing model, as well as the idea of reading characters in a text as autistic.

Before deciding to make this new interpretive lens the basis of an honors thesis project, I first described it in an open-option final essay for the Literary Analysis course, initially inspired as a response to feminist writer and multiple sclerosis educator Nancy Mairs' essay "On Being a Cripple," in which she describes the facts of her own life and the fundamental differences between her perception of the world and that of the general abled public. I went on to win the

Joanne Easley Arnold essay scholarship award with this same essay, which further inspired me to expand the perspective into this thesis as it currently exists. Much like other identity-based lenses, neurodiversity theory must be conceptualized as inherently interdisciplinary in its study. In order for the neurotypical student to both imagine an autistic way of reading and effectively "diagnose" a fictional character through observing their autistic traits, they must first have more than a basic understanding of autism as experienced by autistic individuals themselves; even a comprehensive base of clinical knowledge boils down to a checklist of "symptoms" and produces a detached, partial grasp of our lives that is far from conducive to critical analysis. This theoretical lens exists inseparable from the same voices it seeks to analyze, and thus must be above all centered around own voices narratives to allow for a genuine representation of autistic life that can inform the neurotypical audience and go beyond the medicalized model.

The teaching of multiple theoretical perspectives in literary theory is essential not only for purposes of expanding the English student's worldview and allowing for a wider perspective in their academic writing, but additionally for purposes of creating an educated populace that is capable of engaging with a diverse socio-political climate that is so often hostile towards deviation from the norm. A white scholar does not come to understand the lived experience of their peers of color simply by reading the works of bell hooks or Chinua Achebe, but their perspective is broadened through exposure to writings on those experiences, and they can then approach both academic and social communication from a place of greater empathy as a result. The same is true of male scholars' readings of feminist theory, born citizens' readings of immigrant scholars, and any number of modes by which socio-cultural exchange is able to take place through exposure to diverse fields of academic writing. In this thesis, I aim to establish and

develop a school of literary theory based around the neurodivergent experience, with an emphasis placed on the autistic way of reading; this perspective is unique in that it not only informs how a given fictional character's actions and motivations are perceived, but how the autistic reader's perspective informs their reading of literature, descriptions of sensory stimuli, interpretations of described social interactions, and many more facets of the academic interpretive process on a fundamental neurocognitive level that exists on an entirely different plane than interpretations by neurotypical readers.

Neurodiversity theory exists in a separate frame from most other interpretive lenses in that it necessitates a close critical examination of what qualifies as academic writing, what texts and styles of writing are accessible or able to be easily processed by various neurotypes, and what parts of a text are subconsciously perceived as the most important by the writer versus by the readers. As a point of comparison, the critical analysis and reading of postcolonial texts often involves a deconstruction and analysis of what defines an academic writing style and form outside of the European literary conventions imposed on nations of the Global South in an imperialist mindset that only recognizes certain textual forms as valid works of literature. Oral storytelling traditions and unfamiliar narrative structures are undesirable to a colonizing power by the same token as other aspects of culture, religion, and models of government. Similarly, strictly neurotypical ideals in both the production and processing of content are highly emphasized in the context of higher education.

On a more fundamental level, there is still no formally described model for the teaching or theoretical analysis of a neurodivergent academic perspective. Thus, these ideals should be

critically examined and deconstructed as an essential aspect of this theoretical model in the academic setting. Essentially, the acceptance of neurodiverse perspectives into the broader framework of critical literary theory and analysis is fundamentally connected to a need to separate from the “rules” of academic writing, both in terms of how texts are interpreted and how they are produced in terms of form, syntax, and diction.

In her article “Slow Processing: a New Minor Literature by Autists and Modernists,” Claire Barber-Stetson undertakes one such critical examination in her description a style of taking in information in which “...individuals…take more time than others to reach normatively valued goals… However, rather than inhibiting these individuals' cognition and observational skills, this processing style gives them access to many aspects of their environment (including language) that others often do not see" (Barber-Stetson 148). Later in her essay, Barber-Stetson goes on to recognize a series of stylistic connections between texts of the Modernist era and the works of modern-day autistic writers in their common use of “slow processing” literary techniques, which she defines as “...an unconventional form of literary organization with the following shared properties: the style juxtaposes different literary elements without reconciling them, use unconventional figurative language, and draw attention to unusual sensory stimuli with techniques like onomatopoeia and hyperbole” (Barber-Stetson 151).

While the Modernists are posited to use the described literary techniques consciously in order to “disturb conventional ways of thinking” for their readers, autistic writers’ use of the same techniques reflects an innate and fundamental difference in our perception of written language as a form of sensory stimuli, thus leading us to “...assign importance to objects or

stimuli that may not interest others; in the process, [we] locate innovative [to neurotypicals] connections among the particulars on which [we] focus" (Barber-Stetson 152). That is to say, what reads as “unconventional” and “unusual” to a neurotypical audience may go unnoticed within the autistic author’s writing process; one might go a lifetime imagining that everyone else is simply able to ignore the buzzing of household electronics, when in fact these sounds are only perceptible to the small percentage of the population whose auditory processing is innately heightened by virtue of neurotype. By comparing Modernist and autistic writings and positioning them as a common literature, Barber-Stetson demonstrates a step away from the dominant—that is to say, highly medicalized and pathologized—narrative of autism as founded in deficits from the norm and based around a neurotypical way of experiencing the social world, especially within the context of higher education.

Barber-Stetson’s recognition of an autistic processing style as not only worthy of consideration, but actively beneficial to the diversification of academic literary analysis, is an important step towards the normalization and acceptance of individuals from diverse neurotypes’ input in academia, and through this process, in the broader societal sphere. Historically, the characteristics of “slow processing” have been ignored or dismissed as learning difficulties (or “differences” in more politically correct discourses). Heightened sensory sensitivity to bright lights, the sound of pencil on paper, or the feeling of a school uniform’s seams—as a result of which neurodivergent students may find themselves taking in these stimuli instead of the sound of a teacher’s voice or what words are on the class slides—can act as one of many barriers that prevent these individuals from reaching their full potential in a traditional school setting, from early childhood through the upper levels of higher education and vocational academia. In much

the same way, the inability to filter written information as “important” or “unimportant” based on a neurotypical mode of reference leads us towards one of two equally frustrating paths: the autistic individual is forced to either make a blind judgment on which pieces of information are important in a seemingly-arbitrary and often incorrect manner, or take in and retain all information, leading to rapid burnout and exhaustion. This process is likely the root of the problem in which autists in the academic setting are often moved into respectively “special ed” or “gifted” programs, combined with certain other factors such as logical and problem-solving skills, level of learned masking behavior, or comorbidity of other conditions. The end result of both of these extremes is also influenced by factors spanning a multitude of intersectional identities; class, race, gender, and level of support needs all significantly affect whether an individual’s neurodivergence will be detected early in life, as well as whether accommodations can be accessed.

As opposed to the side of neurodiversity theory based on Barber-Stetson’s slow processing model, which can be conceptualized by neurotypicals with a fairly high degree of accuracy if they are knowledgeable about the autistic processing style, the aspect of this lens that asks readers to identify autistic traits in characters from a work of fiction is more nuanced to an extent, and runs the risk of feeding into stereotypes when performed by even the most informed non-autistic readers. For example, there is nothing academically profound or novel about a neurotypical reader observing a text’s “emotionless,” low-empathy, logic-driven character and concluding that they are autistic. This process is additionally—much like the diagnostic process for autistic individuals in the real world—heavily informed by the character’s intersectional identities. Conversely, a neurodiversity theory-driven analysis of the same character would

examine them within the context of extant stereotypes and socio-cultural imaginings of autistic people, taking into account the author's background and experiences. An effective analysis of this type might take into account what time period they wrote in, their neurotype, and their degree of relationship to individuals of varied neurotypes. Additionally, the neurotypical reader should also consider what changes about their analysis of the given text as a whole if the character is interpreted as autistic, while analyzing preconceived—including those internalized to autistic readers—ableist ideals of what the label of autism means in both the imagination of the reader themself and the social context in which they perceive differences of neurotype in an inherently negative manner.

The ways in which media representations of autistic characters influence public perception of real-life autistic identity—including both characters represented as autistic, and those widely understood to exhibit autistic traits—has been researched and critiqued in depth by Sonya Freeman Loftis in her book *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. She criticizes the overwhelming stereotypes of autistic fictional characters as savants—under which the alien, robot, or otherwise non-human characters are also represented—as victims, or as children, identifiers that affect their real-life counterparts' experiences by offering an unrealistic representation of this community in the neurotypical public eye (Loftis 3-5). Much earlier in the literary conversation of disability in works of canonical literature, but in communication with Loftis' work, Lennard J. Davis similarly criticized representations of physically disabled characters, such as Dickens' "Tiny Tim" or Flaubert's Hippolyte, as serving only to provoke sympathy—or worse, as to either die or be "cured" as plot points—in order to drive the abled protagonists' stories and create a contrast between the normal and abnormal (Davis 36).

Neurodiversity theory as a branch of disability studies seeks to emphasize own-voices narratives, prioritizing the less commonly heard interpretations of literary works—largely due to the systematic exclusion of autistic individuals from academia, as well as the eugenics-based rhetoric of "awareness" organizations such as Autism Speaks, which combined lead to a public imagination of autism as a disorder needing to be "cured" and a surrounding discourse of rampant misinformation connected to pseudoscientific and conspiracy theorist-led rhetoric echo chambers such as those found within the anti-vax movement. Conversely, the neurodiversity movement aims to recontextualize these cognitive styles as an aspect of human identity as inherent as height or eye color, and as significant to one's lived experience as any marginalized group based on race or gender.

Part 2: Neurodivergent Activism, Autism Research, and the Double Empathy Problem

Neurodivergent and disabled activisms are relatively new in comparison to other social justice movements, largely due to the relative recency in which types of neurodiversity have been recognized and subsequently categorized for diagnosis. Although the question of which specific psychiatrist coined the term "autistic" to describe the set of characteristics associated with that neurotype has been the subject of some debate—leading contenders are either Georg Frankl or Leo Kanner—the diagnosis itself was named and described in the early 1940s (Al Ghazi 3). The neurodiversity movement came into being in the late 1990s, when the advances of the internet provided accessible text-based communication and new ways of finding community, and intersects with the broader disability activist movement in its use of the social model of disability. In effect, it is largely manmade socio-environmental factors which shape both physical

and neurocognitive differences as “disabilities” rather than any shortcoming in the individual themself (Leadbitter et. al.). Disability activist Simi Linton also follows the social model in her book *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*, the first comprehensive description of the field of disability studies as well as the most prominent contemporary text speaking out against the use of the medical model, which places more emphasis on the “deficits” according to a society and environment designed only with abled—in both cognitive and physical terms—individuals in mind. There are substantial differences of opinion within both conversations around physical disability and neurodivergence as to the level of recognition that should be granted to social versus medical models of describing these differences, largely due to concerns over whether full de-medicalization of certain conditions of being would lead to inability to receive necessary support needs or be taken seriously by abled and neurotypical society. Conversely, full adherence to the medical model ignores the aspects of disability that could be easily mitigated in a planned infrastructure that seeks to accommodate diversity of physical and cognitive ability; for example, if not for the development of modern eyeglasses, a substantially higher percentage of the population would be considered disabled by virtue of being low-vision or blind.

Similarly, the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for autism reflects neurotypical values in terms of communication strategy, acceptable degree of investment in interests, and manufactured societal norms; a person eating the same few foods, removing tags from clothes, or not making appropriate levels of eye contact has no bearing on their value as a person or how they function in the world beyond going against arbitrary standards. A similar social model to that proposed by Linton is useful in the framing of neurocognitive differences and developmental

psychopathologies in order to establish neurodiversity theories within readings of a literary text; such differences must be removed from the pathologized or medical context and instead conceptualized as not only capable of producing their own critical interpretations, but of seeing the unseen through a processing model that often contradicts the commonly taught models of reading for information upon which the educational system is founded. The neurodiversity movement is centered around conceptualizing neurocognitive styles as variations, rather than as deficits to the neurotypical standard, as is the case in much of the current popular imagination.

In considering a neurodivergent critical lens by imagining a given character as autistic, their every action and interaction becomes recontextualized; unless the work is written in the first person or otherwise in some medium that gives the reader detailed access to the character's thought process, this method can drastically alter a neurotypical perception of the character as an individual. This interpretive lens, like others based around a socio-cultural identity, carries multiple sets of meanings and implications depending on whether the reader is part of, adjacent to—in this case, a neurodivergent reader who is not autistic but could fall under the label due to ADHD, dyspraxia, dyscalculia and dyslexia, OCD, or Tourettes, among others—or completely separate from the given social group, with any range of academic or personal knowledge. Neurodiversity as a theoretical perspective is meant to focus on and uplift these experiences, while decentering the dominant narratives of neurodiversity based on the writings of neurotypical caregivers, parents, or doctors, which are often unconsciously informed by their personal biases or social stigma.

The closest established interpretive lens to a proposed neurodivergent theory is cognitive literary criticism, described by Gabrielle Starr in *A Companion to Literary Theory*. This

interpretive lens is based upon the psychological and neuroscientific aspects of reading, especially relating to how engagement with literary texts can be connected to social behaviors, empathy, decision-making, and perception of the outside world. However, the only mention of neurodivergence is to establish its existence outside of the framework; Starr states that "...the ability to infer mental content is universal in normatively functioning human beings over [the] age of about 3 or 4 (Saxe et al. 2004). Normatively functioning, here and elsewhere in this chapter, means individuals who have developed typically, and do not exhibit neurocognitive differences such as autism, or disorders such as schizophrenia, or dementia" (Starr 414). Starr's use of "normatively functioning" to refer to neurotypical individuals is not representative of a common or established nomenclature in discussions of neurodiversity, but rather a general term used across several fields in the context of "working as expected." The grouping of neurotypes alongside mental disorders including schizophrenia and dementia is another example in this thread of Starr's failure to recognize neurodiversity as a complex scope of identities encompassing a variety of cognitive types, with "neurotypical" arbitrarily positioned as the standard against which all others are compared. Therefore, cognitive literary criticism is at minimum only applicable to neurotypical readers, if not outright exclusionary towards the existence of the neurodivergent theoretical perspective.

The central tenet upon which cognitive literary criticism depends is the assumption that all "normatively functioning" individuals—hereafter referred to as neurotypical—are influenced in both their reading of a text and in everyday social encounters by means of theory of mind, or the ability to "read the minds" of others in order to infer their unspoken thoughts and feelings; "... [theory of mind] characterizes the theoretical structure of the inferences we… undertake to

understand and predict behavior and mental states belonging to ourselves and others. The reason this inferential action is required lies in the unobservable character not only of mental states, but also of emotional processes, beliefs, desires, and intentions, since they are hidden behind us (Rizzo 2). A substantial body of research in the field of neurocognitive developmental psychology suggests that the "impairment" in the social and interpersonal skills of autistic people is due to lack of a developed theory of mind; the autistic brain is positioned to be incapable of fully mimicking or conceptualizing the perceived thoughts and feelings of outside parties in order to infer their unspoken thought processes. According to Scottish psychologist Alan Leslie's prominently recognized 1987 study, this can be attributed to an impairment in metarepresentational ability; by this token "[m]etarepresentations are second-order representations: while primary representations refer directly to the referent, metarepresentations are representations of representations" (Rizzo 2-3). Metarepresentation is thus directly connected to the concept of theory of mind in that one such "representation of a representation" would entail an individual's ability to conceptualize the unknown state of mind of another, and in turn, infer their next course of action based on the also unknown thought processes they would undergo as a result of the established state.

One well-known example of Leslie's theory of metarepresentation and its application to the autistic processing style can be observed in Baron-Cohen's 1985 study on the Sally-Anne task, in which a group of young children were told that "...there are two dolls, Sally and Anne. Sally puts a marble in her own basket and leaves the room; while she is away, Anne takes the marble and puts it in her box. When Sally comes back, she wants to play with the marble… children were asked… where will Sally look for her marble?" (Rizzo 4). The study's participants

included three groups: neurotypical children, autistic children, and children with Down's syndrome. While both the neurotypical and Down's syndrome children were largely shown to succeed in this task and utilize theory of mind to recognize that Sally would not know that Anne had moved the marble, 16 out of the 20 autistic participants said that she would look in Anne's basket. According to Baron-Cohen, this is the result of the autistic children being unable to separate their own knowledge and real-life observations from Sally's, and thus positioning them as lacking a normatively developed theory of mind for their age group. This study has been widely accepted within the neurocognitive side of autism research as evidence that the autistic brain's "deficits" in areas of social interaction and interpersonal relations stem from lack of theory of mind.

The body of research stemming from the neurocognitive perspective treats theory of mind as the central measure of what Starr would refer to as "normative functioning" within the field of literary analysis based in cognitive literary theory; that is to say, all neurotypical individuals can be definitively said to have a grasp on theory of mind and be able to conceptualize the inner workings of the thoughts, beliefs, and feelings of others within their neurotype from at least age four and beyond. This statement is not contested in any area of psychology, and indeed, the demonstration of theory of mind is treated as a measure of normative child development across the board, as well as a tool in measuring the intelligence of animals such as great apes in studies of the false belief test. However, one area in which developmental psychology can be divided is on the question of whether autistic social interaction and interpretation of related stimuli can be traced back to theory of mind at all, or conversely, to a more base level of interpersonal communication based in intersubjectivity.

First conceptualized and named by Edmund Husserl, intersubjectivity can be defined as a series of both conscious and unconscious exchanges of thoughts and feelings between capable subjects, made possible by their mutual possession of inherent empathy (Rizzo 15). In contrast to the theory of mind model upon which the neurocognitivism perspective relies, the intersubjective model proposes that not only do autistic individuals possess theory of mind, but in fact rely upon it to a much higher degree than neurotypicals. While theory of mind is often the result of conscious cognition translated into a specific series of thought processes—in the case of the Sally-Anne task, the child must recognize the fact that Sally was not present when Anne moved the marble to her own basket, and thus make the inference that she would not know to look there upon returning—intersubjectivity operates on a more unconscious level and cannot be demonstrated through such experiments. Indeed, clinical psychologist Shaun Gallagher proposes that the Sally-Anne task cannot serve as an accurate measure of intersubjectivity because the participants are not interacting directly with either of the characters, but merely acting as outside observers to predict Sally's thought process (Rizzo 13). By this same justification, intersubjectivity is not a factor in the interpretation of literary texts; Sally and Anne are effectively characters playing out a narrative that is equally inaccessible to neurotypical and neurodivergent participants' active engagement, but the difference lies in each set of participants' ability or inability to prescribe motivation to Sally as a character by recognizing that her base of knowledge and resulting cognitive process is not the same as their own.

While the neurocognitive model suggests that autistic participants largely failed the Sally-Anne task due to lack of a developed theory of mind, the intersubjective model does not clearly explain or justify the reason for a difference in success based on the participants'

neurotypes. In this conceptualization of the varying cognitive styles, autistic individuals are positioned as having a stronger reliance on their theory of mind due to lack of developed intersubjectivity; they are reliant on their own conscious assumptions about the thought processes of others due to an inability to unconsciously connect on an empathetic level possessed by their neurotypical peers, as well as in other fundamental differences in how individuals of this neurotype are able to connect with their peers and with the world; "...Autistic people have a different embodiment: they perceive and move differently due to more detailed perception and sensorimotor issues, and this makes a difference in the way they interact… because of this sensorimotor difference, autistic people are characterized by a disruption in the earlier forms of intersubjectivity. Therefore, these issues come much earlier than development of [theory of mind]" (Rizzo 14-15). However, this theory appears to be inconsistent with the results of the initial Sally-Anne task experiment, leading certain intersubjectivist researchers to wonder whether something could be missing from the discussion.

In examining both perspectives on the reason for autistic individuals' perceived deficits in interpersonal relationship potential, one notable missing piece is the presence of autistic individuals as part of the discussion itself, rather than simply as participants to be observed. Autistic author, disability advocate, and graduate student Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg proposes that the gap in performance observed by Baron-Cohen in the Sally-Anne task does not stem from any deficit or failing on the part of the autistic children, but from the fundamental difference in sensory processing style between the researchers and their neurodivergent participants. Cohen-Rottenberg posits that a neurotypical person's sensory experience of the world allows them a vastly more reliable ability to track one stimulus while simultaneously taking in and

processing other sources of information, meaning that in the Sally-Anne task, they would feel confident in stating that Sally would leave the room and be able to assume that everything would remain as it was when she returned.

Conversely, for an autistic participant, the assumption would be that the world is a constantly changing hub of sensory stimuli that may be noticed—often to a distressing and distracting degree—or looked over due to the intensity of some other aspect of one's surroundings, and that it would make more sense to assume that Sally would expect the marble's location to have changed whether or not Anne were still in the room. Additionally, Cohen-Rottenberg posits that difficulties in auditory processing could be a factor; the autistic children would also have more trouble keeping track of the information the researchers were sharing in order to set up the experiment: they must hear, process, and remember that Sally put the marble in her basket and left the room, and that Anne moved the marble to her own basket before Sally returned without letting Sally know. From this point of view, theory of mind can be fully taken out of the equation, and the test instead serves as a reminder that an autistic perception of the world must take into account an entirely different mode of operating based on sensory perception (Cohen-Rottenberg 1). Much as Barber-Stetson states within her description of the slow processing model for interpreting works of literature, the difference in sensory perception is simply not conceived of as an independent variable that would affect the results of their test, and thus the two groups not only come to different conclusions, but as the result of different modes of reasoning.

Rather than imply that all widely read psychologists' writings on autism are insignificant, it is necessary to recognize that the majority of medical literature on any given type of

neurodivergence tends to center neurotypical perspectives and perceptions of other neurotypes by using neurotypical behaviors as a standard against which all others are held, and framing any difference as a deficit. In fact, the most consistently observed source of the disconnect upon which the autistic "deficit" in interpersonal and social relationships is the fact that such a disconnect is only found in communications between autistic and neurotypical individuals; the perceived lack of capacity for intersubjectivity is not found in interactions between multiple autistic parties; Crompton's 2020 communication chain experiment revealed that "...autistic and non-autistic people do not significantly differ in how accurately they recall information from peers of the same neurotype but that selective difficulties occur when autistic and non-autistic people are sharing information. This occurs alongside significantly lower rapport within mixed groups" (Rizzo 16-17). Similarly, the medicalized narratives of diagnosis and treatment tend towards a focus on "correcting" even harmless behaviors for no other reason than to conform towards an established standard. By embracing multiple ways of reading and processing within the field of literary criticism, neurodivergent theory works on a deeper level to undo the hegemony of the established rapid-processing method. Additionally, an increased awareness of the nature of the difficulties faced by autistic individuals in sensory processing allows for better understanding and ability for instructors to effectively accommodate their students' needs, and thus create space for autistic students in higher education to contribute analyses that may only be produced organically by diverse neurocognitive patterns of reading.

Part 3: Case Study of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*

When introducing the conversation about literary criticism through an autistic reader's theoretical lens, it is necessary to explore the question of who these readers are, their experiences within the world of academia, and how their interpretation can drastically alter how even the most commonly read works of canonical literature are analyzed. One especially relevant case study, which I will examine in this section of my thesis, is the polarizing character of Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. I chose to analyze this character partially because of the controversial opinions he generates—both in the high school classrooms in which most people are first exposed to *The Catcher in the Rye* and in the most elevated theoretical discussions of Salinger's work in higher education—but also because of my personal experience of reading *The Catcher in the Rye*, immediately recognizing Holden's autistic traits, and feeling a connection to the character that inspired me to defend him from the common critiques posited in critical reading conversations.

The controversial nature of this novel is inescapable no matter where these discussions take place. In the first Google result for "The Catcher in the Rye book reviews", *The Guardian* reader Aiman A. describes Salinger's portrayal of Holden as "...insolent, lazy, and quite frankly, completely clueless about his future" (Aiman 2). While this description could apply to any teenager, and in some ways reads as if Aiman is suggesting that the novel suffers as a result of the protagonist being unlikeable, the specific terms used are often applied to neurodivergent students by their instructors who mistake executive dysfunction, flat affect, or issues of cognitive miscommunication for purposeful disrespect. by their instructors. Another critical review, from non-profit digital publisher *Electric Literature*, suggests that *The Catcher in the Rye* be retired from school syllabi entirely, that the majority of readers are "...too non-young, non-white, and

non-male to be able to stand listening to Holden Caulfield feel sorry for himself", and that the only readers above the age of 18 who can connect with him are "softbois and murderers", in a nod to John Lennon's killer Mark David Chapman's self-proclaimed identification with the character (Saxena et al. 1). While young white men are the most commonly represented protagonists in the Western literary canon, an issue that does deserve recognition and criticism, the discourse of Holden "feel[ing] sorry for himself" as part of Saxena's justification for removing the novel from high school curriculums is insensitive at best, if not openly expressive of hostility to a body of their readers.

Both *The Guardian* and, much more explicitly, *Electric Literature*, are progressive-leaning and largely trusted publications that often push for academic inclusion in their viewers by demonstrating respect for a significant number of historically underrepresented groups. In contrast to their mission, their reviews' interpretations of Holden are reductive, one-note, and demonstrative of the prevalent gap in both activist and higher-education academic spaces dominated by neurotypical voices when it comes to the consideration of neurodiverse perspectives; even within some of the most historically inclusive and diverse circles, there is a substantial problem of exclusion of diverse neurocognitive styles and neurotypes.

Autistic self-identity and the uplifting of these voices is key to the neurodivergent theoretical framework; thus, the case study will begin with an in-depth analysis and part-by-part deconstruction of Holden's most detailed description of himself and how he is generally perceived by others, as well as other notable moments of self-description throughout the novel. This section appears early in the novel, before his adventure into the city begins in earnest:

> I act quite young for my age sometimes. I was sixteen then, and I'm seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen. It's really ironical [*sic*], because I'm six foot two and a half and I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head—the right side—is full of millions of gray hairs. I've had them ever since I was a kid. And yet I still act sometimes like I was only about twelve. Everybody says that, especially my father. It's partly true, too, but it isn't all true. People always think something's all true. I don't give a damn, except that I get bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age. Sometimes I act a lot older than I am—I really do—but people never notice it. People never notice anything. (Salinger 13).

At the beginning of this monologue, Holden states that he"...act[s] quite young for my age sometimes. I was sixteen then, and I'm seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen… I still act sometimes like I was only about twelve. Everybody said that, especially my father" (Salinger 13). Holden describes being consistently told that he acts immature or young for his age, which is a common experience for autistic adolescents and adults. Usually after the stage of development in which children move from "play" to more complex social and interpersonal interactions which rely increasingly on the understanding of unspoken intersubjective cues, the disconnect between neurodivergent children and their neurotypical peers becomes much more pronounced. Autistic children are often praised for being mature or "old souls" for relating more to adults and being uninterested in socializing with peers, only to later be seen as "immature" and be ostracized due to being socially underdeveloped and not knowing how to form relationships in the typically understood ways which their peers have had the opportunity to practice and hone since early adolescence.

As the logical conclusion to these feelings of isolation from a larger neurotypical social structure, there is a tendency for autistic people to find each other and form social groups that function in uniquely understood ways, including parallel play as well as a mutual acceptance of stimming behaviors and sensory seeking or avoidance. Holden demonstrates this tendency in that the only people he seems to truly relate to and connect with are the two other characters who also demonstrate prominent autistic traits. The first of these characters is Phoebe, his ten-year-old sister. From the most basic scientific perspective, this assumption has weight in that it is common for siblings to belong to the same neurotype, as there are substantial genetic components to the variation in function of the amygdala which lead to the development of autism. Within the text of the novel itself, the theory gains further support in that Phoebe is described as having a special interest in the movie *The 39 Steps*, which she has seen at least ten times. She can quote the whole movie by heart, including memorization of the characters' movements and gestures. She is also described as being both very smart and very emotional compared to other children, and is closer with both Holden and their older brother D.B. than with any friends of her own age.

The other character who can be reliably interpreted as autistic is Jane Gallagher, Holden's childhood friend and romantic interest. He describes playing checkers with her, and states that "What she'd do, when she'd get a king, she wouldn't move it. She'd just leave it in the back row. She'd get them all lined up in the back row. Then she'd never use them. She just liked the way they looked when they were all in the back row" (Salinger 41). Even though kings are useful to have in checkers—they can move both forwards and backwards, and are worth more points when captured by one's opponent—Jane leaves them lined up in the back row,

demonstrating an unconventional play style in the same way a younger autistic child might line up toys instead of playing pretend in a more typical way; she gains more satisfaction from the aesthetic organization process than from having an advantage in the game. Another aspect of their relationship that could support their both being autistic—albeit more so in Holden's case than Jane's—is the lack of a sexual component.

The most notable instance of physical attraction expressed by either party in this relationship is Holden's internal monologue about holding Jane's hand, in which he is pleased that "...she was terrific to hold hands with. Most girls, if you hold hands with them, their goddam hand dies on you, or else they think they have to keep moving their hand all the time, as if they were afraid they'd bore you or something… we'd start holding hands, and we wouldn't quit till the movie was over. And without changing the position or making a big deal out of it" (Salinger 103). Even here, he focuses on describing the sensory and motor-based parts of the experience, rather than anything he finds explicitly romantic about their interaction. While current research has moved on from the notion that autistic individuals are less sexually developed than their neurotypical peers, it has been hypothesized that non-standard [referred to in the original article as "deviant"; this term is negatively charged when used in reference to minority groups] sexual behaviors are more common in autistic individuals due to the sensory-seeking-friendly aspects of these behaviors, thus inferring that the sensory aspects of sexual or romantic interaction hold a much higher importance in neurodivergent groups who experience differences in sensory perception than they do for neurotypicals who engage in the same non-standard sexual acts (Kellaher 3). While Holden is later shown to have no real interest in having sex, this can be easily attributed to his individual past experiences and traumatic history rather than anything that

can be generalized or attributed to his theorized neurotype.

Later in the initial descriptive paragraph, Holden goes on to state that his acting young for his age is "... really ironical *[sic]*, because I'm six foot two and a half and I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head—the right side—is full of millions of gray hairs. I've had them ever since I was a kid" (Salinger 13). Here, he goes on a tangent that is at least partially unrelated to the main topic of his internal monologue, moving from how his behaviors are perceived as inconsistent with his actual age to focusing on his appearance. The inclusion of this level of detail does not fit organically within how a passage like this might be expected to flow in terms of how much space he allots for each section of the monologue. Rather, his descriptive narrative style is consistent with the slow processing model proposed by Barber-Stetson to be shared between both autistic and Modernist writers in that he "...assign[s] importance to objects or stimuli that may not interest others; in the process, [he] locate[s] innovative [to neurotypicals] connections among the particulars on which [he] focus[es]" (Barber-Stetson 152). While Holden's height and gray hair are seemingly inconsequential details, they are the only physical descriptors of him in the entire novel. These details' occurring in the middle of an unrelated paragraph reflects an unconventional mode of forming connections between each concept or aspect of what he is trying to communicate, similar to research suggesting that "...individuals with [autism spectrum disorders] have difficulty with aspects of discourse such as understanding context, tying new information to that which was previously stated, and organizing topics and subtopics (Landa 2000). Individuals with ASDs also show impairments in understanding what other people need to know" (Diehl 83). In these ways, Holden's narrative style is consistent with the common autistic trait of unconventional thought processes and trains of thought that

neurotypical readers may have difficulty following.

Returning to the topic of age, often discussed in the conversation around autistic advocacy in the context of neurotypical constructions of "mental age" when justifying the use of functioning labels, Holden admits that he "...get[s] bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age. Sometimes I act a lot older than I am—I really do—but people never notice it" (Salinger 13). Acting a specific age takes conscious focus for Holden, and acting as either his chronological age or "a lot older" can be interpreted as a way of describing autistic masking behavior. "Masking" in this usage of the term is a community standard phrase referring to an autistic person making a conscious effort to appear allistic in order to avoid negative attention from neurotypicals for demonstrating autistic traits. His repeated use of the word "acting" also contributes to the implication of masking behavior; he describes putting in effort into assuming a different "older" or more mature persona in order to fit a standard to which he is held by the adult authority figures in his life, which is another common experience of autistic individuals who have lower support needs and can therefore "pass" and be perceived as neurotypical in some instances.

Holden goes on to state that "Everybody says that [he acts younger for his age], especially my father. It's partly true, too, but it isn't all true. People always think something's all true… People never notice anything" (Salinger 13). Two distinct times in this paragraph, Holden generalizes "people" as if the term refers to a group he is not part of. This phrasing could be interpreted as a description of his sense of feeling disconnected from others in that the way they think and the things they notice—or don't notice—differ fundamentally from his own experiences of the world due to a sense of emotional detachment and isolation. The sense that

“people” don’t think through things on the same level as Holden or notice the same things, often to the point of causing discomfort with the self, reflects a unique awareness of being different while lacking the concrete explanation for that disconnect, which would ideally take the form of a diagnosis. This experience is common to undiagnosed autistic individuals, with a palpable sense of relief as the eventual result of obtaining a diagnosis that would explain the fundamental differences between how the given individual experiences the world around them as opposed to the perception of their peers. Especially in the case of feeling as if people “never notice anything”, Holden is voicing an extremely common autistic experience even though he does not directly mention what it is that they never notice; when the world is full of unignorable sensory stimuli by which the vast majority of people appear to be unbothered, this creates a feeling of being overly sensitive, or of wondering how other people are able to constantly cope with something so distracting in their own experiences.

Throughout the novel, there are several further instances in which Holden refers to “people" and the things they do as a homogenous group to which he does not belong due to his perceived—and actual—lack of any strong social connections or bonds between himself and his peers. One notable example in the context of reading Holden as autistic occurs when he meets the mother of one of his classmates on the train, and notices that “...she had a terrifically nice smile. Most people have hardly any smile at all, or a lousy one” (Salinger 72). In his characterizing “most people " in this way, Holden can be interpreted as being hyper-aware of the “correct” way to form various facial expressions for different social contexts, to the extent that he notices when others are performing these expressions in an “incorrect” way, or in a way that differs from how he has learned to perform them in an effective way.. This is yet another

common autistic masking trait stemming from being criticized for “flat affect”, or lack of emotional expression via unconscious facial movement in order to display the given emotional state.

Another example that demonstrates the same hyper-awareness of physical demonstration of socio-emotional cues takes place when Holden arrives in the city and goes to a piano bar. He is annoyed and upset by the rowdiness and noise of the crowd drowning out the talented pianist, especially how often they clap over any musical trick or showy place in a song, thinking about how if he were a pianist, he would rather the audience not clap at all. He also states that “...people always clap for the wrong things” (Salinger 110). His focus on the “correct” reactions to external stimuli—both his own and those of others—is a consistent motif in the novel, and is in some ways the reason for the title itself. In one of *The Catcher in the Rye*’s most well-known scenes, Holden has a daydream in which he finds himself responsible for a group of young children who are running in a field of rye, constantly in danger of falling off a cliff and unaware of the danger they are in as they play their game.

> Thousands of little kids, and nobody’s around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I’m standing on the edge of some crazy cliff—I mean if they’re running and they don’t look where they’re going, I have to come out 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. I know it’s crazy. (Salinger 224-225).

A possible interpretation of this scene is that Holden’s heightened self-awareness leads him to view others as irresponsible and incapable of conceptualizing the danger he perceives as being all around them. He takes things into account that nobody else seems to notice, and despite some

interpretations' characterization of him as a selfish and spoiled teenage boy, imagines himself as the only person responsible for keeping the children safe from harm due to his heightened consciousness of what is right.

Holden's attention to detail and sense of responsibility for the actions of others is also demonstrated in a later scene in which he goes to his younger sister Phoebe's school and sees that someone has written an obscene phrase on the wall, which greatly upsets him to the point that he fantasizes in detail about getting into a violent fight with the "perverty bum" who he imagines having decided to write it after first breaking into the elementary school after hours and urinating on the wall (Salinger 260-261). While the most common reading of this scene as well as the "catcher in the rye" sequence is that Holden specifically wants to protect children—especially Phoebe—from sex, or from losing their innocence, however, when combined with the repeated criticisms of others' "incorrect" responses to scripted social interaction scenes, it can be read in a much broader context as another occurrence of his obsession with what is correct and proper in a given social situation; while it was most likely an elementary student who wrote the message in some attempt to shock or impress their peers, he instead imagines the worst possible scenario of a socially depraved adult figure breaking as many laws and social rules as possible before vandalizing the wall. He gains some satisfaction from the later imagined scenario of fighting off the vandal, but is still visibly upset by the idea that the children could have seen the message first and been distressed by it as the result of someone's inappropriate actions.

Many autistic people develop an interest—often to the point of fixation—on the workings of the human brain at some point in their lives. Holden is part of this group as well; in

Chapter 19, he has a discussion with his old school friend Carl Luce, whose father is a psychoanalyst. Luce reminds Holden that in the past he had suggested that Holden go for a psychiatric evaluation, and states that seeing a psychoanalyst could help him to "...recognize the patterns of [his] mind" (Salinger 191-192). This conversation fascinates Holden, who asks what Luce means by that, what an appointment with a psychoanalyst would entail, and a number of other questions around the topic.

Attempting to form a comprehensive understanding of the scientific aspects of emotional expression, interpersonal communication, and other facets of life which may pose challenges to the autistic cognitive type can serve as a basis upon which the informal real-world skills they supplement can be constructed in order to more effectively mask and pass as neurotypical. Holden himself does not consciously express desire to blend in with his peers. In contrast, he refers to them disparagingly as "phonies" throughout the novel in reference to their inauthentic modes of interpersonal communication and self-expression, as well as—perhaps unconsciously—to his own inability to connect or form any kind of strong social attachment to other characters beyond Phoebe and Jane. While this lack of interpersonal connection may be cited by some neurotypical interpretations of the character as a reason for his being unlikeable as a protagonist, for other neurodivergent readers, it may serve as a further point of connection beyond his visible autistic traits.

Part 4: Conclusion and Moving Forward

As the neurodivergent movement gains traction and the stigma around public expression of neurodivergent identities decreases, the ability to openly take pride in belonging to these

communities has become ever so slightly possible. Additionally, the percentage of autistic individuals in higher education has increased substantially, a fact recognized by S. Jay Kuder in *College Success for Students on the Autism Spectrum: A Neurodiversity Perspective*, an autistic self-advocacy-driven guide to help these students succeed. Kuder discusses the role of faculty and staff, working with families, and how to address the common college mental health struggles that are often compounded in autistic students, among a variety of other topics.

If faculty, staff, and families of these students are given a base point through which they can begin to understand their support needs, this will in turn establish a need for increased communication and understanding in the broader social communities in which autistic individuals also face exclusion. One significant example is the case of the workforce, which she discusses in Chapter 10, Career Readiness. Kuder's book acts as both a guide to success in higher education for autistic students, and a tool in demystifying an often-misunderstood neurotype for outside neurotypical observers seeking to build communication and help foster success for autistic students in their academic and continued professional lives. The wider reading of works such as Kuder's by academic instructors across the board are key to the continuation of the path towards establishing neurodiversity as just another facet of unique and human identity, as well as a welcome point of diversity in the historically exclusionary or critical conversations that take place within institutions of higher education.

While neurodivergent theories finding a place on the list of interpretive lenses students memorize in a literary theory course would mark a powerful moment of representation as well as an opportunity for a significant point of connection between neurotypes, the impact I hope to achieve in continuing this path of study goes beyond any one academic discipline; the central

tenet of neurodivergent literary criticism and the basis for this future body of research is the ongoing process of decentralizing the strictly neurotypical perspective and moving towards the possibility of intersubjective communication across the neurocognitive boundary. Even if my work does nothing else, I would be satisfied if I could help one person understand autism and better support other autistics in their life journeys through a developed understanding of the functioning of this neurotype, as well as through a critical examination of the stigma surrounding open identification as autistic. Within both academic and informal social circles, there is still substantial stigma if not outright risk in being visibly autistic, despite the enormous strides taken by historic and present-day disability and neurodiversity advocates; it is necessary for neurodiversity-inclusive spaces to make this acceptance openly visible in order to make it clear that such stigma is unwelcome.

The time period in which autism was becoming more well-known as a diagnosis overlaps with the decade in which the modernist literary movement was coming to an end. Furthermore, it has been observed that many of the same literary techniques these writers relied on to "slow down" the reading experience are used by contemporary autistic writers such as poet Craig Romkema, leading to the naming of the minor literature shared by these demographics through the "slow processing" writing style (Barber-Stetson 150-152). Barber-Stetson's article and this thesis' critical examination of the proposed style is part of a larger conversation beginning to question whether certain styles of reading and processing that have traditionally been excluded from the academic world are truly invalid forms of interpretation, or whether they are only treated as such when associated with the stigma of neurodiversity in cases in which it is understood as a learning disability.

Although not necessarily written with autistic readers in mind, Merve Emre's *Paraliterary* describes and defines "bad readers" as those existing outside of the traditional academic context and preexisting schools of literary criticism that are currently taught as part of the established curriculum. The growing public perception of this conversation was sparked when the GI Bill led to a drastic increase in the number of people attending higher education institutions in the United States, leading to a greater diversity of thought than those who fit the previous highly elitist standards of academia. While the GI Bill-led era of this discussion was based solely on socioeconomic status of the incoming wave of veteran university students—notably, African-Americans and other veterans of color were specifically excluded from the GI Bill's benefits as well as those of multiple other postwar social welfare programs, one of many factors that led to the racialization of education and wealth disparity, and subsequently the neoliberal reform via privatization of a vast multitude of formerly government-funded and operated services—Emre opens a similar question to Barber-Stetson's in terms of who belongs in the world of academia, which fields of study or criticism are worth pursuing, and how these standards must adapt as the world comes to terms with an increasingly diverse and educated public (Emre 36). In redefining the standards of literary criticism and interpretation, not only neurodivergent students will benefit, but also any individual with a non-traditional educational background.

In the process of crafting this thesis, I have had the opportunity to look back on a lifetime of academic writing and how my autistic experience has both informed my critical analysis skills and held me back from putting words on a page. The autistic brain operates in extremes in that it conceptualizes even basic needs on an all-or-nothing level; I will often not notice that I am

hungry or tired until I am running dangerously low, I am unable to effectively plan for a long-term project as deadlines are conceptualized as either immediate or in some indiscernible future, and a finished product is either perfect or flawed to the point of being unshareable. There are times when my sensory sensitivities make the clicking of computer keys unbearable to hear, or the dimmest brightness setting on the monitor like staring into the sun. I have written essays in the Google Docs mobile app and by dictating out loud in voice-to-text, tried every conceivable combination of sitting position, stim toy, and weighted lapdesk, and developed strong opinions on types of noise-canceling headphones, all to keep progressing at the same level as my peers. Additionally, the social and interpersonal difficulties that come with the autistic neurotype—whether further research shows it to stem from an underdeveloped theory of mind or of intersubjectivity—make autistic individuals much more prone to developing depression and anxiety than is the case for our neurotypical peers. Especially in the case of depression, mental illness causes other pre-existing difficulties such as lack of executive function to be compounded to further extremes; this and the lack of motivation inherent to the depressive state can make even the most basic and routine tasks seem insurmountable.

These challenges are a part of my life that I have learned to work around, but on occasion, it is difficult to move through the world with the knowledge that ninety-nine percent of the population does not share my experiences, there will always be a fundamental disconnect at the amygdalic level between myself and the majority of my peers, and that the world of higher education is not designed to support my neurotype. However, within the same journey and creative process, I have also gained a more complex understanding of the scientific basis of my cognitive process and how it differs from that of the neurotypical public, expanded my

vocabulary around this processing style, and even gained a deeper respect for my own accomplishments in the context of the scope of such a project.

As an autistic person diagnosed later in life, I am in a position of both privilege and deficit; my autistic traits were not detected by the school system due to my generally low support needs—I am very rarely nonverbal, I can mask with relative ease due to practice, and in most circumstances, I can ignore my sensory sensitivities if it is necessary—however, I spent most of my life lacking support or resources to understand the difficulties I face on the more difficult days. I have consistently felt as if there was something missing, some kind of miracle strategy that was allowing my peers to push through the situations in which I struggled to cope with the overwhelming sensory input from the world around me. Through being diagnosed, finding the autistic activist community, and learning more about neurodiversity in the context of its potential for joy and education, this aspect of my identity has become a source of pride and great happiness that allows me to understand the why and how of experiences that previously only acted as sources of anger and stress.

The most common narratives around autism tend to center early childhood experiences of wealthy white males, are written by the parents or doctors who interact with this demographic of autistic people, and treat autism as either a developmental disorder that these children "outgrow" in favor of becoming socially awkward savants who work in some scientific field, or for those with high support needs, a constant challenge faced by "heroic" parents who are obligated to become long-term caregivers to their nonverbal adult children, especially insidious in the case of the highly visible subsect of this group that uses their children as a source of online fame and manufactured sympathy. During the beginnings of the thesis-writing process, I struggled to find

usable sources that did not fall into either these categories or the other common third consisting of highly technical and pathologized medical jargon that is near-incomprehensible to readers without a PhD in developmental psychology. This is the case not only for autistic individuals, but for any marginalized groups whose sociocultural identity has been medicalized; we are faced with a sense of necessity to become academically knowledgeable about these identities in order to avoid being infantilized or otherwise further spoken over by neurotypical "experts" who treat a diagnosis as a checklist of symptoms based on deficit rather than as a marker of belonging to a community in which one can find a support network, access much-needed resources, and answer lifelong questions about how to navigate an overwhelming and often hostile broader social environment.

Autism is so often either pathologized or spoken of in terms of the difficulties it causes to the neurotypical individuals who interact with it on the most superficial level, and academic sources that treat autistic people with basic human dignity—let alone sources written by autistic academics themselves—are few and far between. This lack of viable options to cite is yet another reminder of the need for a more comprehensive and own-voices-driven approach to discussions about autism, which I hope to contribute to in a meaningful way through my ongoing study of this neurotype in graduate school and in the vocational academic world beyond. On a more personal level, I was additionally reminded of the importance of autistic self-identification and neurodiversity pride; by being openly autistic and discussing my own experiences in the neurotypical-centered social and academic world of higher education, I am in a position to advocate for those with higher support needs, destigmatize autistic traits and create spaces where unmasking is accepted, and share the autistic neurocognitive processing style in order to help

neurotypical allies better understand our perspective through the unique lens of theoretical literary criticism.

I have learned in the course of this research opportunity that a simple lack of intersubjective understanding—compounded by misinformation, stereotypes, and societal stigma around open neurodivergent identity—takes on most of the blame for creating the existing barriers that prevent so many neurodivergent individuals from accessing the world of higher education. With the increasing prominence of the neurodiversity movement, as well as its ongoing conversation with the broader field of disability activism, these spaces are gradually becoming more accessible, but the same lack of respect and understanding still underlies the institutions themselves.

There is undeniable and subversive power in taking pride in an identity that has been not only traditionally marginalized, but treated as a medical issue to be "cured", and even more so in combating the remaining stigma through open celebration of the community's unique strengths as they come to be positioned as having an advantage over their historically normative counterparts. The neurodivergent theoretical perspective holds a rich history of activism and ongoing progress in the face of adversity comparable with all other theoretical interpretive lenses based in an aspect of socio-cultural identity. In establishing neurodivergent reading as a valid interpretive lens by which works of literature can be analyzed, as well as in imagining a future world of literary academia in which autistic writers' works become part of the more widely taught critical theory curriculum, I hope to uplift these voices and in turn develop a greater understanding between academics of diverse neurotypes via transformation of the same system that has historically enabled, if not enforced, absolute conformity of cognitive processing style.

Works Cited

"Autism Diagnostic Criteria." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 6 Apr. 2022, https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-dsm.html.

Aiman, A. "*The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger: Review" The Guardian, User Reviews, 21 June 2012.

Al Ghazi, Loredana. "History of Autism. The Beginnings. Collusions or Serendipity." *Journal of Educational Sciences*, vol. 19, Jan. 2018, pp. 5–17. *EBSCOhost*, discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=3b835ae4-c369-3744-a1c3-95f5e0053aeb.

Barber-Stetson, Claire. "Slow Processing: A New Minor Literature by Autists and Modernists." *Jml: Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 38, no. 1, Oct. 2014, pp. 147–65. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.2979/jmodelite.38.1.147.

Baron-Cohen, Simon et. al. "Does the autistic child have a ''theory of mind''?" Cognition 1985. 21(1):37-46. https://doi:10.1016/0010-0277(85)90022-8.

Cohen-Rottenberg, Rachel. "A Critique of the Theory of Mind (ToM) Test." Autism and Empathy Blog, Wordpress. 2009. https://autismandempathyblog.wordpress.com/a-critique-of-the-theory-of-mind-tom-test/

Davis, Lennard J. *Enforcing Normalcy : Disability, Deafness, and the Body / Lennard J. Davis*. Verso, 1995. *EBSCOhost*, discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=3649b84b-cc4c-31f3-9b36-7e39c5ffc447.

Diehl, Joshua J., Loisa Bennetto, and Edna Carter Young. "Story recall and narrative coherence

of high-functioning children with autism spectrum disorders." *Journal of abnormal child psychology* 34.1 (2006): 83-98.

Emre, Merve. *Paraliterary : The Making of Bad Readers in Postwar America / Merve Emre*. The University of Chicago Press, 2017. *EBSCOhost*, discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2525dc32-4b99-36f2-a50f-8d7dcb2e186a.

Gallagher, Shaun. "Intersubjectivity and psychopathology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Psychiatry*. Edited by Fulford K, Davies M, Gipps R, Graham G, Sadler J.Z., Stanghellini G., Thornton T. Oxford University Press, 2013: 258-274.

Kellaher, Denise C. "Sexual Behavior and Autism Spectrum Disorders: an Update and Discussion." *Curr Psychiatry Rep* 17, 25 (2015). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-015-0562-4

Kuder, S. Jay, et al. *College Success for Students on the Autism Spectrum : A Neurodiversity Perspective*. Stylus Publishing, 2021. *EBSCOhost*, discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=569de726-1710-3972-b04c-0ea1566222ec.

Landa, Rebecca. "Social language use in Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism." *Asperger Syndrome* (pp. 125–155). Edited by A. Kiln, F. R. Volkmar, & S. S. Sparrow, The Guilford Press. 2000.

Leadbitter, Kathy, et al. "Autistic Self-Advocacy and the Neurodiversity Movement: Implications for Autism Early Intervention Research and Practice." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 12, Apr. 2021. *EBSCOhost*, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.635690.

Leslie, Alan M. "Pretense and representation: The origins of "theory of mind." Psychological Review 1987, 94(4):412–426. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.94.4.412.

Linton, Simi. *Claiming Disability : Knowledge and Identity / Simi Linton ; Foreward [Sic] by Michael Bérubé*. New York University Press, 1998. *EBSCOhost*, discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=a134bbc8-4f46-30b5-b831-6a6b113b9355.

Loftis, Sonya Freeman. *Imagining Autism : Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum / Sonya Freeman Loftis.* Indiana University Press, 2015. EBSCOhost, discovery.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=3588fe17-8e4b-3dff-93a5-332e0c0ead62.

Rizzo, Elisabetta A. "Theory of Mind, Phenomenology, and the Double Empathy Problem". *Journal of NeuroPhilosophy*, vol. 2, no. 1, Mar. 2023, doi:10.5281/zenodo.7740092.

Salinger, J.D. *The Catcher in the Rye.* / J.D. Salinger. Little, Brown and Company, 1951.

Saxena, Jaya, et. al. "*The Catcher in the Rye* is Fired." *Fire the Canon*, Electric Literature, 5 October 2018.

Starr, Gabrielle G. "Cognitive Literary Criticism." *A Companion to Literary Theory*, edited by D.H. Richter. 2018. https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1002/9781118958933.ch33