SUBVERSION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN YOUNG ADULT

LITERATURE: A STUDY OF SELECTED FICTIONS OF JOHN GREEN

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DECLARATION

MIZORAM UNIVERSITY

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I, F.LALMUANPUII, hereby declare that the subject matter of this dissertation is the record of work, done by me, that the contents of this dissertation did not form the basis of the award of any previous degree to me or to the best of my knowledge to anybody else, and that the dissertation has not been submitted by me for research degree in any other University/Institution.

This is being submitted to Mizoram University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

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<u>*CERTIFICATE*</u>

This is to certify that "**Subversion of Gender Stereotypes in Young Adult Literature: A Study of Selected Fictions of John Green**" written by **F. Lalmuanpuii** has been written under my supervision.

She has fulfilled all the required norms laid down within the M.Phil. regulations of Mizoram University. The dissertation is the result of her own investigation. Neither the dissertation as a whole or any part of it was ever submitted by any other University for any research degree.

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Introduction

Adolescence is a stage of transition. Being at the edge of childhood and stepping on the threshold of adulthood, the adolescent seeks a solid ground to focus his/her bewildered mind. The adolescent is at a state/stage where one searches for distinctiveness, seeking the self, what she/he is capable of, and craves to discover who he/she is as a distinctive individual. There is no definite moment or a definite timeline as to when the archetypal adolescent/young adult is said to be discovered. It was not until World War II, that the adolescent is given recognition as a separate state. Michael Cart points out that "Indeed, until the World War II, the term young adult – like its apparent synonym teenager – was scarcely used" society did acknowledge the existence of an "ill-defined developmental space somewhere between childhood and adulthood" (*Young Adult Literature* 3). The main reason for the ambiguous state of adolescence maybe because society did not recognise the existence of an in-between state. Because children when they reach the age of ten took on adult responsibilities in earning wages for the family or taking care of the family while their parents worked. Michael Cart explains the reason as to why the 'young adult' failed to be recognised through history:

> For a while it was acknowledged that there were human beings who occupied
> an ill-defined developmental space somewhere between childhood and
> adulthood, the *idea,* the *concept*, the *notion* that this space comprised a
> separate and distinct part of the evolution from childhood to adulthood was
> still foreign in a society accustomed to seeing children become adults

overnight as a result of their entering the full-time workforce, often as early as age ten. (3-4)

The Industrial Revolution can be the main reason as to why children grew overnight into adults. With the responsibility of working and earning to feed the family and the demand of workforce, children did not have the leisure or time to grow up and experience life. As the situation changes with time, it is only in the late 1900 that the youth culture began to emerge, "until 1900 we were a society with only two categories of citizens: children and adults" (Cart, *From Romance to Realism* 4). But in 1904 G. Stanley Halls in his pivotal work- *Adolescence: It's Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime and Religion* came up with a whole new category of human beings, the adolescent. Hall believed that this certain age group needs supervision because he believed adolescent stage to be a transition stage, a time of "stress and turmoil". Hall's finding influenced many to push the youth to be 'schooled' and to tend to the needs of the adolescent. He defines adolescence as a "new birth, for the higher and more completely human traits are now born"; a new birth, from the primal to a refined state (Preface).

With people being influenced to let their kids earn high school diplomas, the establishment of the youth culture as we know of to-date came into shape as "putting young people into each other's company every day led to the emergence of a youth culture centred on high-school social life" (Cart, *From Romance to Realism* 5). The demand for extended education and the need for specialised skills in the certain workforce, led to the enrolment in schools for further studies, which in turn led to the creation of the youth culture; where they began to experience life and have more free

time to grow up, as work is no longer a necessity. The newly minted state of adolescence became institutionalised only after two decades by the American Library Association; creating a new division to cater to the needs of the 'young adult'. Coming to a conclusion that the term 'young adult' would represent the individual between the age of twelve to eighteen years and end at the age of twenty-one.

Young Adult Literature or YAL is self-defined literature with protagonists who are adolescent/young adults; targeted at readers between the ages of twelve to nineteen years. Michael Cart states that "to create a generic literature that can speak cogently to such a bewilderingly amorphous group of readers is a daunting task" because books published as "young adult novels were not written for that audience…Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer*, often hailed as the first young adult novel, was actually published as an adult title" (*From Romance to Realism* 8). Books that consist of the 'young adult' have existed "at least since Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series, which was published in the 1930s" (Blakemore). The presence of the young adult character can be traced back to decades even before the establishment of the existence of a separate state that exists between childhood and adulthood. It is believed that the March sisters from Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*(1868) are the first every young adult mentioned in Literature, they were "America's first "official" young adults" (Cart, *From Romance* 4). But after the clear establishment of a separate state for the young adult and the recognition of the young adult by society, books that are solely meant for the young adult began to emerge on a large scale.

According to Alice Trupe, in *Thematic Guide to Young Adult Literature,* most scholars date the publication of S.E.Hinton's *The Outsider* (1967) as the beginning of Young Adult Literature (YAL), it may be because:

> Hinton had begun writing it two years earlier because she was not interested in the saccharine novels marketed to teen girls. This was the kind of fiction Hinton wanted to read, with characters who were both tough and vulnerable, who faced real social and emotional problems, who had economic worries and life choices to make, in a well-plotted, exciting narrative. (v)

Hinton being a teen herself wanted a character and situation that she could relate to. As Michael Cart says in the article "The Evolution of Young Adult Literature", the 1940's and 50's are the decades that deals with adventure and romance novel for the young adult, being a newly recognized age group writers are still leaning towards the storytelling version from the Children's Literature, however the 60's with the publication of Hinton's novel, as mentioned before, introduced "hard-edged realism".

YAL thrived with the publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsider* (1967) and the genre's recognition grew to a staggering height in the past decade. The publication of Hinton's novel marks the rise of realism in Young Adult Literature, bringing change to the genre with its realistic portrayal of characters. As Cart states, Hinton rejects the "literature that had been written for her generation, calling it the inane junk lining the teen-age shelf library" (*From Romance to Realism*, 47).This rejection of Young Adult Literature is responsible for ushering in a new kind of literature, with hard-edge realistic themes and characters. By the 1980's, Young

Adult Literature as a genre began to deal with topics that are considered to be mature and in-depth for the genre. But it did not gain much recognition at a critical or scholarly level. This may be because most of its origin is based on commercial influence when kids began to gain money for their own that used to be put into supporting the family. But this did not stop the genre from expanding its vicinity, Strickland also states that the reason for the rapid growth of YA maybe because, its readership wants things that are real and things that they can connect to just as Hinton wanted, and other authors tackle the deepest and darkest issues from identity struggle to suicide. Even the readership of YAL has expanded in the past decade; adults who are even beyond their youth are reading YA novels. The reason for the adult's interest in YAL is not because of the increase in the level of literacy but because it is "indicative of the quality and enduring themes addressed" and that the emotions being rendered can be "more or less valid than what one might experience at 30" (Brown). Other reasons as to why YAL is gaining popularity among adult readers may also be because of the presence of the constant conflict and rift that exists between the individual and the society. Rachel Falconer In "Young Adult Fiction and the Crossover Phenomenon" argues that due to the rapid growth of our world the question of identity is at large; so YAL in a way targets these questions of identity, guiding the readers in finding their true identities.

Adolescence being a stage of transition, the liminal state between childhood and adulthood, the individual seeks distinctiveness, preparing for the next journey, that is, into the world of adulthood. The adolescent individual, who in plain terms is in the edge of childhood and on the threshold of adulthood, seeks a reality that will

ground his/her confused mind. With the confusion and search for identity in mind, writers for Young Adult Literature began to gear their themes and storyline to a more realistic ground where the adolescent can much relate to the character, who is like her/him in a quest for who they are and what they are capable of. Falconer writes that:

> …in times of fundamental social change, readers evince a heightened appetite for fiction that focus on the edge of identity, the points of transition and rupture, and the place where we might, like microcosms of the grater world, break down and potentially assume new and hybrid identities. (89)

The existential question of who one is and what one truly is is one of the most predominant themes with the emergence of the realistic Young Adult Fiction. But this realistic representation of the identity crisis theme is not the only entity within the YAL category; there are many sub-categories of fiction, like that of chick-lit, lad-lit, dystopian, science-fiction, fantasy, LGBT and many more. However the concept of identity is a common trope in the realm of Young Adult Literature.

Literature plays an enormous role in the depiction of gender stereotypes, especially folktales and fairy tales that depicts women who are helpless and fragile, in need of saviours; and men who are brave and witty, who embody traits of natural born leaders. But contemporary writing changes the perceptions, no longer creating characters according to the ascribed gender roles and their stereotypes. Individuals began to shift from the enclosure of gender stereotypes with the realization that individuals need not identify themselves with the existing gender identities. One does not necessarily have to act in accordance with the stereotypes that are believed to be

the proper conduct of their ascribed genders. Young Adult Literature with its great emphasis on identity crisis brings out characters that are not stifled by social conformity; introducing characters who believe that jumping over the fence is the only way to find their sense of self.

The term 'gender' does not always imply the socially constructed distinction of roles given to women and men. If one searches up a dictionary the results of the definition given to the term may be different – as in the state of being male or female and of the grammatical usage, the classification of certain nouns into the feminine, masculine and the neuter. Debbie Cameron writes that the English word gender started out as a grammatical term "used in the description of language where nouns are classified as masculine, feminine and neuter" (Cameron), explaining that the term gender first known by its grammatical connotation was broadened to the well-known definition it has to-date. Cameron in the article widens her trace, saying that the Norman French, already used the word 'gendre' (from where the English term gender originates) "to mean 'the quality of being male or female' by the second half of the 12th century" (Cameron). The very first certified use of the term gender in describing a different term from sex occurred in a psychology journal in an article published in 1945 where gender is described as a term that differs from the biological explanation of being female or male. But the term seems to circulate only among different fields of social sciences. It was only in the 1960s that the term began to move out of this narrow circle and into mainstream culture. According to Sarah Gamble in "Gender and Transgender Criticism", Robert Stroller (psychoanalyst) is one of the founding thinkers to be given credit for making a clear distinction between

sex and gender. Robert Stroller says that gender is culturally constructed and argues "that an individual's gender identity may not necessarily correspond to their biological sexual characteristics" (38). The psychologist John Money also claims that gender is not innate but is rather learned. These distinction made by the two along with others has generated the view of gender being a learned behaviour, which is created within the social and cultural realm.

Michael Ryan writes that with the emergence of the feminist's movements in the 1960s the term gender became an important topic of prodigious concern in the field of literature and of cultural analysis. Donald E. Hall says that "In short, gender theory examines critically the *identity politics* of sexuality" (102), Hall explains this assumption by saying that:

> Gender theory as a subset of identity political theory is thus heavily indebted to and intertwined with feminist theory. Early twentieth-century feminist writers such as Virginia Woolf, and later Simone de Beauvoir, questioned the differential nature of socially prescribed gender roles, probing the narrow rules that limits the ways women could express themselves and live their lives. (106)

Women began to question their roles in society and why they have limits to certain aspects, why they have fewer rights from their male counterparts. This serves as the baby steps toward what can be called gender studies/theories. Simone de Beauvoir encapsulates the argument that can be claimed as the foundational theory for gender studies. Igniting the second wave feminism, women fight for their status in society, revolutionists argue upon the fact that women are being oppressed by men and are

being portrayed as sex objects. So, the issues upon gender inequality became a scorching topic of discussion in many platforms. With heated discussion on the disparity between the roles of women and men, men began to look upon feminist theories and turn it around to create what is called men studies. By the 1980s, taking into consideration of what earlier feminist and scholars have said before, their felt a need to study the whole concept of sexuality as a whole, with the emergence of gay, lesbian communities and the increase of interest in them. In *A Companion to Gender Studies* (2009), edited by Philomena Esswd, David Theo Goldberg, and Audrey Kobayashi, introduced Gender Studies as interdisciplinary:

> Gender Studies is a board interdisciplinary project. It focuses critically upon gendered conditions and articulations of social power along with their supporting bodies of knowledge in interaction with additional constitutive makers and expressions o of unequal social arrangements.(8)

Gender studies/theories emerge from the concept that gender is different from our biological sexuality. Gender being cultural and socially constructed, the belief is that certain gender traits are learned, arguing the 'fixed' concept of gender binaries is not limited but fluid and can change over time.

Simone de Beauvoir in her most seminal work *The Second Sex* (1997), states that the inferior woman that is being described till to-date is the result of centuries of discrimination that is based on gender identities. Society has always been men centred ever since nomadic times. Stating her most famous line "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 330), she claims that a child is not born into womanhood but is raised to live that womanhood. Children male or female do not

much differ in their actions till the age of twelve but different treatment given to them at the stage of puberty could lead them to a different lifestyle. For centuries, culture and society through different nations have presented to the societal platform the 'ideal' role or behaviour for both man and woman. As centuries pass with the presences of a clear difference (biological) between the female and male body, society began to appropriate each 'gender' into their assigned roles; through that assigned roles people began to form the idea of what action is deemed fit for each gender. Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality: An introduction; Volume I* (1978) identifies that even sexual traditions are a societal construct. Judith Butler claims that, "There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be the result" (25). Butler argues that our actions, speech, languages and behaviour all constitutes in what is considered to be a masculine and feminine identity; if gender is the effect, the outcome of culture and society, there is no solid structure behind how a woman or a man must act and this opens up to interpretation. Using Michel Foucault's argument of the soul being a prison of the body, she writes that individuals are influences by society which in turn influence the inner self, that society teaches and directs the individual to act in a certain way; that gender is an illusion that has no connection to the inner self. After asserting the fact that gender is performative and an act that is performed to regulate social norms; if gender does not possess any solid structure, the perceptions of gender can be subverted through drag and masquerade.

Stereotype denotes a fixed idea or image, that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality. Linda

Brannon describes gender stereotype as "beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men and women" (160). Brannon explains the concept of gender stereotypes as consisting of:

> Beliefs about the psychological traits and characteristics of, as well as the activities appropriate to, men or women. Gender roles are defined by behaviors, but gender stereotypes are beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity….Gender stereotypes are very influential; they affect conceptualizations of women and men and establish social categories for gender. These categories represent what people think, and even when beliefs vary from reality, the beliefs can be very powerful forces in judgments of self and others. (160)

That if one is born female, they are considered to be interested in the colour pink, wear dresses and be less active, likewise, if one is male, they must be good at sports, must be experts in video games, but these assumption does not describe that person, it defines the conception form through gender stereotypes. According to Perry and Pauletti, "gender stereotype are people's beliefs about how the sexes differ (descriptive stereotype) or should differ (perceptive stereotype)" (*Gender and Adolescent Development)* meaning that certain gender stereotypes formed ideologies in how an individual must behave on the basis of the gender they belong to, for example, crying appropriate for girls and not so much for boys. One of the most popular gender stereotypes formed is the association of women to homemakers and men to bread-winners. So, when the females are seen acting out of their supposed

role their actions are seen as inappropriate, just as when the male does not live up to their 'manly duties'.

The construction of the association of certain traits and behaviour to a particular gender seems to have risen "during the 19th century, the Victorian era" (Brannon 161). Linda Brannon states that before the nineteenth centuries:

> Most people lived and worked on farms where men and women worked together. The Industrial Revolution changed the lives of a majority of people in Europe and North America by moving men outside the home to earn money and leaving women at home to manage households and children. This separation was unprecedented in history, forcing men and women to adapt to different environments and roles. As men coped with the harsh business and industrial world, women were left in the relatively unvarying and sheltered environments of their homes. These changes produced two beliefs: the Doctrine of Two Spheres and the Cult of True Womanhood (161).

The two beliefs produced during the time led to the construction and influence of different interests that women and men have. Through these very different beliefs, society began to form the archetypal man and woman, "The Cult of True Womanhood arose between 1820 and 1860" (Brannon 161), under this the woman is observed using "four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (Welter 152). The male gender stereotype that exist to-date can also be traced back to the nineteenth centuries, Brannon writes that:

The 19th-century idealization of women also had implications for men, who were seen as the opposite of women in a number of ways. Women were passive, dependent, pure, refined, and delicate; men were active, independent, coarse, and strong. These divisions between male and female domains, the Doctrine of the Two Spheres, formed the basis for the polarization of male and female interests and activities. (162)

With the construction of a definite division between what woman and man ought to be, individuals in fear of being viewed different by society began to follow the norms created within the social structure. Similarly, gender stereotypes ensure that societal rules and norms are being followed; and that the acceptance of these gender stereotypes within society, stifled individuals, which in turn create conformity. Leading individuals to follow what has been constructed as the right way of behaving in fear of being singled out. Foucault states that the Panopticon presents the mobility of power where "it makes itself everywhere present and visible" (*Discipline and Punish* 205). With the presence of power and its visibility, an individual is aware of the constant surveillance by society, is governed by the fear of being seen as an outcast within the societal structure, the individual tends to conform to the norms.

John Michael Green was born on August 24, 1977, in Indianapolis. An American author and an enthusiastic video blogger, he and his brother Hank Green launched the Vlog brothers (YouTube channel) in 2007. Green made it to the list of the "Time" magazine "The 100 Most Influential People in the World" in 2014. He is also New York Times' bestselling author for his novels- *Looking for Alaska (2005), An Abundance of Katherines* (2006)*, Paper Town (2008) and The Faults in Our stars*

(2012). He is being credited with "ushering in a new golden era for contemporary, realistic, literary teen fiction, following more than a decade of dominance by books about young wizards, sparkly vampires and dystopia", Green's novel sparks a new interest in "literary realism aimed at young readers and paved the way for the sub-genre to flourish again." ("John Green and the Nerdfighters" Alter) .With its realistic representations of characters, Deakin states that:

> One of the transcendent characteristics of young adult literature is its ability to capture the adolescent's search for identity. Identity is often revealed through the protagonist's exposure to struggling with situating himself or herself in a social and moral situation. (16)

John Green holds a significant place within the world of Young Adult Literature. He is one of the best-selling YAL authors. Kathleen Deakin states that the reasons for Greens popularity as a writer "is his accessibility" for his readers. Deakin et. al. claims that:

> This contract between readers and writers depends greatly on these "points of contact" that foster the relationship that Green has with his readers, especially adolescents. His characters are honest but often lost in the unforgiving social world of youth. The injustices of the world frequently pose the greatest obstacles for these young protagonists…Green's characters reflect the teenage search for power in a world that typically usurps and suppresses their effectiveness. (15)

With his concern for the well-being of young adults, Green through his books speaks to his readers. By representing characters who defy social norms, and characters who subvert gender conformity, because Green, felt that it is necessary to look beyond conventional standards to find our sense of self.

John Green also portrays characters that are intelligent, far beyond their age, subverting the stereotypical teen that everyone believes to be confused, aimless and dim. He subverts the adolescent representation introduced by many psychoanalyses-as a stage of confusion and recklessness and deftly depicts the side of adolescent life which is mature, intellectual and sensitive. Green creates adolescent characters that are in the midst of problems and hardships just as those life crisis faced by adults, who are self-aware of their flaws. In most of his novels he depicts the real life situation of being a teen in the American society; with all the stress and turmoil of their environments but with a twist as he fills the conversations of his characters with witty lines that are memorable. Green incorporates famous literary works, like Walt Whitman, Shakespeare, Gabriel Garcia Marques, and Emily Dickenson etc. thus broadening his themes with philosophical views of life. Green depicts characters that are on a different scale than other YA characters:

Who navigate through their circumstances and echo to some of the great voices in literature. Often wiser than their adult counterparts, and certainly smarter than their peers, these protagonists remember the words of Walt Whitman, T.S. Eliot, and William Shakespeare, to name a few. Readers – especially teenage readers – must *believe* in the characters they read about in order to identify with them; they must engage in the adventures and mishaps

of characters, settings, and stories. Green presents witty protagonists who aren't heroic or beautiful in the conventional sense but rather ordinary and flawed. They are *human* and they are *real.* (Deakin 13-14)

Looking for Alaska published in March 2005 is John Green's debut novel; it won the Michael L. Printz Award in 2006. Based on the fictional Culver Creek Preparatory School in Alabama; the novel follows the life of the narrator Miles Halter. Miles Halter is obsessed with last words and says that the reason as to why he went to Culver Creek Preparatory School is because he wants to seek the "Greater Perhaps" (*Alaska* 11), quoting the last word of Francois Rabelais. As he arrives at Culver Creek Preparatory School he meets with his new roommate Chip Martins (who is also known as the Colonel), Chip gave Miles a new nickname Pudge and introduces him to Takumi Hikohito and Alaska Young. Miles Halter 'Pudge' became infatuated with Alaska on their first meeting, he felt that he has never met anyone so beautiful and is eager to know more about her, Pudge sees that Alaska is fearless, bold and wild. Miles is thrilled to be having friends for the first time. Alaska came up with a brilliant prank for them, for she is always the masterminds behind the pranks. After a successful prank, they celebrated with drinks, while they are drinking Alaska began to talk about her mother's death, and how she feels guilty for not calling 911. But they wake up the next morning to the news of Alaska's death, both the Colonel (Chip) and Pudge felt responsible for her death because they let her drive while she is still intoxicated. With guilt and grieve upon them, they wanted to know where she went, they later found out that she was on her way to her mother's grave but the answer they really want is why did she run into the other car with even swerving. But

they have no way of knowing if it is a pure accident or suicide. Chip scolds Pudge for falling in love with his idea of Alaska. After finding a copy of Alaska's *The General in His Labyrinth* Pudge went through it and finds "straight and fast" inscribed in the page. It dawns on him that Alaska's unpredictability is all because she suffers from the guilt that she feels towards her mother's death. So, Pudge forgives Alaska for dying and let her go. Pudge feels that forgiveness is the only way out of the labyrinth of suffering. *Looking for Alaska* (2005) gives a vivid description of drinking and sexual encounters and issues of peer death, the book got banned at many libraries and school across America.

Paper Town is John Green's third novel published in 2008; and was adapted into a motion picture in 2015. In 2009 it was awarded the Edgar Award for Best Young Adult Novel. The novel is inspired by the author's experience and knowledge of "paper towns" (fictitious entry especially in maps as a copyright trap) during his trip through South Dakota. The novel is divided into three parts - *The String, the Grass and the Vessel.* The novel is set in Orlando and starts off with a prologue nine years ago. Narrated by the protagonist Quentin Jacobsen describes his life with his adventurous neighbour Margo Roth Spiegelman with whom he was secretly in love. . As kids they used to play together but somehow Margo drifted from their friendship. Margo became the popular girl who everyone talks about, she would go on adventures leaving bit of clues for her family of her where about:

Margo Roth Spiegelman, whose stories of epic adventures would blow through school like a summer storm: an old guy living in a broken-down house in Hot Coffee, Mississippi, taught Margo how to play the guitar...spent

three days travelling with the circus...got into that concert by telling the bouncer she was the bassist's girlfriend...The stories, when they were shared, inevitably ended with, *I mean, can you believe it?* We often could not, but they always proved true. (15)

Quentin wildest dreams came true when Margo opened his window and asked him to assist in her revenge scheme. They ended ticking off Margo's entire eleven-part revenge plan. But the next morning Quentin finds out that Margo is missing, and left clues for him, one of them being Walt Whitman's *Leave of Grass,* in which she highlights passages. Using the clues, Quentin with the help of his friends began to search for Margo. But the clues led them to an abandoned mini-mall. With little clues left Quentin began to ponder on what Margo says about paper town and paper people, and her obsession with pseudo vision- suburban development which is abandoned before they are completely built. Quentin finally figures out where Margo might be hiding out when he came upon a comment on Radar's Omnictionary site where a person which might be Margo says that the population of agloe (a paper town) will be one until noon of 29th May. With his friends they went on an epic road trip from Central Florida to upstate New York to the supposed location of agloe, but when he finds Margo, she is angry because she did not want to be saved like a princess it is her choice that she ran away, the reason why she felt is because she does not want to be consumed by the ordinary lives she is destined to lived, she felt that in order to live a life that is not so predictable she must cut ties with her life in Orlando.

John Green in a public speech given at TEDxTalks says that the inspiration for the novel comes from a thought he had when he was in the tenth grade he did not want a good job for he thinks that people with good jobs wake up early in the morning with ties strangling them by the neck, Green felt that how can that life be a happy one. He also says that "the way we map the world makes up our world, what we mapped out shapes our world and changes the life we live" (TEDxTalk). So, his character Margo felt that she needed to map her own world and see where that might lead her.

Will Grayson, Will Grayson published in April 2010 is written in collaboration with David Levithan (author of *Boy Meets Boy*), the editorial director at Scholastics. *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* made it to The New York Times children's best seller list in 2010 and stayed there for three straight weeks. The novel is divided evenly between the two writers- chapters with odd numbers are written by John Green and the chapters with even numbers are written by David Levithan. David Levithan writes his side of the story in lower case because he says that his character "will" felt like a lowercase person, of no significant. The novel takes on two different perspectives, Will Grayson (John Green's character) opens the novel and is followed by Will Grayson (David Levithan's character), Green's Will is a heterosexual teen while Levithan's (which will be referred to as 'will') is a homosexual teen, but they both share the same desire to live their lives without being noticed. Will Grayson lives in Chicago and is best friend with Tiny Cooper who is "the world's largest person who is really, really gay" (1). Levithan in explaining his will says that he wants his character to be caught in the middle. will is living with depression, not

discovering it but living with it. He is not embarrassed about being gay but he likes it to keep it to himself, he does not feel the need to explain to everyone that he is gay.

With the chapters divided between both the characters who meet one crucial night in an unlikely location. Will helps the devastated will who came to meet a boy that he met online who turns out to be his friend Maura. Then met Tiny, the two hit it off right away and they tried to keep the long distance relationship working.will become overwhelmed with Tiny and his flamboyancy. This ends up in their break up and an argument between him and Will. By the end of the day, however, they manage to sort it out and admit just how much they truly care about each other and their friendship. The novel ends with the opening night of Tiny's play, where will grayson shows up to reassure Tiny by finding different people with the name Will Grayson in the local area and asking them to show their appreciation for Tiny. All levels out at the end and the two Wills find happiness in their own lives. The novel gives a clear message of finding our own identity and staying true to oneself amidst societies demands.

Green's novel depicts characters that do not give in to social conformities; they seek independence and question the validity of social structure. Defying the stereotypes that are attached to gender and creating a new form of identity that they can relate to. YAL characters are created as role models for their readers, representing resilient, smart girls and emotional boys, crossing the lines drawn by gender, and blurring the line that gender stereotypes have created.

John Green in his novels subverts the gender stereotypes. His characters do not embody any attributes that are associated with gender stereotypes. For most of

human history, gender has always been a highlighted topic in different fields of studies, especially in literature. Through centuries even before the existence of the written form, oral narrations that are recorded gives us a glimpse of the difference and distinction that exist between a woman and a man. Never in fairy-tale do we find female characters that are strong and independent, while male characters are posed to be strong and resilient who are able to fight dragons to save the damsel in distress. These tales that have been passed down for generations help in the building of a stereotypical image of strong men and helpless and independent women. Stepping into the world of the young adults, where everything especially one's identity is still in a state of confusion writers of Young Adult Literature has taken it as a chance to help guide the confused adolescent the important steps and decision one must take in order to find one's self in a 'pre-determined' world.

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Breaking the rules: Adventurous Females and Sensitive males.

Simone de Beauvoir states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (330), that it is civilization that shapes the state of femininity, that girls throughout their childhood are raised to identify with traits that society claims to be associated with the feminine gender, while boys are raised to identify with acts that are considered to be masculine. According to her our representations in this world is man-made, and "Opinion about the respective roles of the two sexes have varied greatly, they were initially devoid of any scientific basis and reflected only social myths" (45).These opinions create certain roles for each of the two sexes, like providing for men and nurturing for women, which in turn create stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are beliefs that consist of the psychological traits and characteristics, in relation to gender roles and its effects:

> Gender stereotypes are beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity. The concepts of gender role and gender stereotype tend to be related. When people associate a pattern of behaviour with either women or men, they may overlook individual variations and exceptions and come to believe that the behaviour is inevitably associated with one gender but not the other. Therefore, gender roles furnish the material for gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are very influential; they affect conceptualizations of women and men and establish social categories for gender. These categories represent what people think, and even when beliefs vary from reality, the beliefs can be very powerful forces in judgments of self and others. (Brannon 160)

Stereotypes are created when society places certain norms on how a woman and a man are to conduct themselves in the society. Storytelling plays an important role at an early age, children by the time they reach the age of kindergartens' have already "internalised stereotypes of "masculine" and "feminine" roles" (Wildermuth 245). At an early age they are told stories of fair maidens, who are rescued by their prince charming or knight in shining armours. Learning at an early stage that being passive and fragile are good qualities for girls while being strong and resilient are for boys. The cultural concept of gender creates role models for them, directing them to the belief that certain actions are acceptable only for women or men. Society through fairy tales teaches that girl/women who are resilient, thinking beings are not welcome and are somewhat portrayed as evil witches and cruel stepmothers, while boys/men who do not stand up for themselves are seen as cowards, and are portrayed as characters to be laughed at and scorned by society. Lisa J. McClure claims that "Stereotyping permeates every facet of our society" (79), and argues that it affects every individual – girls and boys alike. She concludes that boys suffer from gender stereotyping, because:

> The same socialization that causes girls to "accept as their preeminent destiny, their first and foremost role in life, the mantle of nurturer and caregiver" (Benjamin and Irwin-DeVitis 64) causes boys to assume that they must be the "hunter-gather", the providers for and protector of their families…when males engage in activities or interests that are considered feminine, they are harassed. (79)

The macho, aggressive behaviour represented for boys does not in any sense benefit them in their growth as human beings. Boys also suffer the same case as girls; if he does not possess physical strength as the characters he read is somehow forced to confront with what he sees and acquaints with every day. Just as de Beauvoir's claim of girls being raised to identify with traits that are wholly constructed by society, boys are also made to believe that they must live up to the traits that are often believed to be possessed by the male gender. Boys are made to live "behind a mask of masculine bravado that hides the genuine self to conform to our society's expectation" (Pollack 11), just as girls are pushed to hide behind the feminine façade. It is society that induces one to believe that crying for boys is shameful and undesirable, while "girls may be shame-sensitive, boys are shame-*phobic*" (Pollack 33). This is because society led on to a point that showing emotions is wrong for the male 'gender' while it is strongly associated with the female 'gender'. The limitation of Gender Stereotyping in literature is manifold and has serious consequences:

Gender stereotypes in literature can prevent young adults from reaching their full potential as human beings by depriving them of suitable role models and reinforcing age-old gender constraints in society. These stereotypes exist for both gender and are equally dangerous. While girls are portrayed as passive and weak, boys and men are rarely presented as feeling and vulnerable human beings. These typecasts limit the adolescent's freedom to express him/herself and pressure the young person to behave in ways that may not be best suited to his or her personality. (Jacobs 20)

Preventing, self-discovery, it is harmful for the development of one's identity. While norms are essential to a certain extent, they must somehow be exceeded, for the sake of the future. Judith Butler points out in her performativity theory, gender is not something that is fixed or a result of biological sex but something that emerges from repeated actions; something that one identifies with through performances in everyday life. To prove that gender is an entity that is created through society, Lisa J. McClure speaks of the colour pink and blue, often associated with girls and boys, respectively. This was not always the trend as "Before World War I and II, pink was for boys and blue for girls" (81). McClure claims that many of the behaviours and characteristics are constructed by society and that only a few is solely biological, "Most of the assumption we make about men and women are based on events…represented as truth and perpetuated in various ways" (81). Judith Butler says that gender is culturally constructed. She believed that gender is 'performed' through a set of acts, an act that is reproduced over the course of time, like how the colour pink became labelled to girls, while in actuality the colour pink is once considered more suitable for boys:

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporal signs and other discursive means…In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality. (136)

It is culture that set examples of the ideal type for each 'gender' and then implies it on individuals' to act accordingly. Whenever an individual acts outside of their 'gendered role' their actions are considered to be abnormal, for example, when a woman shows physical strength her actions are considered unwomanly, whereas when a man shows intense emotions he is seen as unmanly. Mothers' would often say to their little boys that crying is not a behaviour strongly favoured for boys, while they teach their daughters to be patient and submissive. Butler argues that if gender (the truth behind it) is fabricated, then "it seems that genders can be neither true nor false" (136), agreeing that 'drag' and cross-dressing in some way subvert gender identities.

> If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted on the surface of bodies, then it seems that gender can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity (136).

With the concept of gender identity as a construction made wholly within the cultural realm, exploration beyond the gendered boundaries has become a great challenge. Through the form of the written words, writers began to create a world of characters that no longer play by the "rules" of gender and creates characters that explore their potentials. With the insightful studies in gender, many Children's Literature and Young Adult Literature began to build characters who steps out from the shelled world of gender. Female protagonists are no longer passive or submissive; but take on the role of the 'hero', standing up for themselves, proving that they do not always need a 'prince; to save the day. Nancy Jennings talks about the representation of

female characters as "more fearful, more supportive, more polite, more interested in romance, and less physically aggressive" (102), but this is not the case anymore, with the emergence of strong female characters, that subverts and defy the stereotypes as "both male and female viewers are interested in seeing lead female characters who are anything but sugar and spice and everything nice" (102). This interest leads to the popularity of YA novels with protagonist who deviates from their 'ascribed' gender roles. Characters who defy the gender stereotype are gaining to form popularity among readers, especially with the publication of YA novels such as the *Divergent* series and *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Both male and female readers have become interested in characters that do not follow in the footsteps of the traditional male-female gender roles

John Green took the world of Young Adult Literature like a storm in 2006 with his debut novel *Looking for Alaska* (2005). He ushered in a new form of writing especially within the Young Adult Literature, with his intelligent dialogues and realistic portrayal of the young adult's lifestyle. Unlike the rebellious characters that fight back society, Green's characters fight back on a more realistic battlefield of everyday life. Green presents "witty protagonists who aren't heroic or beautiful in the conventional sense but rather ordinary and flawed" (Deakin 14). Green in almost all his books creates characters that do not fit into conventional stereotypes; he usually draws up characters that are resilient, tough, ambitious quality to his female characters while his male characters are usually associated with qualities that are once believed to be linked with the female gender. His characters are defying and

confront conformities; they do not follow in the footsteps of the perfect conventional stereotypes.

Looking for Alaska (2005) takes us on a journey of the uncensored life of an adolescent character. It narrates "a genuine albeit raw, story about a group of adolescents trying to navigate through some of the toughest years of their lives" (Deakin 23). Green introduces the vibrant, fun-loving, impulsive, independent character, Alaska Young. Alaska's first appearance in the novel, with her cigarettes gives away the truth that she is no ordinary obedient, passive character that one sees in stories or fairy tales. When the Colonel and Pudge enter her room she quickly tells the Colonel details of her summer vacation. Unlike the stereotypical female character who would never discuss details of physical encounters with the opposite sex, Alaska without hesitation in her tone openly talks about her "boob" being "honked":

> So first day of summer, I'm in grand old Vine Station with this boy named Justine and we're at his house watching TV on the couch…Justin is a friend of mine from when I was a kid and so we're watching TV and literally chatting about the SATs or something, and Justine puts his arm around me and I think, *Oh, that's nice, we've been friends for so long and this is totally comfortable,*…and like a hawk he reaches down and honks my boob. *HONK.* A much-too-firm, two- to three-second *HONK.* (22)

From her conversation alone, it can be discerned that Alaska does not exhibit the stereotypical qualities believed to be associated with women. She does not shy away from provocative conversations. Alaska is independent; she likes to be in control; according to the Colonel's conversation with Pudge, Alaska is always the brains

behind the pranks they pulled together, "Alaska was ever Alaska, the larger-than-life creative force behind them" (29). Alaska rejects any form of what is believed to be the 'cult of true womanhood' or 'cult of domesticity'. According to Barbara Welter, a woman must possess the characteristics of purity, piety, domesticity and submissiveness. Welter writes that the Cult of True Womanhood is a concept that arose during the 1820s to the 1860's. Alaska is not pure, as she declared "there is so much to do: cigarettes to some, sex to have" (28). She rejects the stereotypical view of a woman's duty to domesticity, yelling at the Colonel when he asked her to iron his shirt for him- "You are not going to impose the patriarchal paradigm on *me*" (45). She even says that it is "sexist to leave the cooking to the women" (112). She does not show any sign of being religious nor does she believe or show any form of purity that a woman is expected to possess. Alaska also clearly is not submissive in any form or level, when "The Old Man", orders Pudge to get out of class, she defends him and yells at "The Old Man"/Mr Hyde and goes out of the classroom. Not liking the idea of being stuck in domestic life, Alaska rejects any form of misogynistic comments made by her friends. When the Colonel described Lara's physical features as having "great breasts", Alaska yells at him "DO NOT OBJECTIFY WOMEN'S BODIES!" (75). She hates it when the boys comment on other girl's physical features. When she says that her hero is Vincent Millay (Edna St. Vincent Millay, a poet best known for her feminist activism and views), it subtly hints her strongly belief in feminism. When Sara (the Colonel's girlfriend), accused Alaska and the Colonel of being involved with each other, she angrily, she says that "no woman should lie about another woman...How will stabbing one another in the back help women to rise above patriarchal oppression?!" (82). Standing up for what she

believed in, Alaska is not afraid to express her thoughts. Green portrays Alaska as ahead of her peers, someone who liked to be the winner.

In *Paper Town* (2008), Margo Roth Spiegelman, similar to Alaska is a free-spirited girl who loves adventures. Unlike a stereotypical female Margo does not wish to be confined to a world where she would lose herself to domesticity. Right from the very beginning of the novel, the child Margo shows signs that she is no typical girl. When Quentin and Margo rode their bikes, Quentin mentions that Margo always "biked standing up" (Prologue). Her courage and curiosity is revealed when they found a dead body at Jefferson Park; while Quentin took a step back (or fear) from the dead body, Margo took two steps forward. Just like Alaska Young from *Looking for Alaska* (2005), Margo Roth Spiegelman does not show any trait of submissiveness or idleness. Quentin, in the beginning, describes her to be a mysterious, outgoing and adventurous. Her adventures are what people mostly talked about at school;

> Margo Roth Spiegelman, whose six-syllable name was often spoken in its entirety with a kind of quiet reverence, Margo Roth Spiegelman, whose stories of epic adventures would blow through school like a summer storm: an old guy living in a broken-down house in Hot Coffee, Mississippi, taught Margo how to play the guitar. Margo Roth Spiegelman, who spent three days travelling with the circus – they thought she had potential on the trapeze. Margo Roth Spiegelman, who drank a cup of herbal tea with the Mallionaires backstage after a concert in St. Louis while they drank whiskey…and then

later the bassist wanted to hook up with her and she *rejected the bassist from*

the Mallionaires. (15)

Margo's adventurous nature does not sit well with the proper lady-like conducts that have been re-enacted through centuries. The fact that her actions are being gossiped upon by her peers shows that she stands out within her gendered world where girls are believed to act 'normal'. Even though Margo is described by Quentin to be beautiful, Margo does not like that some people are attracted to others because of their physical appearances. Like Alaska Young, Margo is smart and intelligent; whenever she ran away from home to go on her little adventures she would leave clues for her family so that they would eventually know where she went:

> The day she ran away to Mississippi, she ate alphabet soup and left exactly four letters in her soup bowl: An *Mi, an* I, *an S* and a *P*, She was disappointed when we didn't piece it together…And she left Minnie Mouse on her bed when she spent a night inside Disney world. (102)

Traditionally, intelligence is a trait that is not associated with the female gender. Women are usually portrayed as naïve and passive, but both Alaska Young and Margo Roth Spiegelman are smart and intelligent, Alaska's personal library and her knowledge in the literature shows that she does not sit back and gossip like stereotypical teen girls. Also, Margo is well versed with the poems of Emily Dickenson and Ralph Waldo Emerson. In the novel, portrayed as a fearless character, Margo likes to do things her way and take control, her impeccable courage is revealed through the list that she created the night she challenges Quentin to avenge the wrongs that her 'so-called' friends have done to her (she created eleven things to

be done before sunrise) consists of a number of breaking and entering. Being a rebel, Margo in every little way rebels against the 'system'. When Quentin comments on her "interesting capitalization" she simple answer him that she is a "big believer in random capitalization. The rules of capitalization are so unfair to words in the middle" (32). Margo's character seems to care less about being cautious, her activities throughout the night – taking revenge on the people who did her wrong, proves that she does not care about anything; she does not care if she breaks the law.

Both Alaska and Margo exhibit traits that reject and refuse to perform in accordance with their gender. Margo runs away because she does not want a life where she has to conform to social protocols – going to college, getting married and sending kids to college. Rejecting domestic life, both characters with their actions and descriptions subvert the roles that society has assigned them to take up. Deviating from the 'cult of true womanhood', both shows interest in sexual activities and do not shy away from talk of sexual activity. Neither are they submissive or timid.

Jane Turner and Maura from *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010), are minor characters in the novel, but like Alaska and Margo are straight forward and intelligent. They take the opportunity to get what they want, and are in control of every little situation. Jane Turner, like to take matters on her hand. Irrespective of other's perception of her nature.

The strong, valiant prince, who saves his princess from dragons and evil, is what little boys' are told to identify with as they grow up. Just as girls are told to be submissive and take on the role of nurturers, boys, on the other hand, are told to be

strong and must hold on the role of breadwinners for their families. As many gender theorists have said that the whole concept that surrounds the term 'gender' has very little to do with biological differences. It is true that humans are divided into two very different physical forms, but the roles that society implies to these two forms are not necessarily linked to these physical entities. That the characteristics branded on gender have little relation to the biological differences. The association of certain traits are man-made "represented as truth and perpetuated in various ways" (Beauvoir 81). The man-made 'truth' controlled boys using 'shame' to toughen them up:

> The idea that a boy needs to be disciplined, toughened up, made to act like a "real man," be independent, keep the emotions in check. A boy is told that "big boys don't cry," that he shouldn't be a "mama's boy." If these things aren't said directly, these messages dominate in subtle ways in how boys are treated – and therefore how boys come to think of themselves (Pollack 11).

In opposition to the concept of the 'Cult of True Womanhood', men are the opposite of what women are; men are believed to be independent, successful, confident, self-reliant, aggressive and violent. Linda Brannon in her study claims that:

> The prohibition against being a sissy and the rejection of the feminine are strong components of modern masculinity. According to Robert Brannon (1976), No Sissy Stuff is one of the four themes of the Male Sex Role. The other three themes include The Big Wheel, which describes men's quest for success and status as well as their need to be looked up to. The Sturdy Oak component describes men's air of toughness, confidence, and self-reliance,

especially in a crisis. Finally, the Give 'Em Hell aspect of the Male Sex Role reflects the acceptability of violence, aggression, and daring in men's behaviour (163).

But these traits are not necessarily found in men, as the stereotypes of women are not always found in the same. Green in *Looking for Alaska* (2005) forms a new distinctiveness that is sets apart from the preconceived idea of how a man and a woman should act. Miles Halter (Pudge) is not shaped in the light of the strong confident, independent male character. Right from the very beginning of the novel, Pudge gives off the sense that he is not a representative of the stereotypical teen boy. He is not popular among his peers, is not dysfunctional or aggressive, and does not have the physical features of a god, rather "Miles is refreshingly normal and deceptively smart" (Deakin et al. 24). Green's characters are realistic, moulded after real human beings with all their flaws. They have real features and characteristics that most teenage readers would be able to identify with. For example when Pudge arrives at the school and wanted to take a shower, he began to notice his skinny figure, when he saw his reflection in the mirror:

> The small bathroom contained a huge, full-length mirror behind the door and so I could not escape the reflection of my naked self…My skinniness always surprised me: my thin arms didn't seem to get much bigger as they moved from wrist to shoulder, my chest lacked any hint of either fat or muscle. (15)

Pudge's physique shows that he is not a hero able to fight with demons or dragons. His physical features do not conform to that of the stereotypical strong man. Sports and physical activities are almost always identified as a field in which the male excel.

Visual media and entertainment often depicts a father teaching and encouraging his son to take part in sports and different physical activities. But not all individuals' of the male gender have an interest in sports, while on the other hand some females have great interest in sports and like to take part in different physical activities. Pudge's hatred for sports is disclosed when the Colonel talked about the basketball game that takes place in Culver Creek:

> I hated sports. I hated sports, and I hated people who played them, and I hated people who watched them, and I hated people who didn't hate people who watched or play them (58).

Unlike the representation of active sport loving male, Pudge as a kid never liked sports. He remembers his mother forcing him to play "T-ball" so he could make friends as the "T-ball" team consist of a bunch of kindergarteners. "Traditional notions of masculinity paint a picture of aggression and strength" (Clasen 230) but YA male characters "are allowed to deviate substantially from such physical strength and size" (230). Neither Pudge nor Chip (Colonel) or Takumi are depicted as a traditional muscular male gender. Even when they planned on a pre-prank during the holidays, the fact that Takumi has to reassure Miles (Pudge) that running is a simple task proves that he is not into anything physical- "Right. *Just running. My knees are good. My lungs are fair. It's just running*" (*Alaska* 127).

Society teaches boys to hide their emotions and brave the world. Showing emotions (especially crying) is suggestive of weakness and boys/males should refrain from it. John Green's characters seem to play out in reverse; his male characters are in touch with their emotions and are sensitive. When the Colonel and Pudge heard of

Alaska's death in the school's assembly, they did not hide their sorrows and sucked in their tears- "Colonel was screaming. He would inhale and then scream. Inhale. Scream" (*Alaska* 169) and later both Pudge and Colonel cried of their lost. In a traditionally masculine role, "expression of emotions is limited to anger and frustration" and "honest communication about feeling is practically taboo" (Clasen 232), Pudge and the Colonel both openly express their emotions when Alaska died. The revelation of human emotion is never a quality that is related to a man; crying especially for men is considered 'sissy', but Green's male characters are not afraid or embarrassed to show their weakness. When Margo left and Quentin could not find her, he begins to feel all the emotions welling up and her burst into tears shouting and proclaiming the fact that he missed her.

Young male adults traditionally are described as fun-loving jocks that have no interest in reading or studies. Tricia Clasen says that "constructed masculinity is in opposition to "sissy" stuff" (230), but Green's male characters show at a great length that they carry out a great number of "sissy" traits. Both Pudge and the Colonel are smart and well versed with their classes; the Colonel entered into Culver Creek on a scholarship and Pudge mentions that he took advanced maths because he is a genius. The Colonel's only way of coping with Alaska's death is memorising all the capitals of countries. Pudges unique obsessions with peoples' last words also suggest that he is smart. Interests in books and reading are traits that are almost always associated with the female gender but in *Looking for Alaska* (2005), both the major male characters are well read.

Quentin Jacobson the narrator of *Paper Town* (2008), like Pudge lacks confidence and is not portrayed as a traditional masculine character that is stoic and aggressive. At the beginning of the novel he shows fright when he sees the dead guy at Jefferson Park while playing with Margo. He liked routines – "I liked routine. I liked being bored" (28), Quentin is cautious, anxious and nervous, when they finished their first task of avenging and raining upon Jase and Becca, Quentin had a little anxiety attack due to being chased off with a gun by Becca's dad. Sharing the same notion with Pudge; he has no interest in doing physical activities and his physical fitness is nowhere near the traditional strong, agile male. He is weak compared to Margo who is quick and active:

> Margo started taking the stairs two at a time, flying up, one arm on the rail, and I tried to keep pace with her, but couldn't. Margo didn't play any sports but she liked to run – I sometimes saw her running by herself listening to music in Jefferson Park. I, however, did not like to run. Or, for that matter, engage in any kind of physical exertion…When I got to the twenty-fifth floor, Margo was standing on the landing, waiting for me (56).

Quentin does not feel less of a man even though he is not physically strong, rejecting the notions that a man must be strong and tough.

Will Grayson, Will Grayson (2010), depicts two characters with the same name, Will Grayson. The book deals with the life of two Will Graysons who are connected with each other through a mutual friend Tiny Cooper. In the novel, like the characters mentioned before, the male characters lack a hegemonic male figure, seen in traditional males. Will Grayson, John Green's character is a teen who is

confused with his relations with his gay best friend Tiny Cooper who he refers to as the "world's gayest person who is really, really large" (1), Will tries to avoid any emotional surge in his life, he felt that if he stays quiet and "don't care too much" (3) he would be saved. Being under the spell of the stereotypes and role model that society puts before him, he rejects any kind of behaviour which he believes does not sit well with his gender;

> "You're so cynical," Tiny says, waving his hand at me.
>
> "I'm not cynical, Tiny," I answer. "I'm practical."
>
> "You're a robot," he says. Tiny thinks that I am incapable of what humans call emotions because I have not cried since my seventh birthday, when I saw the movie *All Dogs Go to Heaven*…I haven't cried since then. I don't really understand the point of crying (3).

Traditionally, "masculine men are seen as anti-emotional and stoic" only able to "express anger", that the "concealment of emotions is a trope of masculinity" (Clasen 234), Will's refusal of showing his emotions towards anything maybe the result of the stereotypes that strongholds its root in the society. But with the help of his friend Tiny, Will in the course of the book learns to let go of his "traditional masculine" believes and learns to accept his emotions. According to Judith Butler, gender is a "set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time" (*Gender Trouble,* 43). So, Will is merely re-enacting or performing in accordance to societal beliefs of how a man is supposed to act. But gradually Will steps out of his stereotypical image when he describes how he wants to act around Jane:

I realize this is not, like, boyish. I realize that properly speaking guys should only think about sex and the acquisition of it…But: the part I enjoy most is not the doing, but the noticing. Noticing the way she smells like over sugared coffee, the difference between her smile and her photograph smile, and the way she bites her lower lip, and the pale skin of her back. I just want the pleasure of noticing these things (45).

He does not want or act like a stereotypical teen that mass media produces but wants to enjoy the little things, these are not the traits or characteristics that are "boyish", Will even said so himself, that the fact that he likes to enjoy the little things are not "boyish", but it is what he wants to do and he does not wish to act like a "properly speaking guy". Will Grayson defies the traditional beliefs about romantical love when he shows his love for Tiny. He honestly said to Jane that he loved his best friend-"I Love my best friend more than anyone in the world" (254), John Green in an interview commented on the kind of love he and David Levithan portrays – they wanted to show that love exists in different aspects, the kind of love that exists between friends, between children and their parents, he wants to show that love can also exist that is not based on our sexuality. Will in the novel declared his love for Tiny:

NO. No no no. I don't want to screw you. I just *Love* you. When did who you want to screw become the whole game? Since when is the person you want to screw the only person you get to love? It's so stupid, Tiny! I mean…People act like it's the most important thing humans do but come on. How can our sentient fucking lives revolve around something *slugs* can do. (257)

Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction Volume I* (1990), says that we place everything in relation to our sex, our behaviour to be in connections to our sex.

The other will grayson (mentioned in lowercase, as depicted in the book), David Levithan's character is gay but is afraid to face the truth that he is gay. As he did not like his own self, he fears that people might not like him. He does not want to face the truth that he is gay because he does not want to fall in the line of how people saw gay individuals. He does not want to 'fit in' or be a stereotype:

> I think there really needs to be a rule against calling a guy's sexuality into question while he's working. And anyway, I really don't want to talk about it with Maura no matter where we are. Because, here's the thing – we're not that close. maura is the kind of friend i enjoy swapping doomsday scenarios with…i know if i told her about liking guys, she'd probably stop wanting to date me, which could be a huge plus. but i also know i'd immediately become her gay pet, that's the last kind of leash i want. and it's not like i'm really *that gay*. i fucking hate Madonna (53-54).

will is burden by the stereotype and stigma attached to homosexuality. When Tiny tries to impose this stereotype on him, he does not take it so well. To Tiny's suggestion of holding hands with him in the school hallway, he explains to Tiny that he is not the type of guy who would hold hands – "I'm just not a hand-holding-in-hallways kind of guy, not even if you were a girl" (228). Trapped in a gendered world, will keeps reminding himself that he wants to be with Tiny and that "this is what everybody is supposed to want" (229). will's unwillingness on re-enacting the

stereotype created by society on how a "gay" individual should act shows that gender roles and identities as Butler suggest are fabrications that are manufactured through gestures and acts. He subverts the expectations of society on how he should act according to his gender.

The characters that connect both the Will Graysons in the book, Tiny Cooper, is described as the "world's gayest person who is really, really large" (1). Even though Tiny is the example of a display of stereotypical 'gay' individual, there are instances where he is depicted as defying/ subverting the stereotype. Though his personality/ character gives off a sense of a media produce portrayal of a homosexual, that fact that he is a large person and plays sport shows that he does not fully fall under the stereotype. Whilst talking to will, Tiny reveals how he accepts himself-

> i'm totally at peace with being big-boned. And I was gay long before I knew what sex was. It's just who I am, and that's great. I don't want to be thin or conventionally beautiful or straight or brilliant. No, what I really want – and what I never get – is to be appreciated (242-243).

Tiny proclaims his rejection of different stereotype that society creates. He confides that behind all the confidence that he shows he wants to be appreciated for who he is. The play that Tiny wrote (a bonus chapter dedicated to the play that Tiny Cooper wrote), included a song titled "I WAS BORN THIS WAY" (Levithan) which talks about his identity as a homosexual, and says that " It's pointless to wonder why I ended up so G-A-Y" (Levithan).

Gender Theorist for centuries have studied the relation of gender with the biological sex; but through extensive research and studies "gender" is nowhere related to the physical, biological sex. Simone de Beauvoir's most famous quote "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (330), sums up the fact that gender is a social construction that is not based on our biological difference. According to Judith Butler's performative theory, gendered actions are based on a re-enactment of actions, gestures and practices- "gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (136). The importance of Young Adult Literature with characters that break the rules and forge new identities is because adolescence is a stage of confusion of one's identity. Rashmi Gupta claims that "Growing up for some adolescents is a source of anxiety" and that "from birth an individual is influenced by the social environment" (Preface), Gupta also says that "the social forces, social problems and social situations hamper or help an individual towards the realization of his aspirations" (Preface), so YA novels that subvert stereotypes of any kind especially of gender is important for their development. Stereotypes that pertain to what the media have represented in the case of the young adult can be dangerous. Living in a world influenced with representation made by the media strongly affects young adults. The media with its fast pace culture brings out characters and role models that do not move very far from their predecessors, little have changed with strong, physically active, brooding teen males and shy, passive, romance loving teen female. With the evolution of YAL, YAL is beginning to enmass produce characters that deviate from the societal acceptation of the "right" way of behaving or acting. John Green creates characters that defy gender norms, characters that act beyond the stereotypes of the macho man

and the sensitive female, introducing characters that break the 'rule', Alaska Young, Margo Roth Spiegelman, Jane and Maura, are no typical princesses, they break free from their bonds of passivity and submissiveness. Their actions and behaviour are no re-enactment of the obedient female that society praised. Green's male characters also subvert to a great extent the gender stereotypes, as male characters are not into physical activities. The only one that is fond of sport is Tiny but he also deviates from the stereotype in that by being 'gay', he does not necessarily mean a person should act 'all sissy'. Green through his characters proves that the gender stereotypes are a social construction that is devoid of internal truth. Judith Butler on the imitation of gender says that:

> The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of the very notion of an original*; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a "figure" in the double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin (138).

This concept of Butler's imitation performed by drags proves that the concept of gender is fluid and can be subverted as it is devoid of any true origin, and that its constructions are solely based on the ideas by human beings created.

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The 'New Identity'

A very simple explanation of identity would be who one is or the way that we perceive ourselves and how the world sees us. Erik H. Erikson states that human beings go through eight stages throughout their lives, and within those eight stages, stage five is defined as the stage of "identity verses role confusion" (261). This stage is referred to as the most important of all the stages as it is dedicated to the adolescent. Erikson also refers to this stage as a crossroad between childhood and adulthood where different things happen to the body as well as the mind. It is during this stage that the adolescent becomes aware of themselves and seeking their individuality and asking existential questions about whom they are and the reason of their existence. Erikson in his theory also discusses the confusion that comes along with this search for identity. The adolescent becomes confused with their roles within society, and are left confused as they are torn between the questions of who they are and how they are expected to represent themselves in society. It is a crossroad or a threshold between childhood and adulthood, a kind of transition period where an individual searches for his/her true-self, shedding the identity that has been formed during childhood and a preparation for adulthood. It is a time when the adolescent is "deeply involved in the search through which each human being has sought to realize himself and to discover who he is, and what he might become" (Intro) and that there are "many restraints from the society to keep him from realizing himself" (Gupta Intro). In her discussion of the adolescent stage, Gupta says that G. Stanley Hall thought of this stage as a "critical stage of transition between the primitive and civilised person" describing it as a period of "storm and stress" (Intro). For the

adolescent, the problem is to "achieve personal identity" which is a stage that is special and important "total development" (Intro). In Young Adult Literature the concept of exploration of identity and its developments have always been a common trope, with the protagonist put in a situation where they are in conflict with society and are rebelling against the system. Almost every other YAL book contain a character who is in search of her/his identity, where the protagonist is placed in a scenario of not only the conflict between him/her and the society but with the conflict that arises within the self in questioning their identity. This character finally finds a solution to the conflict after resolving and defining a better version of his/her self.

According to Judith Butler identity is formed (gender identity) through repeated actions that an individual performs. These performance or re-enactments help in establishing the identity of an individual and when this repetition is observed it is seen as the identity of an individual; which implies that one's identity may be to some extent influenced by the culture and the society in which one exists. In the essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" Judith Butler talks about an extension to her performative theory, that identity particularly gender identity is socially constructed:

> Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is really only to the extent that it is performed. It seems fair to say that certain kinds of acts are usually interpreted as expressive of a gender core or identity and that these acts either conform to expected gender identity or contest that expectation in some way. That expectation, in turn, is based upon the

perception of sex, where sex is understood to be the discrete and factic datum of primary sexual characteristics. This implicit and popular theory of acts and gestures as expressive of gender suggests that gender itself is something prior to the various acts, postures, and gestures by which it is dramatized and known; indeed, gender appears to the popular imagination as a substantial core which might well be understood as the spiritual or psychological correlate of biological sex. If gender attributes, however, are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal. The distinction between expression and performatives is quite crucial, for if gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender, and the postulation of a true gender identity would be revealed as a regulatory fiction. That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of essential sex, true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed (527, 528).

With no pre-existing core to the known gender identity coupled with a period of an individual faced with challenges of finding their true identity. Confusion clashes with their perception of identity. They are perplexed with what society/culture have inscribed as an identity trait that one must possess and the fact that they somehow feel the need to express their inner callings.

John Green in a conversation with his co-author David Levithan in *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010), talks about the identity crisis that most adolescent face during their teen years:

> I'm curious how Schrodinger's cat came into the play in your chapter…Will's aversion to attachment; i.e., so long as you don't open the box, the cat is still alive. (Of course, the cat is also dead). But I think a lot of the novel is about the weird relationship between identity and existence: In some ways, you are who you are because other people observe you; but in some ways, you are who you are in spite of other people's observations of you. One of the reasons nonphysicists have latched on to Schrodinger's thought experiment is because we all feel that tension between observed identity and interior identity. (A Coversation, DL)

Green uses the Schrödinger's experiment (Schrodinger's cat is a thought experiment, devised by Austrian physicist Erwin Schrodinger) to stress on the everyday struggle of what he calls "between observed identity and interior identity". Will asked Jane to explain the Schrödinger's cat experiment, she does so but Will uses this explanation to help in his understanding of what identity meant to him– "It seems to me that all the things we keep in sealed boxes are both alive and dead until we open the box, that the unobserved is both there and not"(195). No matter how hard one keep his true/interior identity intact so that society might be more accepting one's true identity still exists- "So keeping the box closed just keeps *you* in the dark, not the universe" (196).

Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal work *The Second Sex* (1949) gives a different level of argument and statement as to the construction of identity especially gender identity at a societal level. She traces back to biology, history, and myths and examines their contribution to the construction of gender identities. The famous quote "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (330), gives a glimpse of the notion that she discusses in her book. Beauvoir believes that identity that is ascribed to a woman is what leads to her status as "the other" in society. The re-enactment and reproductions of the same actions through time have left a great dent in the path of finding one's true identity. Green's Will Grayson throughout the book struggles between the identity that he thinks he possesses and how others see him. He feels trapped by his over-bearing best friend Tiny. Will Grayson tries hard to live up to the traits that usually come along with his ascribed gender identity. He does not believe that crying suits him because he is a boy and tries to avoid it; though "totally avoidable" (3). At the beginning of the book, he is somewhat bothered by the fact that his peers think he likes boys because his best friend is "gay"-

> People laugh and whoop and clap as Tiny continues the serenade while I walk off to English. It's a long walk, and it only gets longer when someone stops you and asks how it feels to be sodomised by Tiny Cooper, and how you find Tiny Cooper's "gay little pencil prick" behind his fat belly. I respond the way I always do: by looking down and walking straight and fast…Shutting up works. Following the rules works. So I shut up and don't care, and I keep walking, and soon its over (5-6).

Will is constantly mocked and scorn upon because of his friend's outward nature to his true being. He is a "bundle of adolescent uncertainty, self-doubt, and clumsiness" (Deakin et. al. 36). He is confused about his feelings for Tiny as well as Jane Turner. But in the course of the book he eventually figures out what he amounts to in life, stumbling along; Will finally comes to an understanding that his love for Tiny is acceptable, that he will always love Tiny, but he also found out that his love for his best friend is platonic. Will is finally able to move out from the peer pressure that he is under, and can establish an identity that is his own.

The other will grayson (intentional lowercase as in the book, *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*) does not feel the need to express his true identity and hides behind the online persona that he creates. David Levithan the writer for will grayson's part explains why he writes in lowercase:

> The reason my will writes in lowercase is simple – that's how he sees himself. He is a lowercase person. He is used to communicating online, where people encourage being lowercase people. His whole self-image is what he projects in that space, and his one comfortable form of communication is when he is anonymous and sending instant messages. (Levithan)

Adolescents usually rely on the creation of an online persona to present their desired identity to society; will grayson is also able to be his true self and relaxe in his virtual world. With the internet and the virtual world ruling the lives of the modern adolescent, teens find it comforting to create a persona that they can relate to other than the front that they put up with so that they 'fit-in' within the gendered identity that society has created. According to Janet H.Long and Guo-Ming Chen "People

who feel important aspects of their identity are unexpressed due to fear of a negative reception will often search chat rooms for role relationships in which to engage stigmatized aspects of their identity" (106); will grayson feels the best version of him when he is "IM-ing" Isaac-

> it's been like this from the beginning. just being comfortable…soon we were swapping pictures and mp3s and telling each other about how everything pretty much sucked, but the ironic part was that while we were talking about it the world didn't suck as much. except, of course, for the part at the end when we had to return to the real world. (28-29)

will grayson is comfortable with his internet persona because he feels that if he ever discloses the fact that he is gay he would not be able to handle people labelling him. He does not wish to talk to Maura about his sexuality because "I'd immediately become her gay pet, and that's the last kind of leash I want. and it's not like I'm really *that* gay. I fucking hate madonna" (54). will does not wish to be put in a box of stereotypical characters; he wants to define himself outside of that box. But will's life comes to a halt when he learns that his online friend Isaac is Maura. With the frustration of him being fooled, he confides in his mother about him being gay. This moment of frustration lead him to accept his identity. The frustration led him to confide in his mother, telling her that he is gay. With this announcement made to his mother and the betrayal of his friend, will grayson breaks free from the repression of negativity that he fears so much. But will grayson does not want to be labelled as the stereotypical gay individual. When Tiny tries to put that label on him he freaked out and breaks away from Tiny. Will eventually learns to accept who he is and finds the

solution to his confusion about his true self. Both Will Grayson and will grayson after many "try-error-try" finally accepts who they are and can go beyond conventional gender identities and traits that are expected of them. Will Grayson at the beginning of the book is pushed to expressing his true identity due to peer pressure. He tries to avoid any emotional wave that he encounters because he is reproducing or acting out what boys for centuries have been taught to do; to keep their emotions intact. But by the end of the novel, he embraces his friendship with Tiny and expresses his love for him and no longer cares for others' opinions of his identity. will grayson who at the beginning of the book does not want anyone to know the fact that he is gay but shift his perspective when he meets Tiny. But when Tiny tries to impose his "gay" identity on him he freaks out and end things with Tiny; but he eventually finding a way to be who he is - gay but living by his own rules.

Tiny Cooper unlike both the Will Graysons is fully aware of who he is. Tiny is not afraid of people's judgment about his behaviour. In his confession to will grayson Tiny talks about how the concept of the binary gender identity is solely constructed within society:

And I was gay long before I knew what sex was. It's just who I am, and that's great. I don't want to be thin or conventionally beautiful or straight or brilliant. No, what I really want – and what I never get – is to be appreciated. (242-243)

Tiny in his confession wanted to be appreciated rather than be labelled. He excepts who he is; even though Green represents Tiny as the embodiment of a stereotypical

"gay" individual, at some point in the book Tiny reveals to will grayson that he feels burden by the way he is but he is proud to be himself because he excepts it is the way he is born. Both through will grayson and Tiny Cooper the authors reveals that identity especially gender identities at some point are true re-enactments of what society expects one to perform, but when that performance does not add up with the individual's core identity, one becomes confused. The confusion is eventually lifted once the individual learns to accept the identity that he is born with not what he is ascribed to.

Holly Hassel and Tricia Clasen discusses the importance of the portrayal of gender identity in both Children's and Young Adult Literature – "portrayals of gender can be particularly powerful for readers whose conception of their own gender identity is in the process of forming and evolving" (Introduction 1). Over the course of the past quarter of the century changes have occurred in the way characters are being portrayed. Especially in Young Adult Literature, readers are introduced to characters that no longer follow in the footsteps of characters that they are familiar with during childhood. With the construction of gender identity at a societal level, YAL characters are portrayed as resisting the pre-destined identity that years and years of repetition have created. Margo Roth Spiegelman from *Paper Town* (2008) is a girl who does not like to be fitted in a world where she must play the role of the submissive other. She frantically tries to escape what she believes is her pre-destined future. Margo like any other adolescent her age is confused about her own identity. She feels trapped under her parents roof with them constantly trying to pin her down to identify with the traits and characteristics they wanted for their daughter; Margo

escape this form of conforming by her parents to follow a certain behaviour that deprives her core identity. In *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (1968), Erikson states:

> Should a young person feel that the environment tries to deprive him too radically of all the forms of expression which permits him to develop and integrate the next step, he may resist the wild strength encountered in animals that are suddenly forced to defend their lives. For, indeed, in the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity. (130)

Just as the characters from *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010), Margo struggles between her interior identity and observant identity. To her peers she is a typical popular high school girl. But when she opens up to Quentin, Margo feels that her identity as the popular girl is unreal and wishing to find herself, runs away from her family and the town she grew up in. According to Erik Erikson in *Childhood and Society* (1950), as an individual reaches the adolescent stage, one began to ask the question of "who am I?" or "What can I be?" In order to discover her true self Margo runs away from everything. When Margo and Quentin go up to the "SunTrust Building" she talked about living in a paper town:

> Here's what's not beautiful about it: from here, you can't see the rust or the cracked paint or whatever, but you can tell what the place really is. You see how fake it all is. It's not even hard enough to be made out of plastic. It's a paper town. I mean look at it, Q: look at all those cul-de-sacs, those streets that turn in on them, and all the houses that were built to fall apart. All those paper people living in their paper houses, burning the future to stay

warm…Everyone demented with the mania of owning things. All the things paper-thin and paper-frail (57-58).

Margo refers to her town as being made of paper because she felt that everything in it does not have any truth to its core. Margo feels that everything with her town is two dimensional, that every individual living there are repeating and recreating. The reason why she leaves everything is because she feels that she is losing her identity within the superficial world that she is living in. Margo is confused with the identity that her peers have labelled on her and what she feels inside:

> The truth is that whenever I went up the top of the SunTrust Building – including that last time with you – I didn't really look down and think about how everything was made of paper. I looked down and thought about how I was made of paper. I was flimsy-foldable person, not everyone else. And here's the thing about it. People love the idea of a paper girl. They always have. And the worst thing is that I loved it too. I cultivated it, you know? (293)

Margo feels that she tries hard to craft the perfect image of a girl that everyone loves, trying to fit in a box so that people would accept her – "Because it's kind of great, being an idea that everyone likes. But I could never be the idea to myself, not all the way." (293). Margo quotes a line from *The Bell Jar* by Silvia Plath so that Quentin could understand her struggles of wanting to be rid of the paper girl image that she once loved:

She gets up and searches around her backpack for a moment, then reaches over and grabs *The Bell Jar*, and read to me.

"But when it came right down to it, the skin on my wrist looked so white and defenceless that I couldn't do it. It was as if what I wanted to kill wasn't in that skin or the thin blue pulse that jumped under my thumb, but somewhere else, deeper, more secret and whole lot harder to get at."(294)

Margo struggles to escape the reality of a stereotypical American girl, who everyone loves and adores. Reading lines from *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath gives a hint of her struggle to be different, different from her peers. This desire to be different results in her curiosity and adventures; it also results in the way she writes her words. Margo feels that the rules of capitalization are unfair to the words in the middle of the sentences so she chooses to randomly use capitals in the middles of her sentences:

Six-pack, Mountain Dew

One dozen Tulips

one Bottle of Water

Tissues

one Can of blue Spray paint

"Interesting capitalization," I said

"Yeah. I'm a big believer in random capitalization. The rules of capitalization are so unfair to words in the middle". (32)

Margo in a way is rebelling against the system created by society - she wants to live by her own rule, act according to her wishes and speak as she wishes. Margo fears to

fall back into the stereotypical teenage identity that she is forced to identify with. She believes that a person can truly be one's self when viewed beyond the ideas created for an individual:

> "Maybe it's more like you said, all us being cracked open. Like, each of us starts out as a watertight vessel…And the vessel starts to crack open in places. And I mean, yeah, once the vessel cracks open, the end become inevitable…But there is all this time between when the cracks start to open up and when we finally fall apart. And it's only in that time we can see one another, because we see out of ourselves through our cracks and into others through theirs…Before that, we were just looking at ideas of each other, like looking at your window shade but never seeing inside. But once the vessel cracks, the light can get in. The light can get out". (302)

Due to the constant reproductions and re-enactments of acts that are considered to belong to a certain gender identity, individuals tend to form ideas/ stereotypes. Margo wishes and desires to create an image that is beyond the gender stereotypes that she once identifies with. According to Erik Erikson, the adolescent have acquired plenty of characteristics for self- reflective but at the same time, the adolescent must find the right balance between the desire to be unique and the desire to follow in the path of their peers culturally and socially. Margo faces the same challenge in the novel, she wishes to be different but at the same time she also loves the "idea of a paper girl". In order to escape her troubled reality; Margo eventually escapes to Agloe as this had been the place that she read about while growing up and never stopped thinking about it:

Algoe is a place where a paper creation became real. A dot on the map became a real place, more real than the people who created the dot could ever have imagined. I thought maybe the paper cut out of a girl could start becoming real here also. (294)

She believes that if she goes to Algoe (a paper town created by mapmakers, which eventually became a real town), her two-dimensional identity might become real just as the town did. Erik Erikson in *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (1968) says that the adolescent "bewildered by the incapacity to assume a role forced on" to them tend to "run away in one form or another" (132). When Quentin invited her to come back home, Margo replies that she does not want to be sucked back into the life that she feels so trapped in.

Quentin, the narrator liked his routine life unlike Margo – "My days had a pleasant identicalness about them…I liked routine. I liked being bored." (23) Quentin like any other adolescent likes to stick to what he knows rather than explores what is beyond that routine. Unlike Margo, he is comfortable inside the stereotypical boy image that is already there within his grasp. Margo even points it out to him that he is merely a "paper boy" that lives in the "paper town". She sees no other dimensions within him except the two-dimensions just like paper, Margo points out to him that he is flat and blunt-"You had been a paper boy to me all these years – two dimensions as a character on the page and two different, but still flat, dimensions as a person."(292). Judith Butler says that "we act and talk" in ways that if being a man or a woman "is actually an internal reality" but in actuality is "a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time" (Big Think.com); Quentin

likes the idea of his routine. He reproduces all the time - his actions, the way he behave and talks. But he is made to realise that he, in reality, do not have any identity that stands out. It is Margo who points out that he is two dimensional, acting and behaving like everyone else, producing and reproducing the same reality time after time.

John Green in *Paper Town* (2008) uses *Moby Dick* (1851) by Herman Melville to give a hint on Quentin's obsession for Margo. Just as Ahab obsessing over the white whale, Quentin had been obsessed with Margo since their childhood. Kathleen Deakin described Quentin's obsession as key for Quentin to grow from the "paper boy" image:

> Q becomes so engrossed in Margo and her plan for revenge that he begins to forget himself. Q is not the kind of kid who sneaks out on a school night, steals his mom's car, or breaks into people's houses, yet he does all of that just to stay connected to Margo…so, he keeps her talking as much as possible and tries to impress her by being the person he believes she wants him to be. This marks the beginning of Q losing his identity in Margo. (55)

Once Margo disappears, Quentin makes it his destiny to find her; gradually losing himself within the folds of his obsession. He becomes so engrossed in his quest of finding Margo that he wishes his friends would join him and stop everything they are doing. As Quentin's desire to find Margo intensifies he begins to lose himself totally within the idea of Margo that he created. Quentin in a way can be identified with a hero from fairy tales:

They temporarily over identify with the heroes of cliques and crowds to the point of apparently complete loss of individuality. Yet in this stage not even "falling in love", is entirely or even primarily, a sexual matter. To a considerable extent, adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one's identity by projecting one's diffused self-image on another and by seeing it thus reflected and gradually clarified. (*Identity, Youth* 132)

To explain the loss of Quentin's individuality, Green lets Dr Holden (Quentin's English teacher) explain *Moby Dick* (1851) to Quentin's class, asking the class if there is "something tragically heroic about fighting" a battle "doomed to lose" or if "Ahab's hope a kind of insanity, or is it the very definition of humanness" (159). In his effort of trying to find Margo, Quentin begins to lost connections with his friends. With this frustration, Quentin gradually realises that he is losing his own identity. He comes to a point where he realises that he has created an image of Margo, an idea that does not in any form resemble the self-image that Margo identifies with. Quentin also creates images that are not associated to the person, even with his friend Ben, Radar made Quentin realised this- "You keep expecting people not to be themselves", with this in mind Quentin began to question the images he creates have misled him to overlook the true identity of his friends. In last part of the novel "The Vessel", Quentin gradually comes to a realisation, that he cannot change just because of Margo, and soon realises that they are two completely different people - while Margo wants adventure, Quentin liked the idea of the future that Margo fears- graduating, college, jobs, and a family. Quentin suddenly "realizes his first interpretation of a vessel was all wrong: there is no perfection" and that "each person

is just who he or she is and nothing more" (Deakin et. al. 57). His quest for finding Margo turns out to be his search for his own identity. Margo by the end of the book tells Quentin that their little adventure together has made her realise that the "paper boy" is real; that Quentin through his adventure of finding Margo, complete lost himself on the way but at the end came to a realisation of his true identity. He finally realises that he had always been living in the shadow.

Many gender theorists have for centuries settled upon the argument that the gender we inherit is solely based on the construction of society and culture. Kathy H. Latrobe and Judy Drury have discussed upon the topic of the gender identity; where its influence lies and what it influences:

> People are products of both their biology (nature) and their environment (nurture). At this point, no one knows for sure if nature or nurture is more influential in forming adolescent gender identity. Many see, however, that contemporary Western society often places unnecessary limits and expectations onto each generation of its young people. (191)

Margo Roth Spiegelman from *Paper Town* (2008) is trapped within the confines of this "unnecessary limits and expectations" that society creates. Just like Margo who felt the pressure of the overbearing expectations, Miles Halter; the protagonist of *Looking for Alaska* (2005), finds himself being pushed to a corner because of the image and character that society imposed upon him. Michel Foucault says that our sexuality is not something that is connected to our being nor is a fixed quality, but claims that it is a result of a "historical construction"

> Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries
> to hold in check, or as an obscure domain which knowledge tries gradually to
> uncover. It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive
> reality that is difficult to grasp… (105)

Foucault also points out that sexuality is not something that occurred naturally or stems from our being but is something that is constructed culturally or socially. In "Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity" (an interview from 1982) Talking about sexuality, Foucault states that sexual identity is our creation, and that sexual identities "limits us, and I think we have – and can have – a right to be free" (164); Green wanted all his characters in some way to stand out in the sea of identical characters – strong, sporty, pretty, good-looking figures. Miles Halter from the very beginning of the book discusses his "unpopular" status in his high school. His mother is "awash in the delusion that I had kept my popularity secret from her all these years" (9). She wishes her son to be like any other teen that has a huge group of friends and is popular among his peers. Miles, who does not possess the muscular physique, is intimidated by the silent expectation that stereotypes have created about the physical appearance of the male body. Seeing his naked reflection on the bathroom mirror, he "felt embarrassed" by his "skinniness" (15). In his first encounter with his new roommate Chip .Who ironically gives him the name 'Pudge' pointing out his skinny-ness. Miles is well aware of the stereotype that his identity as a male human being "must" possess. From the beginning of the book Miles makes a clear statement to embark on the quest to find his identity – "I was after a Great Perhaps, and they knew as well as I did that I wasn't going to find it with the likes of

Will and Marie" (11); Miles knows that if he does not embark on the adventure of going to a boarding school he would never know what his true identity would be if he stayed home. When Miles arrives at the boarding school, he is ready to let go of his old self and reinvent himself. But this does not come easy – "I'd joke. I'd make a good first impression. *Oh, he's funny. That guy Miles is a riot."* (14), he wishes that people at his new school would have a great first impression of him but this does not happen. Miles battles between his interior identity and exterior/ observed identity, he wants people to like him and be accepted by his peer group. Miles with his lack of social interaction prior Culver Creeks where he meets Chip and Alaska, assumes that they both seem to be a bad influence for him – "The phrase *booze and mischief* left me worrying I'd stumbled into what my mother referred to as "the wrong crowd" (28). After his encounter with Chip, Miles gradually begins to move away from his identity of a boy who has no friends and usually stays at home and read biographies:

> The Colonel gave an obligatory laugh, and then asked, "Want a smoke?" I had never smoked a cigarette, but when in Rome…then lit a cigarette and handed it to me. I inhaled. Coughed. Wheezed. Gasped for breath. Coughed again. Considered vomiting. Grabbed the swinging bench and stomped on it, convinced my Great Perhaps did not involve cigarettes. (24)

His first cigarette did not convince him that smoking is not part of his plan on reinventing himself. But as he sticks along with Chip, Alaska and Takumi, smoking became a habit that seems to be a part of his Great Perhaps:

> I decide to hang out on the swing for a while…And then I decided to smoke. Now, I did think, *the smoke will drive the bugs away.* And, to some degree, it

did. I'd be lying though if I claimed I became a smoke to ward off insects. I became a smoker because (1) I was on an Adirondack swing by myself, and (2) I had cigarettes, and (3) I figured that if everyone else could smoke a cigarette without coughing, I could damn well too. (26)

Boys at a young age are taught to be tough and resilient, their emotions have never been accepted by society, forcing them to re-enact the strong, violent, rough personality time and again. But Miles somehow does not seem too keen to confront the stereotypes that his ascribed gender identity must at a point, perform. The first night at the boarding school for Miles is tough, as his new classmate surprised him by waking him up in the middle of the night and taking him to the lake. He tries to escape but realises that "the fight-or-flight reflex swell up in me...but I knew that neither fight nor flight had ever worked for me before", which again points to his physical weakness, declaring that he does not possess the physical strength that boys are thought to have.

The ideas of the association of boys with sports have always been one of the most popular stereotypical stances. But Green in *Looking for Alaska* (2005) makes it clear that physical strength and the quality of athletic potency does not necessarily equate to the male gender and proves that it is something that is merely an association created by stereotypes of gender identity. None of the male characters in the books is interested in sports or any physical activity; the only character that has an interest in sports is Tiny Cooper. Miles Halter like other male characters from the other two books has no interest in sports. He declares that he hates sports and that he even hates the people who play sports or like sports. The only time he plays is when

his mother forced him to play so that he would make friends. This shows his mother trying to force Miles into the gender identity formed socially so that he would be accepted by his peers.

Throughout the first half of the book, Miles wants adventure, he wanted to change his life and the way he represents himself to the world. But rather than doing that, he followed in the footsteps of his friends. Miles thinks that he knows who he is and is quite happy with his life and his newfound friends. He begins to go down a spiral of smoking and drinking in order to keep up with his friends and loss him among the folds of his friendship with "the wrong people". But he is jolted awake with the death of Alaska. He began to be aware of his "self" on his quest to find the truth behind Alaska's death. Within his vain search for the answers to Alaska's death Miles begins his journey towards maturity.

Antero Garcia says that *Looking for Alaska* (2005) "is pointed to as a powerful description of a strong, female character" (79). Though she is not the protagonist of the book, every character in the book somehow revolves around her character. Tricia Clasen claims that "romances follow a very tight structure in which the woman is beautiful, defiant and sexually immature" (228). These characteristics do not entirely apply to Alaska, even though she is described by Miles to be beautiful. She still does not possess the conventional standards of a tall, lean beautiful figure. Alaska is being described to be petite, with a full body that is nowhere near a slim figure. She is more adventurous, out-going and acts as the leader of the pack; planning pranks and living life as she wishes–"Alaska is famous for

pranking. I mean, last year, we put a Volkswagon Beetle in the library. So if they have a reason to try and one-up her, they'll try" (89-90).

Alaska is mischievous unlike other female characters. When the Eagle caught them smoking, she simply claims that even if you "lose a battle", and "mischief always wins the war". Traditional portrayal of romantic love, especially in the U.S "relies on the dichotomous gender construction of power in which true love is driven by a dominant male":

> For example, one of the 12 romantic myths identified by Mary-Lou Galician's *Sex, Love and Romance in the Mass Media: Analysis and Criticism of Unrealistic Portrayals and their Influences* are "men must be taller, stronger, and wealthier than their female counterparts." Other gendered relational expectations include: heterosexual partners are predestined, love at first sight exists, and women should look like centrefolds…These concepts form the basis for an archetypal myth about love in literature that ultimately guides social understanding of how men and women should behave in relationship. (Clasen 229)

Even though *Looking for Alaska* (2005), is not a romantic love story, the protagonist, Miles Halter (Pudge), is obsessed with Alaska. Alaska knew about Pudge's little infatuation and to some extent plays with him, throughout the book. From time to time she gives hint of liking him but never gives him the chance to take control – pushing and pulling him as she wants, breaking the myth of men holding power over women. Alaska is portrayed with a strong belief in the rights of women

reminding her friends about her feminist beliefs. Alaska yells at the Colonel's girlfriend for blaming her of causing a rift between her and the Colonel:

> "No woman should ever lie about another woman! You've violated the sacred covenant between women! How will stabbing one another in the back help women to rise above patriarchal oppression?!" (82)

Alaska even claims that Edna St Vincent Millay is her hero, who is well known for her feminist activism. She reminds her friends that a woman is being objectified. She asserts herself to be the leader and she likes to take control of every situation. Alaska also strongly rejects the notion of the Cult of True Womanhood just like Margo in *Paper Town* (2008). Like Margo Roth Spiegelman she does not want to be tied down to a domestic like where she has to live a submissive life.

> She turned away from me, and softly, maybe to herself, said, "Jesus, I'm not going to be one of those people who sit around talking about what they're gonna to do. I'm just going to do it. (68)

Alaska makes it clear that she wants to live her life to the fullest rather than just dreaming it off. She is, in a way, breaking away from the notions of living a life "in the right way". Like Margo, she does not want to live by the rules and wants to break free from any constraints created by society. Thus both these two female characters to live by their own rules and doing things as they wish.

John Green creates new characters that do not follow in the footsteps of mythical, archetypal characters. Green in a certain way presents characters going

against the stereotypes, learning from their mistakes and their peers in the end, moulding new identities.

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False Conception of the Female Image

John Green in almost all of his works of fiction has crafted characters that subvert stereotypes in one way or another. His female characters break free from the image of fantasy to an image that is pragmatic. Due to the strong influence of gender roles created by society; the female characters struggle in the world of being seen as another pretty face that needs to be saved, they are no typical helpless maidens that stereotypes have created. The misconception of the female image especially within literature dates back to many centuries. Fairy tales have a lasting impact on society most fairy tales portray a female character that are the "ideal" female embodying societies' efforts in silencing and oppressing a woman and turning them in to passive beings as "much of the fairy tales reinforces the idea that women should be wives and mothers, submissive and self-sacrificing" and "embedded in these tales are warning" to the girl child of what "will befall upon them should they choose to exhibit non-female traits" (Nanda, 246-247). Through literature boys and girls are taught they should act in a particular way, leading them to believe that the opposite genders must act according to what they have been told.

Green's female characters, especially Margo Roth Spiegelman in *Paper Town* (2008), are mistakenly placed under the image of a damsel in distress by Quentin. When Margo runs away from home, Quentin thinks that Margo is leaving a trail of bread crumbs for him to follow. He sees Margo under the image of his fantasies. *Paper Town* (2008), undertake the issues of identity, When Quentin is influenced by the stereotypes created by society. John Green discusses how people's images are often mistaken; Quentin on his path of finding Margo stumbled upon the realisation

that he never knew "the real" Margo who is a person because he has always observed her through his fantasies.

From the beginning Quentin is depicted as never having trying to be acquainted with Margo. He merely believed what others have said about her and sees her as a larger than life character. On their little revenge adventure the night before Margo ran away, Quentin merely assumes that Margo cared less about getting in trouble because she is a straight-A student:

> "Let's just please not get in trouble," I said. "I mean, I want to have fun and everything, but not at the expense of, like, my future."…

> "College: getting in or not getting in. Trouble: getting in or not getting in. School: getting A's or getting D's. Career: having or not having. House: big or small, owning or renting. Money: having or not having. It's all so boring."

> I started to say something, to say that she obviously cared a little, because she had good grades and was going to the University of Florida's honors program next year, but she just said, "Wal-Mart." (32-33)

Not bothering to question her about why she finds the whole planning of one's future "boring", Quentin just assumes that she did not care whether she gets in trouble or not because she has good grades. When they reach Wal-Mart, Margo gives a soliloquy about what she thought about the whole future planning, she believes that due to the increase in the span of life, "people started having more and more future" (33). This leads them to think about their future; which she believes is that planning for a 'good' future is just so they could repeat the whole thing for their future

children. Quentin just waves off what Margo says about living for the future when they should be living in the present, because he thought that Margo "was just rambling to avoid the question at hand."(34). Margo finds the planned life boring because she wants to live by her own ways; a typical female character would be thrilled at the thought of marriage as "marriage in itself traditionally lies her fulfilment" (Gorsky, 30). Quentin fails to see the intellectually speaking Margo who questions the whole ambit of life, right in front of him because he only sees the girl that lived in his fantasies.

Quentin idolise Margo because he thinks that she is the "hottest" girl in school. He liked Margo because of her physical features, not because of her personality or wits. When she and Quentin discuss the fact that Margo's boyfriend Jase cheated on her with her friend Becca; she believed the reason to be "probably because she's hot" (37). Though Margo does not want to conform to societies expectations, she is still somehow entrapped by the idea that being "conditioned from earliest infancy to think of ourselves in specific ways by strong expectations" and "demands from gender-typed behaviour" (Cornillion 113). But she quickly comes to her senses when Quentin comments on her physical appearances; and is quick put down her opinion on physical appearances:

> "That's always seemed so ridiculous to me, that people would want to be around someone because they're pretty. It's like picking your breakfast cereals based on color instead of taste…But I'm not pretty, not close up anyway. Generally, the closer people get to me the less hot they find me." (37-38)

Margo wants Quentin to see beyond the pretty face and into people's character. She claims that she is not just a physical form but more than that, which may not be as bright and beautiful like her exterior. Quentin tries to argue but Margo stops him because she feels that Quentin is not capable of seeing beyond what everyone sees.

When Margo and Quentin arrived at Lacey's house (Margo's friend), she asks him if she is fat. Even though Margo may be rebellious and acts on her own free will, she is still under the trance of the expectations of beauty created by society. Lacey's comment on her physical appearance, as not skinny offends her. Because of the expectation created, Margo struggles to find her place within society, which eventually leads her to believe that being skinny and lean is the only form of beauty that society accepts. Quentin reassures her not to lose weight Margo sees right through Quentin's reassurance and says that "You just love my big ass" (50). He then goes on commenting on Margo's physical form:

> I turned from the road for a second and glanced over, and I shouldn't have, because she could read my face…You can't divorce Margo the person from Margo the body. You can't see one without seeing the other. You looked at Margo's eyes and you saw both their blueness and their Margo-ness...Margo's beauty was a kind of sealed vessel of perfection – uncracked and uncrackable. (50)

Because of the fantasies, he has of the 'beautiful' Margo, he sees her as a perfect being that cannot be unsoiled. Quentin is so mesmerised by Margo that he felt even "her fake smiles were convincing" (54).

The representation of the world and our concepts of everything are man-made, "they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (Beauvoir 161). Quentin's perception of everything around him especially Margo is influenced by what Beauvoir talked about, the representation of our world, being man-made. Quentin, internalises the conditions created by "masculine centred values and definitions" "to such an extent" that he has little or no sense of what everything really is apart from how we are "conditioned to perceive ourselves" (Cornillion, 113). When Margo and Quentin go to the SunTrust Building to look for the progress that they have made on their adventure, Quentin fails to see beyond the surface. They are looking at Orlando from a skyscraper and Quentin calls the view of the place beautiful because he is looking at it from a distance, "you can't see the wear on things, you know…you see the place as someone once imagined it."(57) Quentin finds the view beautiful because he sees it from afar looking at only the surface of it, just like how he finds Margo beautiful, looking at only the surface. Margo reminds him that everything is "uglier close up" (57). She even reminds him that she is also uglier up close. Margo says this because she feels that Quentin did not know her up close and is only mesmerised by the image on the surface, not the whole thing.

When Margo went missing, Quentin presumes that she has gone off on another adventure without him. He did not question her reasons but simply assumes that she is off on another adventure; because that is what she usually does. But when she did not return, Quentin began to look for clues, as her parents told Quentin that Margo would leave clues to where she went. When he first found the clue he

naturally assumed that Margo is leaving him behind clues so that he could follow her. When his friend Radar points out that why she would leave hints for him, Quentin replies that Margo "wanted to be found":

> Radar stood up. "It really seems like she's drawing a pretty straight line…It's weird though – I mean, no offence, but if she always left clues for her parents why would she leave them for you this time?"
>
> I shrugged my shoulders. I didn't know the answers, but of course I had hopes: maybe Margo needed to see my confidence. Maybe this time she *wanted* to be found and to be found by *me…*And maybe untold riches awaited he who found her. (115)

Quentin is clearly guided by his imagination, making assumptions that the girl he has known from afar wanted him to find her. This shows that he is living in his fantasies that girls need to be saved by their knight in shining armours. As the gendered bodied is performative, lacking truth to its core resulting in "a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of the bodies."(Butler, 136) Quentin is misguided by the repeated acts and performances of the gendered bodies that society constantly puts on. When he fails to find her in the place where the clues led him, he confessed that he does not know "who she is anymore, or who she was" (141). This justifies the fact that Quentin does not really know the person Margo but is only well acquainted with his imaginative Margo, which he chooses to believe. With the frustration of not finding Margo, Quentin begins to think about whom Margo really is, using the metaphor of mirrors and windows:

"The longer I do my job," he said, "the more I realize that humans lack good mirrors. It's so hard for anyone to show us how we look, and so hard for us to show anyone how we feel."…

I was sitting back. I was listening. And was hearing something about her and about windows and mirrors. Chuck Parson was a person. Like me. Margo Roth Spiegelman was a person too. And I had never quite thought of her that way, not really; it was a failure of all my previous imaginings. All along – not only since she left, but for decade before – I had been imagining her without listening…And so I could not imagine her as a person…Margo was not a miracle. She was not an adventure. She was not a fine and precious thing. She was a girl (198-199).

Guided by his fantasies he fails to see the real Margo who is an actual person like others, a person who is not miraculous but a person "who could feel fear, who could feel isolated in a roomful of people" and who is "shy about her record collections" and she is "Someone who – because no one thought she was a person – had no one to really talk to" (199).

On the road trip to finding Margo, Quentin stumbles on another realisation of how often people get mis-imagined. On the "Hour Six" of their route to Agloe, New York, Radar and Quentin are playing a game that they invented "That Guy Is a Gigolo". While they are busy guessing the life of the lady that just passes them by, Quentin begins to think about how the world is full of people and that "each of them imaginable and consistently misimagined" (257). This leads back to where Quentin and Lacey are having a conversation about Margo, at Becca Arrington's party. When

they discuss one of the highlighted lines from Whitman's poem, Lacey mentioned that it does not sound like her Margo (185), which made Quentin think about how, he, Lacey and Mrs Spiegelman all have their different versions of Margo. Not the version of Margo, that Margo herself wanted but a version that every single person have created of her in relation to her gender.

When Quentin and his friends finally arrive at Agloe, they did find Margo inside an abandoned barn. Quentin feels that Margo would be delighted to see them rather she is upset by her friend's abrupt arrival. She explains to Quentin that he is simply chasing after his idea, not the real up close uglier Margo:

> You didn't come here to make sure I was okay. You came here because you wanted to save poor little Margo from her troubled little self; so that I would be oh-so-thankful to my knight in shining armour…You're not even pissed at me, Q! You're pissed at this idea of me you keep inside your brain when we were little (284-285).

Quentin fell for the false projection of Margo, an idea that he made up. Finally, Margo explains that it is not only Quentin who has a pre-conceived idea of a person but people, in general, liked the "idea of a paper girl" (293) and she also liked the idea of her being a paper girl. She has internalised so much of the male idea of femininity that she projected the idea that people want rather than projecting a true form.

Women who show deviation from their gendered roles are often misapprehended. This is because of stereotypes that arise within the gendered world.

When women act out of the 'norm' they are viewed as deviating from the binaries. In John Green's *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010), Jane, is repeatedly mis-imagined due to her behaviour. Jane is in the same club as Will, the "Gay-Straight Alliance"; a club apparently created by Tiny Cooper. She is the only female member in the club and is assumed to be 'gay'. Will naturally assume that Jane is not his type because "her hair's kinda disastrously curly" and "she mostly hangs out with guys" and also because Will's type of girls that he likes is "a little girlier" (18). Will clearly does not like a girl who is not the stereotypical girly-girl, who is pretty, whose hair is usually blond or light brown, is "smooth and luxuriant and thick" (Gorsky 31). While Jane and Will are chatting via Facebook, Will quickly access her account:

> I look at her profile. The list of favorite music and favorite books is obscenely long, and I can only get through the A's of the music list before giving up. She looks cute in her picture, but not quite like she looks in real life – her picture smile isn't her real smile…and feel like a fool for even thinking her as a flirt. Jane's just a smart, snarky girl with too-curly hair. (38-39)

Joanna Russ writes that "our literature is full of women but all these women are not of women but of images of women", who are:

> modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty schollmarms, beautiful bitches, faithful wives and so on…at their best they are depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play and often do play, but they are public roles and not the private women, at their worst they are gorgeous, Cloudcuckooland fantasies about what men want, or hate, or fear (4-5).

Will does not like the non-girly Jane who likes to speak her mind and hang out with guys. He preferred the gendered version of an 'ideal' girl who is modest, poise and coy. The requirements of youth and beauty in women even influence news shows, where female newscasters are expected to be younger, more physically attractive, and less outspoken than males (Wood 7). Will prefers a girl who is physically attractive and less outspoken, the attributes that are the total opposite of Jane's character.

Jane's image in the novel is constantly misapprehended. Being members of the "Gay-Straight Alliance" she is assumed to be "gay", and upon arrival at Will's house in "an ancient, hand-painted orange Volvo" (47), Will quickly presumes that the car does not matches Jane's personality, because, he felt "she seems quieter than the car implies" (47). Will constantly assume what kind of attributes matches Jane. But every time he tries to perceive her character in alliance with the attributes usually endowed with the female gender, he is proven wrong. Will is intimidated by the fact that Jane Turner is not a typical girl who does not act according to the gendered behaviour she belongs to. When Will assesses her from afar, the image that Jane projects, disgusts him. He feels that Jane's honesty and lack of modesty are something that he is not into. Jane has to tell him that she is "quite shy" and not as confident as she seems to be. Jane is a character that is independent, smart and is into music. Stereotypical female characters in literature are usually portrayed as being dependent, naive and gentle, none of which Jane possess. When Jane projects the image of a strong independent female, her character is being misapprehended by her friends. They thought that she is 'gay' because she only hangs out with boys and she

has joined the "Gay-Straight Alliance" club. When Gary mentions that Jane is not gay, both Tiny and Will are shocked to hear the news (43).

Women are usually portrayed as characters that cannot control their emotions and are sensitive to the topic of love. Will expects Jane to have an emotional break down when he tells her that he is not interested in her. But Jane does not show any sign of disappointment when she hears what Will has to say, rather Will, is disappointed when he sees that Jane is not the least bit upset by it- "It occurs to me that I am weirdly disappointed about how entirely un-upset Jane seems to feel, which in turn causes me to feel strangely rejected." (49) Whenever Jane proves her friends wrong with all the stereotypes of her 'gender' thrown at her, her friends are somewhat disappointed. Her friends are inclined to think that some attributions that is said to belong to her gender, are what Jane is made off. But when her actions and characteristics do not match with the pre- conceived ideas, it clearly verifies that there are "default perceptions" that we relate some attributes to each gender as if that attribute is a part of them that they must perform, "perceptions and stereotypes dictates what we tend to look for and what we expect to find". (Haller, TEDx Talks).

Stereotypes and perceptions of an individual have led the human mind to a very great length in forming images of an individual. These stereotypes about gender have helped form a false image of an individual. Judith Butler believes that gender identity that is perceived to be the essence of an individual true-self does not hold any internal truth, but are mere creations of repetitions of certain acts, gestures and desires. Alaska Young in *Looking for Alaska* (2005) is falsely perceived as an idealised character by Pudge (Miles Halter). His misconceptions of Alaska are

formed solely because he sees her only on the surface and pushes away her true attribute. Miles is fascinated by the physical attractiveness of Alaska whom he constantly idealises and fails to see her true self. From their first encounter, Miles only mentions Alaska's physical appearance- "I stared, stunned partly by the force of the voice emanating from the petite (but, God, curvy) girl" (*Alaska* 22). It is her physical features that Miles talks about when he described her:

> In the dark beside me, she smelled of sweat and sunshine and vanilla, and on that thin-mooned night I could see little more than her silhouette except for when she smoked…But even in the dark, I could see her eyes – fierce emeralds. She had the kind of eyes that predisposed you to supporting her every endeavour. And not just beautiful, but hot too, with her breast straining against her tight tank top, her curved legs swinging back and forth beneath the swing (27).

Miles only notices her physical form and did not pay much attention to what Alaska is contemplating about – when how one will escape the labyrinth; she is actually hinting on how she herself will escape her own labyrinth but all Miles could think about is her appearance. She projects the image of an intelligent individual who is competent with her male counterparts. But her honesty in speaking her mind and acting out her wishes leads the boys to see her as another crazy female character. When Miles asks about Alaska, the Colonel (Chip) warned him that "there are ninety-two girls at this school and every last one of them is less crazy than Alaska" (31). Chip and Miles already have formed pre-perception of the qualities they want in a girl. Their comments on Alaska's character show that they preferred a more

silent, naïve, modest girl, unlike Alaska who is loud, honest and intelligent. Just because she does not fit into the 'usual attribute' created by stereotypes, she is defined (by Chip and Miles) as being crazy.

Alaska points out to Miles that he does not love the "crazy, sullen bitch" but he loves the "girl who makes you laugh and show you porn and drinks wine with you" (118). She knew that Miles only liked the idea of her, not the real Alaska, who is unpredictable and a mess. Chip and Takumi also preferred fun-loving Alaska rather than the crazy, unpredictable Alaska. Miles throughout the first part of the book, titled 'Before', constantly assumes Alaska to be something she is not. He created a fantasy and it is this fantasy that guides him into projecting Alaska's image. When Alaska honestly points out to him that he liked the idea of her more than the truth, he does not deny it and simply accept it to be partly true.

When Alaska shares her worst day with her friends, Miles quickly presumes that the reasons for Alaska's impulsive actions are because of her regrets about her past:

It was the central moment of Alaska's life. When she cried and told me that she fucked up everything, I knew what she meant now. And when she said she failed everyone, I knew whom she meant now…I could not help but imagine it: I imagined a scrawny eight-year-old with dirty fingers, looking down at her mother convulsing…a little Alaska sat with her mother in silence…So she became impulsive, scared by her inaction into perpetual action. When the Eagle confronted her with expulsion, she blurted out Marya's name because it was the first that came to mind, because in that

moment she didn't want to get expelled and couldn't think past that moment. She was scared, sure. But more importantly, maybe she'd been scared of being paralysed by fear again (146-147).

Miles creates an opinion from what Alaska has accounted about her past, he does not know the real truth behind any of the incidents. He somehow blamed the incidents for Alaska's impulsive actions rather than attempting to see that it might be her true nature.

Miles's inability to see beyond his fantasy continues even after Alaska's death; he still cannot see beyond her physique:

She was dead. She was warm and soft against my skin, my tongue in her mouth, and she was laughing, trying to teach me, make me better, promising to be continued. And now.

And now she was colder by the hour, more dead with every breath I took. (173)

Still obsessed with Alaska's body he fails to see beyond the beautiful, attractive girl, who is deeply troubled. Miles constantly romanticised Alaska even after her death; when he contemplates the reason as to why Alaska killed herself. He asked himself, t if her life flashes before her eyes as she steps on the verge of death and wonders if he is there in that fleeting flash, because he is still hung up on the idea that Alaska promised him a continuation of their time together. Even in her death Miles still, holds on to the fantasy that he created ever since he met her.

Alaska is portrayed as an object of fascination for Mile. She is aware of his inability to see her as a whole person. Even when she tries to let him know about what is on her mind, he fails to listen because he is being distracted by his fantasies and imaginations. This clearly shows how self-centred Pudge (Miles) is since he would rather fix his conception of Alaska to his limited view than accept the attributes that do not fit in that very limited view. Even after her death, Miles is still fixated upon his limited view of Alaska, and assumes that her sudden death is because of him. Miles makes the assumption that Alaska felt guilty towards her boyfriend Jake for cheating on him that she ran off in the middle of the night to apologise to Jake. But this is not the real situation; the end of the novel reveals that Alaska ran off is that she forgets to put flowers on her mother's grave.

Miles is not the only one who has a limited view of Alaska. Chip (the Colonel) also has a limited perception of her, repeatedly perceiving a false image of Alaska. Alaska strongly believes in the empowerment of women and within the course of the first part of the novel professes her strong belief in feminism. She would from time to time, remind her friends not to objectify the female body. She clearly states that she does not support any form of belief that domestic chores are solely a woman's task. But whenever she displays her honest opinion about the things she cared about she is ignored and labelled as crazy and impulsive.

"The role of a hero is never given to a female character" (Benedict 6), Alaska Young, even though she possesses a strong heroic feminine figure, that in no way resembles the traits traditionally label to a stereotypical female character.

Though strong, heroic and feminine figures are never portrayed as a hero but are rather depicted as villains:

> Literature, therefore, tends to portray the woman who demonstrates initiative, strength, wisdom, and independent action – the ingredient of the heroic life – not as a hero but as a villain…When female heroism is not condemned, it is simply ignored…An obvious example in American history is the women who homesteaded in the west. These women performed the same heroic feats as men, as well as the tasks designated to women; yet western Literature generally portrays them as damsels in distress or as unwilling and inadequate companions and victims of the men who conquered the frontier. (Benedict, 6)

Benedict further explains the reason as to why there are very few female heroes in contemporary literature, She cites "conservatism of popular literary and media form" to be the reason as they are not based on real life but are based upon "popular beliefs" (6). Due to the portrayal of a strong female as a flaw in most literature, individuals are lead to believe that such character traits are something that one should not be proud of. The three female characters – Alaska Young, Margo Roth Spiegelman and Jane Turner, are portrayed as independent, strong heroic feminine figures but they are often misunderstood by their male counterparts.

Margo's rebellious actions and outspoken views lead Quentin and the others to perceive her as an attention seeker. She is not at all praised for her actions but rather she is seen as some crazy girl. When her friend Lacey sees Margo's real nature, she is offended by her harsh words and calls her a "bitch" (*Paper Town* 283). Also Radar preferred the clues that Margo left rather than Margo. Their reaction to

her true self reflects what she said about everything being uglier up close. Quentin is merely applying the context of what has been thought to be the attribute of a female, who is submissive, naïve and dependent. Because "there are certain things that we associate with being either masculine or feminine" which may seem harmless on the surface, but the extent of these association is much more than just on the surface and "has a much heavier impact", these certain association eventually "contributes to gender roles and stereotypes" (Chinchankar, TEDx Talks) and it becomes a threat, when an individual performs certain tasks that are associated with the set stereotypes.

Jane Turner (*Will Grayson, Will Grayson,* (2010) just like Margo Roth Spiegelman is misapprehended many times by her friends. Traditionally, a typical female is usually depicted as shy, modest and less competent than her male counterpart. The associations of traits with certain genders have led to the belief that people must in some way conform to those attributes. In John Green's novel, when these associations of certain attributes are made, a misconception of the individual's image occurs. Will Grayson simply believes that Jane is not his type because she does not possess the attributes that a female must possess. When Jane does not show any sign of the attributes that are generally considered to be associated with her gender, she is assumed to be either 'gay' or unattractive. This misapprehension also happens to Alaska Young (*Looking for Alaska,* (2005), whenever Alaska talks about greater issues in life, her concerns are never heard by her friends; Miles projects her as an object of pleasure and fails to see the intellectual girl within her. And Chip only sees her as someone who is crazy, who cannot control her emotions.

The power that gender stereotypes hold upon the society is responsible for misconceptions of the female image. Michel Foucault says that power is an intricate connection of constraining interrelationships that exist, in which power constrains actions, leading people to act in ways that would condition the options of the actions of others around them (92-102). Therefore, the perception of an individual's image is controlled by the gender stereotyping and the association of attributes to particular genders.

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Conclusion

The fifth chapter brings the study to an end by summing up the important points in the preceding chapters. The dissertation comes to a conclusion by presenting Green's efforts in defying and destabilizing the pre-existing traditional conventions of gender stereotypes. His characters defy the conformity that they have always known, seeking autonomy away from the unseen binding norms of gender. In seeking a sense of their selves, characters steps out from their 'normal' behaviours and action; and subvert gender norms, thus disrupting the illusions of the interior created by actions and gesture enacted and repeated. Butler argues that if gender is fabricated, then the gender instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies can neither be true or false (136). Butler believes that while norms are essential to a certain extent, yet they must somehow be exceeded for the sake of the future.

John Green's main aim as a writer is to show that an individual need not follow the societal norms and in order to find our true sense of 'self', one must break free from the "straitjacket of gender" (Pollack 13) to taste a sense of true self. John Green through his characters proves that the gender stereotypes are social construction that is devoid of internal truth; Judith Butler on the imitation of gender says that:

> The notion of gender parody defended here does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of the* very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy, the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a "figure" in the double sense, so gender parody

reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin. (138)

With the concept of Butler's imitation performed by drags, proves that the concept of gender is fluid and can be subverted as it is devoid of any true origin, as its constructions are solely based on the ideas that humans created. John Green's characters prove that deviation or subversion from societal norms and conformity is possible as the concept of gender is man-made and the traits that are associated to each gender is a reproduction of acts, that is being re-enacted and reproduce through time. Green's characters break-free from social bonds and seek new forms of identities.

John Green by portraying characters that defy the stereotypes attached to gender, proves that the whole conception on which gender is build upon does not have any solid foundations. With no truth behind the creation of gender identities proves that gender stereotypes are a mere social construction. Created through acts being repeated over the course of time. Green proves that gender stereotypes can be subverted as gender stereotypes are mere beliefs created by society. Green's depiction of the reversal of character traits show the fluidity of gender.

In the text John Green subverts the gender stereotypes by portraying his characters in opposites to one another. Quentin Jacobson and Miles Halter (Pudge) are being portrayed as teenage boys that do not fit into the stereotypical image of 'normal' teenage boys. They are passive, weak and cautious and do not hide behind "the mask of masculine autonomy and strength" (Pollack 13). While Margo Roth Spiegelman and Alaska Young are independent, adventurous and resilient, Quentin

and Miles are passive, weak and cautious. When Margo and Quentin reach the last bit of their adventure, Margo speaks the truth of their opposing natures:

> "Q, in the scheme of things, what kind of trouble can Sea World get you into? I mean, Jesus, after everything I've done for you tonight, you can't do one thing for me? You can't just shut up and calm down and stop being so goddammed terrified of every little adventure?" And then under her breath, she said, "I mean, God, Grow some nuts."

> She wouldn't look at me… "You think I needed you? You don't think I could have given Myrna Mountweazel a Benadryl so she'd sleep through my stealing the safe from under my parents' bed? Or snuck into your bedroom while you were sleeping and taken your car key? I didn't need you, you idiot. *I picked* you (69-70).

Margo does not need any assistance in her little adventure but she chooses Quentin to help her so that he could taste the adventures that she loved so much. That their characters are in exact opposition to the existing gender stereotypes. Margo is the stronger and braver character, a trait that does not suit her female character, while Quentin is the weaker and passive character. This is also the case between Miles Halter and Alaska Young, Alaska is wild and daring while Miles is more reserved and anxious. Throughout *Looking for Alaska* (2005) Alaska shows traits that does not conform to her female gender, and Miles is not a representation of a brooding masculine male whom boys are often told to look up to. Alaska introduces Miles to a life of reckless adventure and 'bad habits', qualities that are never associated to a female.

John Green in *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010) portrays that loving someone does not necessarily connote that one has sexual desires. When Will Grayson confesses his love for his best friend Tiny Cooper, he proclaims that love does not translate to sexual feelings:

> NO. No no no. I don't want to screw you. I just *Love* you. When did who you want to screw become the whole game? Since when is the person you want to screw the only person you get to love? It's so stupid, Tiny! I mean…People act like it's the most important thing humans do, but come on. How can our sentient fucking lives revolve around something *slugs* can do. (257)

Will Grayson subverts the "Boy Code" which dictates "that boys "should suppress all other emotions and cover up the more gentle, caring, vulnerable sides of themselves" (Pollack, 13). Will is not afraid to be seen as a weakling among his peers. The other will grayson also does not want to be labelled as a stereotypical 'gay' individual. When Tiny Cooper tries to impose his stereotypical traits upon him, he pushes Tiny away afraid that he would fall into the descriptive label. will wants to live by his own 'rule' rather than live by the norms of a stereotypical 'gay'.

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CHAPTER I

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