

**Imagine me complexly:  
Female characters in John Green's novels**

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May 2017



Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta		Laitos – Institution – Department Nykykielten laitos	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Ida Tamminen			
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Imagine me complexly: Female characters in John Green's novels			
Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject Englantilainen filologia			
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Pro gradu		Aika – Datum – Month and year 16.05.2017	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 76
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract			
<p>Pro gradussani tarkastelen naishahmoja John Greenin kirjoissa <i>Looking for Alaska</i>, <i>An Abundance of Katherines</i>, <i>Paper Towns</i> ja <i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>. Tutkielmani tavoitteena on selvittää miten naishahmoja kuvataan Greenin kirjoissa ja miten se eroaa mieshahmojen kuvauksesta. Lisäksi pohdin mediarepresentaation tärkeyttä etenkin nuorille suunnatussa kirjallisuudessa sekä sitä, ovatko Greenin naishahmot autenttisen tuntuisia.</p> <p>Teoriataustana käytän teoksia hahmojen tutkimuksen, feministisen kirjallisuusteorian, kerronnantutkimuksen ja stereotyyppitutkimuksen alueilta.</p> <p>Tutkimusmenetelmänäni on tekstin huolellinen lukeminen, eng. 'close reading', teoria-aineistooni nojautuen. Aineistonani käytän Greenin kirjojen lisäksi hänen omia mielipiteitään, kommenttejaan ja vastauksiaan, joita hän on esittänyt lukuisissa blogeissaan.</p> <p>Pro graduni keskeisimpiä tuloksia on se, että naishahmot on esitetty eri tavalla kuin mieshahmot, etenkin kun kyseessä ovat muut kuin nimettömät sivuhenkilöt. Naishahmoin liitetään enemmän fyysiseen viehättävyyteen liittyviä piirteitä ja heidät on kuvattu vähemmän persoonallisiksi kuin miespuoliset henkilöahmot. Vaikka hahmonkehitystä tapahtuu, se on usein sidoksissa miespuoliseen päähenkilöön. Naispuoliset henkilöahmot ovat myös miespäähenkilön epäluotettavan kerronnan varassa, <i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> pois lukien. Totean Greenin kirjojen olevan kohdistettu pääosin teini-ikäisille tytöille. Koska representaatio vaikuttaa sekä kuvaan omasta itsestä että toisista, on tärkeää että se olisi monipuolista. Greenin kirjoissa naishahmojen representaatio on melko yksipuolista, mikä vähentää autenttisuutta. Naishahmojen autenttisuutta edustaa parhaiten <i>The Fault in Our Stars</i>, koska siinä on naispäähenkilö, jonka kerrontatyyli on melko realistinen. Autenttisuutta luodaan myös henkilöahmojen omilla stereotyyppioilla, maailmankuvilla, huumorilla ja luonteenpiirteillä, sekä kerronnan keinoin.</p> <p>Green ilmaisee monissa kommentteissa olevansa tietoinen kirjojensa puutteista etenkin vähemmistöjen edustamisen suhteen sekä naishahmojen roolien suhteen, ja tämä tiedostaminen näkyy verrattessa <i>The Fault in Our Starsin</i> naiskertojaa muiden kirjojen mieskertojiin. Green tekee naishahmojen yksinkertaistetun kuvittelun ja romantisoinnin ongelmallisuutta selväksi myös kirjoissa, joissa se on esillä toistuvana teemana, etenkin <i>Paper Townsissa</i>.</p>			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords John Green, young adult literature, gender, character, characterization, Looking for Alaska, An Abundance of Katherines, Paper Towns, The Fault in Our Stars			
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited			
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information			

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## 1 Introduction

John Green stated in his speech at the ALAN (Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE) conference that “Literature is in the business of helping us to imagine ourselves and others more complexly, of connecting us to the ancient conversation about how to live as a person in a world full of other people” (johngreenbooks.com). It is not always easy to understand other people or to see them as complex as they truly are, but literature can be a way of practising that, presuming the characters are fairly close to real human beings. It is important that characters are represented in detail in books and other forms of media, since our opinions and identities are influenced by what we read and consume. It is particularly important when your audience consists mainly of teenage girls, who are beginning to construct their worldview and personal identity. What is good representation of female characters and is there such in popular mainstream literature? What are the ways in which females are characterised and do they differ from how males are characterised? What makes a character feel authentic? In this thesis I discuss these questions in relation to the popular American author John Green and his novels.

### 1.1 Aims and methods

The aim of this paper is to understand John Green’s female characters and their characterisation, by doing a close reading of Green’s four novels: *Looking for Alaska*, *An Abundance of Katherines*, *Paper Towns* and *The Fault in Our Stars*. In the second chapter my focus is on the characterisation of the main female characters, partly in comparison with the male characters. First I study narration and how it affects the inferring of character, since characters are always presented from a certain viewpoint, which is not always reliable. Then I go on to discuss how the physical features of the characters are apparent in the book, because I want to find out whether female bodies are viewed differently from male bodies. After that I deal with how female personality is shown in the text and how it is interpreted or imagined by male characters. Finally, I analyse the extent to which the female characters present themselves as opposed to only being described by the male characters. In the third chapter I analyse first the male characters and focalisation. Then, I discuss stereotyping and how it affects characterisation. I also discuss whether Green’s own stereotyping can be seen in the text, apart from the conscious choices of having a teenage boy’s perspective. Lastly I exam the minor characters of both genders and whether their characterisation and interactions are made different because of gender. In the fourth chapter I analyse the importance of representation and how well the characters in Green’s books represent

real life people. I first discuss minorities and then the target audience of his books, which is mainly teenage girls. Lastly, I study the authenticity of the characters and why that is important in representation.

Besides literary studies on for example narration, characterisation, stereotyping and feminist criticism, I also use Green's own opinions so as to find out what he originally intended with his characterisation. He has presented such opinions not only in interviews but on several of his own internet pages, for instance Tumblr and YouTube. Even if an author's opinion does not necessarily affect the text itself or make wrongs right, it gives another perspective and makes it possible to attempt finding the author in the text.

## 1.2 On John Green and his works

John Green is an American author, born on 24 August 1977. He writes young adult fiction, but is also known for the YouTube channel "vlogbrothers" he and his brother Hank Green share. Their videos are on different topics, ranging from political issues and philosophical questions to arguments about Batman. The videos and the "nerdfighter" community surrounding them have most likely influenced the popularity of the books. The nerdfighter community consists of people of all ages, who are fans of the Green brothers and according to their webpage "are made of awesome instead of bones and organs. It is their mission to decrease worldsuck and increase global awesome" (nerdfighteria.info). In some videos, Green discusses topics that have to do with his books and their themes. John Green's presence on the internet is strong also on other sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr. What's more, he has answered questions about his books both on his own webpage (johngreenbooks.com) and on separate Tumblr blogs dedicated to his works. I discuss these answers and insights in this essay in order to show what the author's personal opinions on certain points are, such as how he writes female characters and what roles those female characters have in relation to the male characters.

John Green's first novel, *Looking for Alaska* was published in 2005. It tells the story of Miles "Pudge" Halter, a biography nerd with an obsession with the last words of famous people. Pudge goes to a boarding school where he meets the "gorgeous, clever, funny, sexy, self-destructive, screwed-up, and utterly fascinating Alaska Young, who is an event unto herself" (Green, *Looking for Alaska* back cover). Pudge and his new friends play pranks on the principal and on the "Weekday warriors", rich snobbish teenagers who do not live at the school. During the school year, he gets to know Alaska better, and learns that she blames herself for her mother's death. Alaska and

Pudge kiss one drunken evening, though both of them are dating someone else. But that same night she receives a phone call and gets hysterical, getting Pudge and their friend the Colonel to help her sneak out of the school. She drives off and is later found dead. Her friends struggle with the fact that they do not know whether it was an accident or a suicide. Later they learn that Alaska had forgotten to visit her mother's grave that day (the anniversary of her death), and was on her way there when she died in a car crash. Pudge finally writes an essay, wherein he shows that he accepts that he did not know her well enough and at the same time finds a way to understand religion and his own worldview better.

*An Abundance of Katherines* is John Green's second novel, published in 2006. The main character is Colin Singleton, the boy who has dated 19 girls named Katherine. After being dumped by Katherine number 19 and having had a nervous breakdown about not mattering or making a mark on history, he goes on a road trip with his best (and only) friend Hassan. They end up in Gutshot, Tennessee, a small town that is dwindling away. There they meet Lindsey Lee Wells and her family and friends. Throughout the novel, Colin works on his big idea, the Theorem of Underlying Katherine Predictability, which he believes can predict how long a relationship will last. Lindsey ends up being Colin's love interest and thus breaks the chain of Katherines. She also breaks Colin's prediction of their relationship by not leaving him after four days. Colin learns that the future is unpredictable and even the great geniuses of history fade eventually, thus liberating himself from his obsession with leaving a mark on the world.

The third novel was published in 2008 and is called *Paper Towns*. Here Quentin "Q" Jacobsen is in love with his neighbour Margo Roth Spiegelman. They were close as children and even shared the shocking event of finding a dead body together, but have drifted apart when growing up. However, one night during their final year in high school, Margo sneaks through Quentin's window and asks him to help her on a revenge mission. They have an exciting and in many ways illegal night taking revenge on all who have wronged Margo, with relatively harmless methods. After this night, Margo disappears from the town and a life she considers fake and "made of paper", and Q starts on a quest to find her. He believes she has left him clues to follow, leading to an actual paper town – a fake city drawn on a map by cartographers so as to know if someone is copying their work – in New York. Quentin and his friends do find Margo there, but she insists that she has not left any clues. She also confronts Quentin about always imagining her as something more than she was, and idea which Quentin has already reminisced upon during their journey to find her. They kiss, but Margo stays in Agloe, New York and Quentin goes back to California.

The fourth and so far latest novel from John Green is *The Fault in Our Stars*. The main character is 16-year-old Hazel Grace Lancaster, who has thyroid cancer. Her mother makes her join a cancer patient support group, where she meets Augustus Waters, a fascinating boy who has lost his leg because of osteosarcoma. The two hit it off right away and agree to read each other's favourite books. Augustus is impressed and frustrated with Hazel's book, *The Imperial Affliction*, by Peter van Houten. The book is about a girl with cancer and ends in the middle of a sentence leaving the ending open. Augustus surprises Hazel by using his "cancer perk" (a wish the Genie Foundation grants for cancer patients) to fly them to Amsterdam to meet the author. Their trip is otherwise magical and amazing, but van Houten turns out to be a bitter, mean drunk. They confess their love to another, but Augustus also confesses to being a lot sicker than he has let Hazel understand. His condition gets much worse and he dies after having had a pre-funeral party (to hear his eulogies before dying) with his friends. Hazel later receives Augustus' unfinished eulogy for her, which he had hoped van Houten would help him write. Van Houten does no such thing, and Hazel reads Augustus' message of not being able to get through life without getting hurt by someone and that he is happy with his choices. This ties in with Hazel's fears of hurting people around her. The book is partly inspired by John Green's work at children's hospital and partly by his friendship with Esther Earl, a nerdfighter girl who died of cancer.

Except these four novels, Green has also written a collaboration book with David Levithan called *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* (2010). Another collaboration is with Maureen Johnson and Lauren Myracle in the form of the book *Let It Snow: Three Holiday Romances* (2008). I have chosen not to include these, since they include other writers' work.

The response to Green's works has been rather positive, and the books have done well on different lists and won prizes. *Looking for Alaska* won the 2006 Michael L. Printz Award, and *An Abundance of Katherines* was nominated for the same award. *Paper Towns* won the 2009 Edgar award for Best Young Adult Mystery. *The Fault in Our Stars* was a bestseller on New York Times', Wall Street Journal's and Indiebound's book lists. I find this popularity and success relevant in the sense that they make the books even more available to a larger audience, and therefore affect more people. *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns* in particular are being taught in many schools in the USA, but Green's books have also raised controversy because of their content, as the list of banned books on Marshall University's webpages shows. *Looking for Alaska* has been challenged many times since its publishing for inappropriate language and sexual content, and has been banned or removed from required reading in some schools. *An Abundance of Katherines*, too, has been challenged in 2015 for sexual references. *Paper Towns* was removed from one school's reading list

for too many “F-bombs”, references to teen sex and for one of the characters continuously using the misogynistic term “honeybunnies” for girls. *The Fault in Our Stars* has been banned from some schools libraries because it involves dying teenagers, crude language and sexual content. Green’s own comment to the banning of *Looking for Alaska* in some schools is that “If a terrible blowjob keeps *Alaska* from being taught in schools, that’s unfortunate. ... I’m very happy, and grateful [about the otherwise good reception and popularity of the book], and I stand by the massively unerotic blow job” ([johngreenbooks.com/alaska-questions/](http://johngreenbooks.com/alaska-questions/)). On the banning of *The Fault in Our Stars* owing to the fact it deals with death of teenagers, he remarks rather sarcastically that

I am happy because apparently young people in Riverside, California will never witness or experience mortality since they won’t be reading my book, which is great for them. But I am also sad because I was really hoping I would be able to introduce the idea that human beings die to the children of Riverside, California and thereby crush their dreams of immortality. (John Green on [fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com](http://fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com))

This shows that Green believes his books’ contents are appropriate for children and teenagers even when they deal with sexual and morbid themes, and I would wholeheartedly agree.

The popularity of the books shows also in the two movie adaptations that have been made. *The Fault in Our Stars* became a film in 2014 and was a success, having won several awards and doing well in the box office. The film adaptation of *Paper Towns* premiered in 2015, and even if it did not reach the popularity of the preceding movie, it did fairly well and John Green has expressed his full support of the film ([fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com](http://fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com)).

### 1.3 Critical background

John Green is a very recent author and therefore his works have not yet been that widely studied. I rely on internet sources for autobiographical information and book reviews.

To my surprise there are rather few literary studies that focus on character and characterisation, let alone on specifically female characterisation. I make use of Jonathan Culpeper’s *Language and Characterisation – People in Plays and Other Texts* (2001), even though it analyses plays rather than prose. Culpeper’s study gives a wide description of character from the points of views of both reader and text, and to some extent the author. His book also has many sociological and psychological details relating to categorising people and finding information about characters from the text. Although Culpeper discusses Baruch Hochman’s *Character in Literature*



(1985), I rely on the original work as well, since it at times gives simpler and more literature oriented answers for what character is and how it has been interpreted. Hochman's literary history about character proved rather useful in my understanding of character. To deepen my view of character and its importance I also use Blakey Vermeule's study *Why Do We Care about Literary Characters?* in which she makes many interesting correlations between real and fictional characters and gives a plethora of examples from literature, history and her own experience.

In relation to narration I apply theory from Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan's *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* to find out how narration affects our reading of character. Rimmon-Kenan makes many of the same points as Hochman does, and to some extent they rely on similar sources, and she also makes rather clear points about character and how it is constructed from the text. To supplement Rimmon-Kenan's views on focalisation I also use the article "Perspectivization and Focalization: Two Concepts—One Meaning? An Attempt at Conceptual Differentiation" (2009) from Tatjana Jesch and Malte Stein.

From the field of feminist criticism I have read a few works, only to find that I am mainly using a few of them. These include *Feminist Readings/Feminists Reading* by Sara Mills, Lynne Pearce, Sue Spaul and Elaine Millard, from which I focus on Sara Mills' article on "Authentic Realism". I discuss how male authors create female characters, what the role of female characters is – and what should it be – and how female characters are to be viewed. In fact, I do find John Green to be a feminist writer in a sense: he recommends books from both male and female writers on Twitter and has co-operated in writing with authors from both genders. He also attempts to break a female character stereotype by having the male characters misinterpret the girl as larger-than-life and then revealing their absolute normality and complexity, and discussing it explicitly in some parts. And in my personal opinion, he manages to write very well from the point of view of a sixteen-year-old girl and making it sound authentic instead of it being clichéd or unrealistic.

I must admit that I have a lot of issues with feminist literary theory, and was disappointed to find it didn't answer most of the questions I asked, especially regarding female characters. I also disagree with many of the main theorists and felt that the arguments were outdated. I did however find a more contemporary article from Cheryl Lange titled "Men and Women Writing Women: The Female Perspective and Feminism in U.S. Novels and African Novels in French by Male and Female Authors" (2008), which made good use of also classical feminist theorists. I also borrow from the field of feminist film theory the term *male gaze* from Laura Mulvey's article "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema" (in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. 1999) in an attempt to connect that with a form of focalising which is particularly patriarchal.

A term I refer to quite often is the “manic pixie dream girl”, which was coined by Nathan Rabin in his Avclub.com review on the movie *Elizabethtown*. According to Rabin, the manic pixie dream girl exists “exists solely in the fevered imaginations of sensitive writer-directors to teach broodingly soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures” (Rabin 2007). Rabin states apologetically in a later article that “The trope of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is a fundamentally sexist one, since it makes women seem less like autonomous, independent entities than appealing props to help mopey, sad white men self-actualize.” (Rabin 2014). He also expresses that the term got out of control:

I coined the phrase to call out cultural sexism and to make it harder for male writers to posit reductive, condescending male fantasies of ideal women as realistic characters. But I looked on queasily as the phrase was increasingly accused of being sexist itself. ... I’m sorry for creating this unstoppable monster. Seven years after I typed that fateful phrase, I’d like to join Kazan and Green in calling for the death of the “Patriarchal Lie” of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope. ... Let’s all try to write better, more nuanced and multidimensional female characters: women with rich inner lives and complicated emotions and total autonomy, who might strum ukuleles or dance in the rain even when there are no men around to marvel at their free-spiritedness. But in the meantime, Manic Pixies, it’s time to put you to rest. (Rabin 2014)

Even though the creator of the term feels like it should not be further used and is right in his plea for more nuanced female characters that exist also outside the range of the male gaze, I will discuss why some of Green’s characters have been claimed of being manic pixie.

For theory on stereotyping I use Michael Pickering’s *Stereotyping – the Politics of Representation* (2001). It deals with many aspects of stereotypes and from those the most relevant themes to my thesis are gender, racism and the overall discussion about stereotyping and the upholding of the so called “normal”. Unfortunately, the book does not really discuss stereotyping that has to do with sexual minorities or patriarchal views of the feminine and masculine.

## 2 The main female characters

The existence of character is not to be considered self-evident: Hochman points out that there have been many cases made against character (Hochman 13), from New Critics' claims that "imaginary people were not relevant to literature" (Hochman 15) to the structuralist-formalist view of character as a mere necessity for the plot (Hochman 20-21). However, Hochman defends character by saying that "Yet whatever the problems of conceptualizing and interpreting character, literary characters are generated by the texts in which they subsist and participate in whatever reality literature itself generates and participates in, even in works that dismantle themselves before our very eyes" (Hochman 30). Vermeule goes as far as to consider all people whom she has never met and will never meet fictional characters, including for example celebrities (xi), which I do not wholeheartedly agree with, since it is not only about how much you know about the character, but about what you know. Categorising someone as fictional has an element of knowing whether something is real or not: I know a certain celebrity is real, I know a certain character is fictional. Vermeule does however have a point when she claims that characters can be used for sorting our own moral problems and for practicing emotional situations (xii). I find this particularly applicable, when the readers are young people, who are still finding their own moral point of view and who are facing new situations and new emotions almost daily. For a child or a teenager – and for an adult too – a book can be a safe environment to learn about unfamiliar events and characteristics. Fictional characters can help with self-reflection and with reflecting on relationships with other people. For example, being able to recognise a harmful relationship in a book may come to use in recognising one in real life. Going through the characters feelings and empathising with them allows the reader to also feel negative feelings in a safe way.

Rimmon-Kenan also presents the idea, that the mimetic nature of characters – that they imitate reality – can be combined with characters being part of a design (33). I agree wholeheartedly, since I don't see why the reader would have trouble understanding the character both as a creation and as a person. No matter how character is viewed, I would argue most people nowadays accept its existence and importance to the text. John Green has said that he builds his books mainly on the characters:

My novels are not particularly well-plotted, and they don't usually have high concepts or anything, so I'm particularly dependent upon characters. I guess for me character and theme are inextricable. (In an ideal world, plot would be, too, and it would all emerge for me simultaneously, but that doesn't usually happen.) So I start with people and the questions they make me wonder about. In *TFIOS*, for instance, the person was Hazel, and the question was

what meaning can be found in a short life if you don't imagine suffering as noble or transcendent. In *Paper Towns*, the person was Quentin, and the question was, What are the real-life repercussions of imagining others two-dimensionally, of dehumanizing them by viewing them as more than human? And then I have to make up a plot to try to keep people interested while I think about those people and the questions they raise for me. :) (John Green 4 reddit.com)

Green's opinion therefore is, that the plot is a way to present the characters and through them the themes of the book. Green attests to the importance of character and the questions surrounding them, and I agree that those are the elements in his books that are most memorable. But liking a character does not necessarily make them a good character, and therefore it is important to look at how those characters are built and presented. Even though the reader knows that a character is fictional, it is perhaps easier to empathise with a character that is authentic, since then the character can be compared to real-life people and given characteristics from those known people. Looking at Green's characters critically is needed to see whether they are built on stereotypes or whether they are authentic characters that are rounded enough to be good representation and perhaps even "good", rounded and interesting characters.

In Green's books the characters are going through many new and life changing events, both the males and the females. The four main female characters whom I focus on are Alaska Young, Lindsey Lee Wells, Margo Roth Spiegelman and Hazel Grace Lancaster. I will later discuss the male characters and the minor characters in more detail, but in this chapter they are mostly in relation to the main female characters.

## 2.1 Narration and focalisation

Focalisation is a part of narration, where the narration focuses on a certain character. The term *focalization* was first introduced by Gérard Genette, but according to Tatjana Jesch and Malte Stein (Jesch and Stein) Rimmon-Kenan's definition is "representative of the prevailing use of the term" (62–63). The difference between the two uses of the term is that Genette differentiates between non-restricted and restricted regulation of information (i.e. there is either zero-focalisation or focalisation) and divides restricted information further to external focalisation (narrator's perspective) and internal focalisation (agent's perspective) (Jesch and Stein 62). Rimmon-Kenan, however, "consistently uses the term focalization as a synonym for perception" or perspective

(Jesch and Stein 63). I use it in the same way as Rimmon-Kenan has defined, since I do not find it necessary to define it further.

There is also a distinction between focaliser and the focalised: focaliser is the subject who perceives and focalised is the object being perceived (Rimmon-Kenan 74). In Green's novels the focalizer is in three cases a boy, and therefore the girls are mostly focalised. This means that most of the information the reader is given about the females comes through the male character and therefore his attitudes, worldviews and feelings, making it more unreliable as an indicator of what the focalised character is like.

In the four novels, there is first-person narration in three books, *An Abundance of Katherines* being the exception with a third-person narrator, who employs the male protagonist as focaliser. The three books have a homodiegetic narrator, which means the narrator participates in the story (Rimmon-Kenan 95), whereas it is not as simple in the case of *An Abundance of Katherines*: it is not made clear, who the narrator is and whether it could even be Colin himself after he has learned how to tell a good story. If it is an outside narrator who limits his storytelling and information to things related to Colin, it would be heterodiegetic, but if it was Colin himself it would be homodiegetic. Two of the books have a male first person narrator, whereas in *The Fault in Our Stars* the narrator is female. Thus, three of the books focus on the emotions and thoughts of the male protagonist, and the female characters are viewed through their perspective. Therefore, it is reasonable to question how reliable the descriptions about female characters are. In all three of the male-centred books, there is infatuation with and attraction to the main female characters. Indeed, Rimmon-Kenan names personal involvement as one source of unreliability in a narrator, the other two being narrator's limited knowledge and their problematic value-scheme (100). Leaving the value-scheme aside, I do find that the narrators in Green's books have limited knowledge about other characters and events, which makes their impressions of them less reliable. I will discuss this unreliability and the male characters in more detail in 3.1.

The limited knowledge comes in part from the fact that John Green plays with gender stereotypes and the male protagonists are affected by this in their viewing of the opposite gender. In fact, one of the points John Green has emphasised especially about *Looking for Alaska* and *Paper Towns* is that the male protagonists fail to see Alaska and Margo as ordinary people, and make them out to be something else, something that suits them better. This can be seen in the way they choose to focus on the female characters in an almost obsessive way. Of course, in real life as well, it is impossible to know everything about another person, and we are as affected by our own perspective as John Green's literary characters are. What matters most is the understanding of such limitations

and thereby being able to grow as a person – a story arch presented especially in *Paper Towns*. Obsession and infatuation leave little room for complex imagining, not to mention realistic perception of another person.

In *Looking for Alaska*, Miles – or Pudge as he is mostly referred to in the book and as I shall be referring to him – is immediately infatuated with Alaska (14), wants to know all about her (21) and really wants to kiss her even though she has a boyfriend (54). And even when Alaska has been mean to him on several occasions, he still thinks the world of her, though he does note her unpredictability (75). Even when she is dead, Pudge is rather selfishly mourning not only her but the relationship they never had (151) and is angry at people outside of their group of friends for missing her. That is, he feels they did not even care about her (159) even though he does not really know how well anyone knew her. Pudge is even confronted about this selfishness by the Colonel (161) and later Takumi (185), and accused of only caring about the Alaska he imagined (165). However, he feels guilty about her death, since neither he nor the Colonel stopped her from driving drunk (139). In the end, Pudge realizes that him not knowing Alaska well enough to know whether it was a suicide or not will not make his feelings any lesser (218). He also believes that he will forgive her for dying – which is rather narcissistic – and she will forgive her for being a poor friend for her (221). In *Looking for Alaska*, Pudge is interested in Alaska, but his efforts to get to know her and understand her are futile, since he is mostly interested in her in relation to himself. Even if he finally understands that he didn't know her that well, he still selfishly assumes to know her thoughts.

In relation to Pudge not accepting other people's mourning over Alaska's death, I must comment on *The Fault in Our Stars*, since there are similarities. When Augustus dies, Hazel goes on his wall page (assumably Facebook or something similar) to see what people have commented (264). She seems upset at seeing condolences from people Augustus never even mentioned, and she is also angry because none of the people have even attempted to contact or visit Augustus, but praise him now after his death (264). She is also upset because the messages "implied the immortality of those left behind: You will live forever in my memory, because I will live forever!" (264) Even though her point about people not even visiting is valid, since she has spent enough time with him for the past months to know, she fails to see that other people are entitled to their grief and have known Augustus in different ways than she has, even if that has been some time ago. She realizes this herself as well, saying that she knows they are really sad and that she is really just mad at the universe and at friends appearing when you do not need them anymore (266). Similarly to Pudge imagining Alaska's feelings, Hazel also imagines how Augustus would react to those

messages: by ridicule and saying that “It’s almost as if the way you imagine my dead self says more about you than it says about either the person I was or the whatever I am now” (265). This is also selfish in the sense that she assumes Augustus would agree with her. However, I would argue that Hazel knows Augustus better than Pudge knows Alaska, since the previous pair has had more dialogue compared to Pudge’s internal monologue musings of Alaska. Hazel also realises she has not imagined Peter Van Houten, the author of her favourite book, complexly enough: he was not just a mean drunk, as they had assumed from his behaviour – though he is mean and drunk – but he was upset because Hazel reminded him of his daughter who died of cancer (285). Hazel is more conscious of her faults in perceiving other people than Pudge is, which makes her feel less selfish and more thoughtful in comparison.

Failures in viewing other people are dealt with most obviously in *Paper Towns*. The main character Quentin has been fascinated with Margo ever since they were children and has thought of her as the most wonderful person ever since. When Margo disappears after their significant night of revenge, Quentin is convinced that she wants to be found and fantasises of bringing her home just in time for prom (133). With immense luck, he manages to put together the various clues Margo has left – some intentionally and others not – and goes on a life changing road trip with his friends to find her (236, 243–281). When they do, she explains that she never wanted to return (295) and she is upset that Quentin “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 that I would strip my clothes off and beg you to ravage my body” and accuses of Quentin only liking the idea of her (284–285). Quentin however has thought of this a few times “What a treacherous thing it is to believe that a person is more than a person” (282) and they manage to make up and depart on friendly terms (305). Quentin’s journey to understanding Margo ends in a better realisation than that of Pudge’s, because Margo herself gets to comment on his obsession and misconceptions.

Both Pudge and Quentin – and even Hazel – are consciously dealing with the idea of limited knowledge, which I think is a credit to their character. But, this does not mean that all readers come to understand the issue of limited imagining of another character, and might end up only focusing on the romanticising. This can lead to interpreting the characters as flawless and romantic or as failed flat characters, such as the manic pixie dream girl.

Since the narration never really has more than one focalizer character, it is not possible for the reader to know what the focalised girls really think. There are however ways for non-focalising characters to express themselves in the text, such as their appearance, their actions, their

possessions and their dialogue, although these too are mostly looked at through the main character's perspective.

## 2.2 Description of physical appearance

From those aspects that show something about a focalised character, physical appearance comes across undoubtedly in most texts. In *Language and Characterisation* Culpeper states that "there is a strong body of evidence to support the idea that people attribute positive qualities to physically attractive people and negative qualities to unattractive people" and people associate certain stereotypical characteristics with certain physical features, such as fatness showing self-indulgence (224). I would disagree in relation to Green's books, since beauty can be deceptive: Alaska and Margo are described as stunningly beautiful, but both can be rather mean and struggle with feelings of depression. Lindsey on the other hand, is made out to be plain and turns more beautiful as the story goes on and Colin learns more about her. But again, her appearance does not actually change but Colin's feelings do, making his perception favourably skewed.

Having the males look at the females, especially when they do so in a romantic way, brings to my mind the term *male gaze*, as used by Laura Mulvey in relation to how female characters are viewed in movies in the article "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema" (in *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*, 1999). Although I am not particularly fond of the psychoanalytic theory and film is not the same as literature, I find the term and its definition useful: "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 837). This goes well with how the male characters in Green's books think they know the female character better and project their own hopes and views on them. Mulvey also presents that women can function as erotic objects for both the character and the spectator, in my interpretation thus the reader (838). In Green's novels there is a clear male focalisation and the males do project their phantasies on the females, but I think the eroticism is not very strongly directed at the reader, since the books do somewhat problematize the way the main characters view their love interests. This problematisation may not be as clear to all readers and they might view the females in a very similar way to the male characters, which can be very objectifying.

One of the points I noticed when reading *An Abundance of Katherines* is that even though the male minor characters are also described by their physical qualities – Colin and Hassan agree to call Chase "Jeans Are Too Tight" and Fulton "Short One Chewing Tobacco", the narrator describes Lindsey's boyfriend as "a hulking mass of muscle" (51) – the girls' physical features are



emphasised and it is seemingly important to know whether they are attractive or not. Most of the comments on physical features happen in narration, instead of dialogue. When Lindsey Lee Wells is introduced readers learn about her appearance, which is a natural thing to notice first in a new person. However, she is expressly not pretty, but interesting looking and has “puffy cheeks and too-long nose” (31). This aspect of attractiveness is apparent again when the character of Katrina is introduced: she has a tight top and “gigantic gazoombas” and her appearance in general is Colin’s “least favorite way of being hot” (52). Marie, with whom Colin was supposed to go on a date in the past, was someone who “everyone agreed was the most attractive individual in American history” (116) and was “the hottest girl he had ever, or would ever, come across” (114). Her beauty is used to emphasise how important Katherine 19 is to Colin, since he misses a date with the oh-so-hot Marie just to tutor Katherine in French (116). These all appear in narration, which focalises on Colin’s perspective and opinions.

Colin finds Lindsey to be more beautiful when she arrives with her brown hair tied in a ponytail and in pyjamas and most importantly without make-up – which Colin prefers (98). At another point when Lindsey is wearing no make-up, and this to Colin is “as if she knew what he liked” (137), as the narration focalises on his opinion. This is rather objectifying from Colin in the sense that he is assuming that she would want to cater to his preferences. The main male characters do not completely sexualise or objectify Lindsey, as can be seen when Hassan tells Colin that Lindsey’s boyfriend gave the impression that he is always grabbing her ass, to which both Hassan and Colin comment rather innocently that they have not even noticed her backside (111). Colin is not overly poetic about her appearance, unlike many other of Green’s male characters, but describes Lindsey’s smile to be “like bright white firecrackers in a starless sky” (120) and “inimitable” (127). However, I find it curious that when Colin hits his head, Lindsey has to take her shirt off because Hassan feels insecure about his body. Lindsey is exposed and Colin makes a joke about saving taking off clothes for the second date (34). Lindsey responds with “Right, perv”, but is smiling (34). Colin also jokes with Hassan about losing his glasses just when there was a girl without a shirt present. This event is used maybe as a way of building sexual tension, but also as a bridge to Colin’s memories of different Katherines with different bras. All in all, I think Lindsey taking off her shirt is somewhat unnecessary and does result in the boys sexualising her.

Lindsey’s appearance is an important topic for her: she has struggled with being called ugly, being likened to a dog, and even receiving dog food in a Valentine’s present (149). She has gone through a phase of looking like a goth after she got sick of feeling ugly and being simply different from everyone in the small town made it easier (67). She has found her confidence, and after her

goth phase she decided to become cool and popular and succeeds in her imitation of cool kids (67), only to realize that she does not need to be cool. In relation to clothes, Culpeper points out that they are a less static feature of a character, since the character has control over them (Culpeper, 225). Since they are a conscious decision, they can show the character's personality in a way. In Lindsey's case, they show her attempts at either not fitting in or fitting in.

What I find positive is that Green does not have Colin make her feel beautiful or find her confidence: she does that herself. When Colin tells the story of all the 19 Katherines, he describes the appearance of some Katherines and the importance of some of them being beautiful is emphasised (203–207). Lindsey comments on Colin's appearance only a few times: she compliments his eyes (122) and makes a joke about his bony shoulders (211). The difference of *An Abundance of Katherines* compared to the other books is that some of the remarks about appearance are made by the narrator – who cannot be said with absolute certainty to be Colin, even if it is focalised by him – so they might not resonate so strongly as the opinion of the main character, as in the other novels.

In *Looking for Alaska* Pudge's first impression of Alaska immediately focuses on her attractiveness: “the hottest girl in all of human history was standing before me in cutoff jeans and a peach tank top” (14). Pudge is stunned by the force of her voice and notes that it comes from a “petite (but God, curvy) girl” (15). He gives great significance to the way she looks, and speaks almost reverently of her appearance at length:

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, when the burning cherry of the cigarette washed her face in pale red light. But even in the dark, I could see her – 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 breasts straining against her tight tank top, her curved legs swinging back and forth beneath the swing, flip-flops dangling from her electric-blue-painted toes. (19)

Pudge often thinks in a rather poetic way, and this is emphasised in his viewing of her: for him, she is a spectacle. At many points, there is a feeling of pretentiousness in his overly romantic or intellectual way of seeing things. He is also not very interested in her mental qualities, since when she is telling him about a quote that is very important to her, he is contemplating on the curviness of her body:

It was right then, between when I asked about the labyrinth and when she answered me, that I realized the importance of curves, of the thousand places where girl's bodies ease from one place to another, from arc of the foot to ankle to calf, from calf to hip to waist to breast to neck to ski-slope nose to forehead to shoulder to the concave arch of the back to the butt to the etc. (19)

Alaska is sharing something personal and something that would require thoughtful thinking, but all Pudge can think of is her physique. Alaska's curves are mentioned again, when Pudge and Alaska are digging for a buried wine bottle (80). The side characters' appearances are not given much special attention. The Colonel notes that Lara has big breasts (59), but Alaska gets angry at him for objectifying women (60). Other mentions of appearance are rather casual: it is mentioned what the Colonel's (ex)girlfriend looks like, but no emphasis is given on whether she is highly attractive.

Alaska's body is also associated with death. When Pudge learns of her death, he vomits and thinks of her dead cold mouth (140) and the contrast to the warmth of her when they kissed (144). He imagines her naked on the coroner's table, which turns into the memory of kissing her (141). He also has a nightmare of her floating naked over him and then turning into the dead version of her and crushing him with her cold rotting body (147–148). Pudge is traumatized by her death and confused by his own hopes and lust for Alaska. The image of her body, which he has finally touched – although fully clothed – and the memory of her lips from their first kiss has become twisted into a representation of her as dead (130–131). He's reactions are again a representation of his teenage ego or even narcissism: Alaska is dead, and he is focusing on how his fantasy of her body is ruined. It is understandable that he is shocked and traumatised, but his inability to understand that others are also hurting because of Alaska's death and his selfish fascination with her – especially her body – makes him a little less sympathetic.

In *Paper Towns* Quentin and Margo have been neighbours since they were two. As readers, we learn from Quentin that he has regarded Margo as “the most fantastically gorgeous creature that God had ever created” at least from the age of nine (4). There is a childlike innocence in the nine-year-old Quentin's admiration of her dragon-themed shirt. The next time Margo's appearance is dealt with is when they are older and at school. Quentin's attention is drawn to her. He describes her clothes and points out that he can see her collarbone (13). As he watches her laugh, he sees “her shoulders bent forward, her big eyes crinkling at their corners, her mouth open wide” (13). Her mouth is open again when he walks past her, the vision “a photographic series entitled *Perfection Stands Still While Mortals Walk Past*. ... She couldn't seem to close her mouth” (14). Her smile is

mentioned many times in the novel, but also in context where Quentin is not viewing her and thinking of her appearance.

When Margo comes to Quentin the night she takes her revenge on those who have wronged her, the most important thing about her appearance is her blue eyes and the odd black face paint and outfit (25). Quentin does regard her face: “Her cheekbones triangulating into her chin, her pitch-black lips barely turned to a smile” (26). She uses her charm to get out of trouble at Wal-Mart when she uses an air horn, and the employee cannot stop looking at her (34) and another minor character comments that “She was hot, huh?” (204). Margo has an appealing effect on many men, since also SeaWorld employee calls her pretty while rudely staring at her breasts through her wet shirt (76). Margo does call him a “perv” for it (77) and as a reader I felt that the books disapproved of such behaviour and comments. Later on, when Ben and Radar assume that Quentin spending the night with Margo meant sexual intercourse, they joke about her breasts in a rude and childish way and Quentin mildly disapproves (88–89).

During the night of the revenge, Margo’s figure is described as curvy and made of soft edges (44–45). There is actually a conversation between Margo and Quentin about her body: Margo says Lacey was always commenting on her appearance and asks Quentin if he considers her fat. Quentin thinks to himself that her butt is spectacular and that:

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. In the end, you could not say that Margo Roth Spiegelman was fat, or that she was skinny, any more than you can say that the Eiffel Tower is or is not lonely. Margo’s beauty was a kind of sealed vessel of perfection – uncracked and uncrackable. (50)

This way of thinking could be seen as a way of Quentin defending himself and giving himself permission to look at her. Margo also jokes at one point about shaving her legs just for the chance reason that someone might have to suck snake venom from her ankle, which Quentin finally does (75). But there is something beyond her looks that makes her attractive: she is “awesome” in the literal sense of the word (14). It is not so much her looks or even her personality, but her confidence and the ability to seem mysterious, whimsical and exciting that make her attractive to people. Still, there is definitely a lot of focus on Margo’s attractiveness and her body, and Quentin is – rather similarly to Pudge – rather poetic in his view of her body. However, at the same time he is objectifying her and making her body seem like the most important aspect of her.

Lacey, who is a friend of Hazel's and later Quentin's as well, is made out to be extremely attractive as can be seen from the way Quentin dramatically describes the way she approaches them:

Denim miniskirt. Tight white T-shirt. Scooped neck. Extraordinarily olive skin. Legs that make you care about legs. Perfectly coiffed curly brown hair. A laminated button reading ME FOR PROM QUEEN. Lacey Pemberton. Walking toward us. (118)

She is desirable and so beautiful she "could make you forget about a lot of things" (183), and ends up being the girlfriend of Ben, Quentin's friend. Radar's girlfriend is Angela, who Quentin says is "a pretty African-American girl with spiky little dreads" (19) and who is also "awesome" (20). Otherwise, there is not a particularly high emphasis on the attractiveness of the characters.

*The Fault in Our Stars* is different in the sense that it is focalised by Hazel and we learn of Hazel's appearance first from herself. She is critical of herself, since the cancer and the treatment for it has changed her and made her feel unattractive: she has lost weight and her clothes sag on her, her hair is short and unbrushed, her cheeks are puffed from medical treatment (9). She pays attention to herself because Augustus is staring at her and she thinks he is extremely attractive (10). When Augustus calls her beautiful, she starts to say that she is not (16) and later disagrees with Augustus' opinion of her looking like Natalie Portman (35). Her cancer has changed her view of herself, as can be deduced when she says that illness repulses people (36). She is relieved when she hears that Augustus did not see her in hospital condition, when she had an issue with her lungs (109, 110). When their friend Isaac has lost his eyesight, she jokes that she has suddenly become "really hot" (131), implying she does not feel she actually is desirable. Augustus often compliments her (56) and calls her hot (123), gorgeous (160) and sexy (204), and he manages to sound humorous and sincere at the same time. She does make an effort to look good when she goes out with Augustus (83) and she mentions what she is wearing on several occasions (159, 178, 270). The one occasion when she likes her "cancer-ruined" body is when they are kissing for the first time in the Anne Frank house (203).

Hazel comments on Augustus' appearance on many occasions throughout the book. She makes it clear from the very start that she is attracted to him (9), turned on by him (17) and even his voice is "low, smoky, and dead sexy" (11). Even though Augustus makes jokes about his good looks (251), he is still insecure about his leg when he and Hazel are about to have intercourse (206). The appearance of others is not much discussed. Isaac is described in relation to his eyes, since he has a glass eye and eye glasses that make his eyes look huge, owing to cancer (6). A minor

character is also described in relation to her sickness (130), and this shows that Hazel looks at bodies often from a cancer patient's point of view, even if she is able to appreciate Augustus' appearance.

What is to be made of these details is that the gender of the narrator affects the way a person of the opposite gender is described. *An Abundance of Katherines* shows a rather appearance-focused view of the female characters, particularly since that is a large part of Lindsey's story. In *Looking for Alaska* Pudge is overly fixated on Alaska's appearance, because he romanticises her – both in the way of adoring her and by being traumatized over her death. *Paper Towns* shows a similar fixation on Margo's appearance but from even from others than the main character, some of whom highly sexualize her. *Fault in Our Stars* has Hazel ogling Augustus and viewing him in a sexual way, but she also shows her own insecurity about her appearance in a way none of the other narrations do. John Green makes use of gender stereotypes in the sense that the sexual attraction between the teenage characters is made rather clear and the characters rather often comply to gender normative behavior, such as boys being the ones to usually joke about sex or Lindsey being overly girly when her boyfriend is around.

This focus on the girls' attractiveness has also led to questions about how the author himself views teenage girls. Green responded to a criticism about the attention paid to the girl's physique in the books as follows:

Question: ...she[Anonymous person's friend] seems to think it's you perving on girls, not Pudge etc... What would you say to her?

Answer: Look, both the reader and the writer have a job when it comes to books. The writer's job is to give the reader some words to work with. The reader's job is to make the best book s/he possibly can using those words. Not to put too fine a point on it, but: If your friend cannot separate fiction from its author, then she's not doing her job as a reader. This whole idea that authors who write about teenagers have some kind of romanticfixation on teenagers is really weird to me. No one ever accused Judy Blume of perving on teenagers, but it happens to male authors frequently. So, yeah, let me just say this: Nothing personal, but I find high school students—all of them—completely and overwhelmingly unhot. (Green 13.08.2012 [onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com](http://onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com))

As can be seen, Green claims that if the reader thinks he is fixated on teenage girls, they have failed in understanding narration. I rather agree with Green, since authors wouldn't be able to write about any topics, if they were always assumed to think exactly like their characters. I must however

concede, that as authors often use their own experience as inspiration, they also put their own opinions and worldviews in their works – intentionally or unintentionally.

In all Green’s books attractiveness plays a role, which is natural, since they are about teenagers and about romance. When a character is infatuated with someone, it is natural to show interest in their appearance. However, as can be seen for example from Colin’s growing attraction to Lindsey when he gets to know her or from Pudge’s and Quentin’s revelations about not knowing a person deeply enough, looks are just a small part of a person: personality is what matters more, and knowing someone’s personality is not as easy as seeing their appearance.

### 2.3 Showing personality

Since a character is much more than their appearance, the ways in which personality is shown in the text are important to discuss. According to Rimmon-Kenan, “in the story character is a construct, put together by the reader from various indications dispersed throughout the text” (36). These indications are defined as various kinds of personality trait, which Rimmon-Kenan defines by quoting Chatman’s definition: a “relatively stable or abiding personal quality” (37). These traits, alongside physical traits, can be seen for example when the narrator shows a character’s material possession or when a character acts in a certain way. Characters also show personality in dialogue, which I will discuss here in relation to lines that show personality but are not directly self-presentation, which is discussed later in 2.4. All these traits together work to make a character more “round” than “flat”, concepts which both Culpeper and Rimmon-Kenan discuss to some detail. Rimmon-Kenan defines flat characters as caricatures which have few traits and do not develop much during the story (40). A round character is unsurprisingly the opposite: they have many qualities and develop in the course of the action (Rimmon-Kenan 40). Culpeper connects this with schemas, which are nearly synonymous to stereotypes, and says that “one can describe flat characters as typically schema reinforcing and round characters as typically schema refreshing” (95), meaning that underdeveloped characters reinforce the reader’s stereotypical view, whereas a well written character can change that stereotype. Although Q and Margo have been said to be “types, not fully dimensional characters” by a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer (ic.galegroup.com), I would argue that most of John Green’s characters are fairly rounded, since they usually have a few qualities to them and, more often than not, they develop.

Culpeper also discusses how readers interpret characters. He sums up his main findings by listing seven points from his pilot study (109). Firstly, he points that “knowledge developed for

real-life people is used in the perception of characters” (109), showing that the readers experiences affect the way they read character and that characters are perhaps automatically treated similarly to real-life people. Readers also use “contextually oriented concepts, such as social roles and group membership (and even appearance, health and emotional state)” (109–110) in inferring character. This would mean that the fact that Hazel is a cancer patient evokes the idea of what the social function of a cancer patient is. These roles can however be fluid and multiple (76). According to Culpeper, differing interpretations of character may be caused by different schemata about for example gender (110). Culpeper makes two points that I find particularly interesting. First, that “Impressions of character are dynamic and may change over time” (110). Impressions of characters change not only as the story goes on, but also as the reader changes between readings. Looking at Green’s characters during the first reading differs from the way they present themselves to the reader on a second reading. This is because the reader’s expectations about the characters are different and because the reader has new information (both from reading the book and from the changes in their real life) to base their interpretations on. The second important point I wish to emphasize from Culpeper is that “The perception of a particular character is coloured by the context that character is perceived in. This context includes impressions of other characters” (110). In John Green’s books the context of the female characters is often in relation to the male protagonist – as is perhaps natural, since that is also how we look at the people in our lives: this person is my mother, this one my friend and so on. What makes the context narrower is infatuation and the deliberate discussion on not seeing others complexly enough. What I mean by this is that the reader is forced to view the characters mainly in the context the main characters assign to them. This is sometimes enforced or contradicted by other characters’ impressions.

Culpeper’s idea of personal categories is my main theory in this chapter. These include “knowledge about people’s preferences and interests (e.g. likes Chinese food), habits (e.g. late for appointments), traits (e.g. extrovert), and goals (e.g. to seduce somebody)” (75). Other categories he gives are social role categories and group membership categories. Social roles include social functions, such as kinship, occupation and relational roles (76) whereas group membership means for example sex, race, class, age, nationality and religion (76). What can be said of the female main characters is that they are all members of the groups “female” and “teenager”. Other groups they have in common include “American” and “middle class”. I discuss race and religion in chapter 4.1. Social roles the girls have in common are “daughter” and “love interest”.

Alaska’s room shows that she is a book lover (15), and from the fact that the boys are going there to get cigarettes, it is obvious that she is not one to follow rules (14-15). Her smoking also



shows a lack of care for her own wellbeing, which is emphasized when she says she smokes to die (44). She is said to hate authority figures (167). She also has a sense of humour, since she is immediately telling Chip, also nicknamed the Colonel, a story of how a guy “honked” her boob (15) and she makes fun of Pudge’s baggy shorts (15). She expresses a dislike for the patriarchy a few times, as when they are eating thanksgiving dinner at the Colonel’s house and Pudge reports she said that “it was sexist to leave the cooking to the women, but better to have good sexist food than crappy boy-prepared food” (91). This shows also how she is a bit contradictory: even if she thinks sexism is problematic, she still views the boys in a very patriarchal way. Alaska loves metaphors (59) and there is reason to believe she is intentionally vague at times, as when Pudge refers to her odd story about going to the zoo as “another example of her furthering her own mysteriousness” (115). Based on her behaviour and the comments others make on her, she is very moody: she can bubble over with energy and silliness and then turn rather cold the next second (27). She also consumes large amounts of alcohol and uses it to deal with her issues, and it wouldn’t be too far off to say that she has a drinking problem. We also learn from the Colonel that she has been unfaithful in relationships (21), showing that she is not completely trustworthy and that her flirtatious nature does lead to consequences. Some of the information we learn about her is problematic, since it is affected by Pudge’s limited perspective. After hearing about the death of Alaska’s mother Pudge imagines the scene of Alaska not being able to save her mother (120), but this is not the truth: he imagines it with very little knowledge about how Alaska actually felt. He also starts making assumptions about how the death of her mother affected her behaviour and made her impulsive (120), even though he obviously cannot know. However, Alaska is impulsive, as can be seen from when they do a prank, and Alaska decides to disregard their plan and sends progress reports to some Weekday Warriors parents, saying their failing classes (108–109). I would say many personal categories about Alaska are shown, but the overall picture about her character remains as mysterious as she attempts to be. It is hard to give names to all the traits shown, but I personally would categorise her with at least “book lover”, “problematic alcohol consumption”, “impulsive” and “extrovert”, extrovert here meaning mostly sociable and not necessarily someone who also lets people close to her. I also think a trait that largely defines her is her guilt about not being able to save her mother: she talks about her mother on a few occasions, but her death is something she discusses only when she is drunk and they’re playing a game (119). Alaska’s character stays quite the same during the book, although her last act is most dramatic and impulsive. She does not in my opinion grow that much, Pudge only learns a bit more about her.

Lindsey is first made out to be a not “worthwhile soul” from the focalised perspective of Colin since she is reading a gossip magazine. She is however a paramedic in training and a highly intelligent person, as can be seen from her vast knowledge (34, 42). She is extremely girly and pretending to be a bit dumber than she is when she is with her boyfriend (53). This shows, as Hassan mentions, that she seems to be shifting personality when she is with different people (86). This combined with her having intentionally changed her appearance and personality to either stand out or to fit in (67) shows that she is conscious of how appearance and behaviour are valued, even if they do not really say all about the person’s personality. Lindsey has in her room a bulletin board with pictures of her and her friends, but only recent ones where her style is the same as in present time (107), in order to keep the current social status. No other items are mentioned, but it is noted that the room is not pink – unlike nearly rest of the house (107). She also has a secret hide-out in a cave with a bottle of moonshine because it “adds ambience” (146), and Colin is the first person to go there with her (145–151). The cave also gives a personal aspect to Lindsey: she has a place where she can be on her own and be herself, unlike in her own room where she still keeps up the façade of being a popular girl. Green comments on Lindsey’s chameleoning by stating that

... the process of trying to live an authentic life is complicated, as Lindsey discovers. I think you hit at something important in your question, though, by linking worry and authenticity. Colin is super-annoying in a lot of ways, but one thing he can’t help but be is himself, and that is really attractive to Lindsey. And when you acknowledge that there is nothing repulsive or unforgivable or shameful about yourself, it becomes easier to be that authentic person and feel like you’re living a less performed life. (Green 06.08.2012  
onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com)

This comment feels accurate, since Lindsey has felt that her true self is disgusting and something she had to change. She however comes to realise that being popular did not make her feel like a real person (201). Part of being popular was dating a popular guy, and her relationship with The Other Colin is painted as rather shallow throughout the book, and it ends with The Other Colin cheating on Lindsey with her friend. Lindsey is of course upset, but also reflects that “I think I just realized that I don’t actually want to date an asshole” (188), showing that she is giving up on living according to other peoples rules. Lindsey is also defined by her relationship with her mother Hollis, who is her only family since her father left them when she was one (139). Hollis would like for Lindsey to go to college but Lindsey does not have such ambitions (56). Hollis and Lindsey banter with each other a lot in a way that shows familiarity and humour (54, 58, 74), but there are still secrets between them. Hollis has not told Lindsey that the tampon string factory they own, and that

is keeping the whole town of Gutshot alive, is failing (194-195). This is of course shocking to Lindsey, who has planned on staying in the town for the rest of her life. However, her feelings or future plans are not discussed, although the ending hints that she and Colin and Hassan are going on a road trip together. I think it is harder to find personal categories for Lindsey. She has a habit of biting her thumb when she is alone (e.g. 151), she is liked by the old people of the town (200), she knows how to shoot a gun (140), but her overall character is quite hard to describe. She fits in to the category of “bullied” but she is also makes an effort to be “a popular girl”. She is the kind of person who mirrors other people and their expectations of her, but still wishes to be herself. Her character does develop, as she realises that she can indeed be real.

From Quentin we learn that little Margo is brave and curious and approaches the dead body they find in a park, but Quentin draws her back (5–6). This bravery turns into self-confidence and the curiosity turns into a talent of getting into epic adventures: She is awesome, a legend “whose six-syllable name was often spoken in its entirety with a kind of quiet reverence” (14–15). She is also a person of action, as the revenge plot and the rumoured legends of her adventures show – even if not all those rumours are necessarily true. Margo keeps to herself much of the time, which is why though all know her, nobody really knows her. This can be seen when Margo’s room turns out to be a surprise to all: even her best friend Lacey does not know about her record collection (121). The music collection consists of many different artists and Quentin “could never have imagined her listening to all these old records” (112). Walt Whitman’s “A Song of Myself” has some meaning to her, since she has highlighted some of the lines in her book (116–117), and the book works later as a way of Quentin coming to realise how little he knows about Margo (173). According to Quentin, Margo’s room is “much neater than you’d expect Margo to be”, but also thinks Margo’s mother might have tidied up (111–112). These comments show that Quentin does not really know her that well, and even when he sees the room he still does not know what meanings each element has. He has categorised her to be messy, because she seems wild and carefree. To be fair to Quentin, it must be said that Lacey too, who was close friends with Margo, “had no idea who she really was. I honestly never thought of her as anything but my crazy beautiful friend who does all the crazy beautiful things” (200). The character’s comments on Margo do not show a lot about her actual character, which emphasizes the book’s theme of failing to see other people as complex: no one has bothered to deepen their view of her. Even her parents only see her as a nuisance. When Margo has run away, they change the locks because they are done with her antics (101). They also feel she has been walking over them and that she is self-centred (101). Margo’s relationship with her parents is not great, and she does not seem to get much support or understanding, besides the bare necessities.

The police assigned to Margo's missing says he knows her type: "—somebody – girl usually – got a free spirit, doesn't get on too good with her parents. These kinds, they're like tied-down helium balloons. They strain against the string and strain against it, and then something happens, and that string gets cut, and they just float away" (102). He makes it clear to Quentin that there are a lot of people who run away, and a lot of the times they don't come back, although Quentin is sure she will return (103). This image of her being a free spirit fits both with other people's ideas of her and her actions. Margo's preferences are shown a lot, for example music, books, her habit of random capitalization because "The rules of capitalization are so unfair to words in the middle" (32). But those preferences are made vague by the fact that they are presented without Margo: they cannot be interpreted by Quentin and the others. A lot of her personality is shown through her actions: she is great at coming up with plans, she is able to get herself out of difficult situations (76–77) and when she feels the life she has is not the kind of life she wants, she leaves it behind. This is her most defining quality: she is a person who does things, who is active. She speaks out against Quentin's ideas about her and thereby actively disallows being something others try to create (283-284).

Hazel is the wittiest of teenagers: she uses words like *hamartia* (19) and her ability to contemplate serious matters such as her own sickness and death and how it will affect others show maturity. She is taking literature classes and knows a lot about poetry. She does not want to be defined by cancer, but there is little choice when it affects her everyday life as much as it does: she needs to carry an oxygen tank and use an oxygen concentrator when she sleeps. Hazel is very disillusioned when it comes to her health, as can be seen from when she tells about her cancer and how it almost killed her once already and she knows her new medication only "resulted in a bit of purchased time" (24–26). She does however paint "the rosier possible picture" about her cancer treatment working when she first discusses it with Augustus, perhaps because she does not want to seem weak or pitiful (26). She also understates how the cancer is affecting her mental health: "My mother decided I was depressed, presumably because I rarely left the house, spent quite a lot of time in bed, read the same book over and over, ate infrequently, and devoted quite a bit of my abundant free time to thinking about death"(3). She is being humorous, and the reader knows that mothers may have the tendency to be overprotective of their children, but the fact that a person so close to Hazel thinks that she is depressed cannot be ignored. Even if Hazel claims to be fine, she may not be completely truthful about what her mental state is. We learn that she feels distanced from her former friends and is only in contact with Kaitlyn, to whom she does not really tell what's going on with her life (45). The combination of her illness and her thoughtful personality make her a person who thinks about others more than herself. She feels she wants to "minimize the number of deaths"

she is responsible for by being a vegetarian (28). This extends to the idea that she does not want to do normal “teenagery” and socializing, because there will be more people affected by her death, as can be seen when she talks to her parents: “I’m a grenade and at some point I’m going to blow up and I would like to minimize the casualties, okay” (99). That is of course not how her parents see her, but from Hazel’s perhaps depressed perspective she sees herself as harmful to others. From Hazel’s possessions that show her character, her clothes are mentioned a few times (9, 137, 159, 178, 270) and I believe the number is higher than the mention of the male narrators’ clothes in the other books. Her room is not described as much as Augustus’ is, which is natural considering that Augustus’ room is new information for Hazel. Her bed is one of her favourite places (48) and she has named the oxygen concentrator beside her bed Philip (39). These I think depict nicely, how she is reluctant to leave home and be sociable. The most important object that shows Hazel’s personality is her favourite book, *An Imperial Affliction*, which she feels is “my book, in the way my body was my body and my thoughts were my thoughts” (33–34). She does not feel that it is a “cancer book” even though its main character dies of cancer, because it does not tell the typical story of a patient finding goodness in humanity and leaving a legacy of raising money for cancer (48–50). Hazel explains in a letter Peter van Houten, the author of the book, that “As a three-year survivor of Stage IV cancer, I can tell you that you got everything right in *An Imperial Affliction*. Or at least you got me right” (69–70). What makes the book also important is that she decides to share it with Augustus, who feels like he has been given a special gift (66). The book is also vital to the plot, since it is the reason Hazel and Augustus go to the Netherlands. Hazel’s signs of personality are more evident than with the other female characters, because she is the narrator and capable of expressing her emotions and thoughts more directly. Hazel also grows as a character, since she becomes more active and discusses her problems with her family, instead of mulling alone with her thoughts. She also learns to see Augustus as a more complex person.

There are similarities between the four characters: all are rather intelligent and all are a love interest. Hazel, Margo and Alaska are all very interested in literature, whereas Lindsey is not very interested in it. They all have struggled in different ways. Alaska has a trauma through her mother’s death and her moody personality does not make things easy for her or for people around her. Lindsey has struggled with bullying and not being able to be herself. Margo, too, has never shown her true self to others and she has qualities that would suggest depression. Hazel, although she claims to be fine, might also be struggling with depression in addition to her physical illnesses, and she is worried about hurting other people when she dies. All four are also described to some extent in relation to their family. Alaska feels her father blamed her for her mother’s death, since she did

not call 911 or perform CPR (119), although she adds that he only blamed her right when it happened. Her father is present at her funeral (151), but no other relatives are mentioned. Having Alaska's relatives more present would have in my opinion emphasised the fact that there is more to her than her schoolfriends know. Lindsey has only a mother, but they are a team. Margo's family consists of her parents, who are distanced from their daughter and don't perhaps even like her that much, and her little sister Ruthie. Hazel's family is more present than the other girls', and more present than those of the male main characters. She deals with many emotions about her parents and is supported fully by them.

Since all these traits are shown through the focalizer, there is a question of what has the narrator decided to show the reader. This means that the reader can never get a full picture of all that there is to a character – and neither is it necessary, since the books would then be mere description and the reader would not be left with any space for their own imagination. Indeed, the reader forms their own view of the character also based on their own experiences and worldviews. However, one of the things the reader has to take into account is the way the characters give information: is it given by the focalizer or the focalised?

#### 2.4 Self-presentation

Since narrators can be unreliable in the sense that they have limited knowledge and are too affected by their own feelings and world-views to be completely objective, it is important to look at instances of self-presentation from the female characters as opposed to their other-presentation (Culpeper 167). Culpeper points out that there is a difference between self-presentation in the presence of others and self-presentation in the absence of others, since the presence of others may cause the character to have strategic considerations which guide their actions (168–169). As for Green's female characters, only Hazel has the opportunity to present herself, since the other novels focus on the males and do not leave room for the females to be alone and present themselves. The characters' self-awareness and self-observation skills affect the trustworthiness and correctness of the given information, according to Culpeper (170). However, other-presentation can give a valid impression of a character, especially if multiple characters give a similar characterization for said character (Culpeper 172). Mulvey also explains in relation to the male gaze that there is often times a division to an active male gazer and the passive female character who is viewed (Mulvey 838). This definitely shows in the books, as the males have a more active role and the females are not given room to present themselves in a way that is not related to the male character.

It is not always easy to tell if Alaska is being sincere. When she talks of her “Life’s Library” worth of books, she mentions that there is so much to do: “cigarettes to smoke, sex to have, swings to swing on” (20). It is hard to determine whether she is trying to give the impression that she is cool, or if she really thinks as she says. Her comments about Pudge are also often hard to decipher: she compliments him, and then reminds everyone – herself included – that she has a boyfriend. Given that she seems depressed at times, lines like “Y’all smoke to enjoy it. I smoke to die” (44) and “I may die young. ... But at least I’ll die smart” (52) seem worrying, even if they were said only to be dramatic. She is indeed smart, as she is teaching other students math before their precalc test (52). Most of Alaska’s story telling feels sincere enough, especially when she is alone with Pudge, because she even if she is being mysterious, she is not trying to make an impression. She tells how she has picked her own name (52-53), how she has visited the zoo with her mother (115) and how her mother died (119). Alaska tells Pudge and the rest of their group of friends about her mom and her own incapability of saving her (119) and therefore shows that she trusts them with this piece of very personal information. However, she is drunk when that happens and they are having a competition with stories of their worst day. In any case, her story does not feel exaggerated. Alaska shows her feminist opinions every now and then. She tells Colonel “DO NOT OBJECTIFY WOMEN’S BODIES!” (60) when he is discussing a girl’s breasts and when they have a freestyle contest she makes her part about not “diss[ing] the feminine gender” (112). However, her feminism only comes across as yelling to others and she does not really attempt to make the others see feminism as something valuable. Even if she is at times full of life and spontaneous fun and pranks, when Pudge suggests she drink less, she says “Pudge, what you must understand about me is that I am a deeply unhappy person” (124). She says it best herself: “You never get me. That’s the whole point” (55).

Readers do not learn much about Lindsey’s preferences, unlike with Hazel whose favourite book is mentioned, Margo, whose favourite pieces of literature are known and Alaska who gives her labyrinth quote. However, Lindsey does speak openly about her past and her future goals, such as how she wants to stay in the town (56-57). Lindsey tells Colin the story behind a picture of her as a goth kid: she shares with him how she decided to change herself, twice (67). She also shares the even more personal story of being bullied and called a dog (148–149). She tells of how her father left (139). From Green’s focalised female characters, she is the most open one. Lindsey’s dialogue is tricky in the sense that she changes her personality depending on who she is talking to, and she even discusses this herself, stating that she does this because she does not want people to see inside

her, but admits that she can be herself around Colin (150-151). Lindsey as a character is rather reliable, as she is so open about herself and her chameleoning.

Margo openly complains about her parents to Quentin (29) and expressly says she is not interested in an average life (33). Margo has a dramatic way of speaking at times (30, 49) and that applies to her oddly capitalized writing too (32). She expresses her discontent with people who choose their company based on appearance (37), yet makes fun of a girl's hair while simultaneously claiming to be sorry for her harsh words to her (46), showing that she is not perfect or always aware of her own faults. When she does not appear for a long part of the book (85–281), there is no self-presentation, and the image of her character is completely reliant on others, similar to how Alaska is discussed after her death. Margo however gets to speak again after her absence, and ends up talking about the reasons behind her leaving and her future plans (288-296). Margo admits that “it’s kind of great, being an idea that everybody likes. But I could never be the idea to myself, not all the way” (294), which shows that her mysterious qualities are partly conscious and holding up the appearance has come at the cost of not being able to be herself. Quentin confronts Margo about her ominous messages and how he feared her suicide, and she answers by quoting Sylvia Plath’s “The Bell Jar” (294). The quote is about not being able to cut one’s wrists, and Margo seems to emphasize both with being suicidal and with not being able to kill herself. Margo therefore seems to be or at least seems to have been struggling with mental health issues. She has been struggling alone, as not even her parents knew the extent of her issues.

Hazel is the exception regarding the female characters presenting themselves, since the narration is very diary-like. She talks rather openly about most things: her feelings for Augustus, her fear of what will happen to her parents after she is gone, and her battle with cancer. She also discusses these aloud with other characters, such as when she tells her parents she feels like she will only end up hurting everyone by dying (99). Hazel feels the cancer has brought a distance between her and her old friends (45) and she does not have many friends. She also thinks about not wanting anything romantic with Augustus (91–93), partly because of fearing the effects of her own death. Like the male characters, her thoughts are also very philosophical and poetical at times, as can be seen when she thinks about her time together with Augustus: “It seemed like forever ago, like we’d had this brief but still infinite forever. Some infinities are bigger than other infinities” (233). She does at times have a romanticised and sexualised view on Augustus, and when they first meet she pays a lot of attention to the way he looks and how attractive he is (9). But she also sees Augustus as a complex person, as can be seen when Augustus is nervous and excited when their plane takes off: “When surprised and excited and innocent Gus emerged from Grand Gesture Metaphorically



Inclined Augustus, I literally could not resist” (148). She likes him both for the way he would like people to see him and for the more private way he acts, and understands she is in the process of getting to know him. This kind of understanding also shows when Hazel reflects on Augustus reading her favourite book: “I hadn’t realized he’d thought about the book so much, that *An Imperial Affliction* mattered to Gus independently of me mattering to him” (171). She recognises that Augustus has other motivations than being attracted to her, which allows also the reader to see that Augustus exists outside of Hazel’s narration. Hazel’s intelligence is shown for example by having her discuss Marlow’s hierarchy of needs in relation to her own situation (212), reading Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl” and by having her use difficult vocabulary, such as “toe-specific dysmorphia” (44) and “hamartia” (19). This intelligence often blends with her humour, which shows especially in her dialogue with others, such as when Augustus and Hazel jokingly express how no food can compare to the meal they had in Amsterdam: “It does not taste like God Himself cooked heaven into a series of five dishes which were then served to you accompanied by several luminous balls of fermented, bubbly plasma while actual and literal flower petals floated down all around your canal-side dinner table” (231). All in all, because Hazel is so open about her thoughts and feelings, it makes her feel more rounded than the other female characters. I would even argue her narration is more realistic than that of the male characters thereby making her a more realistic character as well, a topic to which I shall return to in chapter 4.3.

## 2.5 Role in the story

Janet Todd refers to Shoshana Felman’s questions of “What is femininity for men? and “What does the question – what is femininity for men? mean for women?” (63) Todd makes note of Felman’s need for “the notion of sexual difference so that woman will not simply be seen as a mediator of male desire or as a medium of exchange” (Todd, 64). This coincides rather nicely with the concept of a manic pixie dream girl, a term coined by film critic Nathan Rabin to represent a female character the purpose of whom is to make young men embrace life and live more fully (Rabin 2007). Though Rabin has later regretted the term, having noticed that it has become demeaning and misogynistic, the term has stuck and even has an *Oxford Dictionaries* definition: “a type of female character depicted as vivacious and appealingly quirky, whose main purpose within the narrative is to inspire a greater appreciation for life in a male protagonist” (Kornhaber).

John Green has been accused of having characters be so called “manic pixie dream girls” or in Augustus’ case a “manic pixie dream guy”, due to their seeming perfection and role as a love

interest, who makes the main character see the world in a completely different way. Green has commented on these matters more than once:

*Paper Towns* is devoted IN ITS ENTIRETY to destroying the lie of the manic pixie dream girl; the novel ends (this is not really a spoiler) with a young woman essentially saying, “Do you really still live in this fantasy land where boys can save girls by being romantically interested in them?” I do not know how I could have been less ambiguous about this without calling the novel *The Patriarchal Lie of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl Must Be Stabbed in the Heart and Killed*. (John Green on [fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com](http://fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com))

Augustus Waters is not a Manic Pixie Dream Boy, and Hazel’s initial misimagining of him (and Gus’s initial wish to be misimagined) falls away pretty quickly. Both Alaska Young (in *LfA*) and Margo Rothe Spiegelman (in *Paper Towns*) are imagined by the boys who adore them as manic pixie dream girls, but in both cases, this inability to see a young woman as fully human has disastrous consequences, and in *Paper Towns* the dirty pernicious lie of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl is repeatedly and violently destroyed. In fact, that’s essentially the plot of *Paper Towns*. (John Green on [fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com](http://fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com))

It is true that the theme of imagining others complexly is rather obvious in the books – *An Abundance of Katherines* perhaps being an exception. Even though Green insists that he is making the manic pixie dream girl trope evident and destroying it, many have read the characters as such and therefore it is important to take a closer look at female character’s roles in relation to the male characters.

Alaska is an object of fascination, and she makes Pudge understand himself, religion and the world more profoundly through her death. Alaska is aware of Pudge’s inability to see her as a whole person, but he does not really seem to mind: “‘You love the girl who makes you laugh and shows you porn and drinks wine with you. You don’t love the crazy, sullen bitch.’ And there was something to that, truth be told” (96). This shows how self-centred Pudge is, since he would rather stick to his limited view of Alaska than accept also the features that do not fit in that view. Alaska takes him into a world of smoking, drinking and practical jokes and makes his life exiting. While the guilt her death brings to Pudge enables him to grow as a person, she does not get the opportunity grow and learn, and remains a mystery for the sake of Pudge’s story. Even if the novel tries to make a point about how Pudge’s view of her is very limited, Alaska perhaps still feels like a kind of plot device to make the reader see the main male characters’ growth story.

Lindsey's role is making Colin realise that being a boyfriend is not the way to define yourself and that being famous or a genius is not the only way to make a difference. Funnily enough, she ends up being his girlfriend anyway. However Lindsey's past is explained a bit (the bullying, changing herself) and she grows as a character when her boyfriend cheats on her and she realises she does not have to be with people she does not like. Lindsey is not the typical manic pixie dream girl, because she is shown as rather normal and not mysterious or life changing. Also, the way she makes Colin have revelatory ideas about his own life is not as much a plot device, but more like a character affecting another character through intelligent conversation. The Katherines in the novel are mere objects of desire and stepping stones on Colin's way towards a healthier understanding of both himself and women. Colin wants to win back Katherine number 19 and romanticises all the previous relationships, all the while de-individualising them by giving them numbers and by grouping them together by saying things like: "They like their coffee like they like their ex-boyfriends: bitter" (77). This de-individualisation has the effect of making the whole concept of having had 19 girlfriends named Katherine even more absurd, which I believe is intentional. It also makes Colin a more questionable character and even ties him more to the theme of failing to imagine others as complex human beings: he sees the Katherines in relation to himself and as something almost magical, and not as individuals with their own goals and traits. *An Abundance of Katherines* therefore gives Lindsey the chance to be a well-rounded character, but uses the Katherines as a kind of a joke and a way to give something to Colin's character.

Margo's role is to be a mystery. Quentin wants to find and save her, despite her never needing to be saved or asking for it. Even though they do not end up together, Quentin's yearning for her pays off and he gets a kiss. The novel seems to portray her as larger than life from the start: "Margo always loved mysteries. And in everything that came afterward, I could never stop thinking that maybe she loved mysteries so much that she became one" (8). She is constructed to be something so utterly incredible, that it is no wonder she wants to escape. Although she gives Colin the inspiration to be spontaneous and active, and makes him grow as a character, she gets to stay separate from him. Colin thinks he has managed to imagine her right by following the clues they thought she left, but it turns out even that is not complex enough, as can be seen when they finally find Margo: "-- I'm so pissed at her. For... for, I don't know. Not being the Margo I had expected her to be. Not being the Margo I thought I had finally imagined correctly" (284). Green emphasizes his theme of failing to imagine other by also having Margo confess that she thought Colin was a "paper boy", meaning that she thought he was "two dimensions as a character on the page and two different, but still flat, dimensions as a person" (292). Their revenge adventure proves her wrong and shows that

he is “real” (292). Margo’s plan was self-centred, and she had decided to “push [Colin] toward being a badass. This one night would, like, liberate [Colin]. And then I could disappear and you’d always remember me for that” (292). Therefore, her manic pixieness was in part conscious and she wanted to make a memorable exit and at the same time push Colin away from being a paper person. Colin’s actions make her see that she had a wrong idea of him. Margo’s role is to emphasize the theme in two ways: by not being imagined complexly enough and by not imagining complexly herself.

Hazel’s role is to fall in love and be loved in return, even though she fears getting hurt and hurting someone. Hazel and Augustus’ roles are harder to define, since they are more equal: they both fall in love fast, they are both close to dying, and they are both clever. She stays with him until the end and shows great strength during the whole book. Although Hazel imagines Augustus at first as an unbelievably good-looking and wonderful boy and Augustus does many unbelievable things – like using his Genie wish to fly them both to Amsterdam – he is not reduced to a manic pixie dream boy, since he does drop the façade and shows a bit of his true self. Even though Hazel said her favourite book was not a cancer book, *The Fault in Our Stars* is. And even if Hazel is many things, her role is also to show what a cancer patients life is like. The book shows both practical elements of the illness, like hospital visits and using an oxygen tank, and mental elements, such as her fears and feelings.

Because many readers have read some of the characters as manic pixies, it needs to be questioned whether the message of imagining others complexly comes across clearly enough. If it does not, the books are in danger of presenting the opposite of what Green has perhaps intended. In *Looking for Alaska*, Alaska is quite close to being a mere plot device, because she does not get to represent herself enough and because Pudge’s view of her remains rather self-centred, even after she has called him out on only accepting the fun aspects of her personality. In *An Abundance of Katherines* Lindsey is not so much a manic pixie dream girl, but Colin’s idea of her ex-girlfriends is deindividualizing and therefore shows his limited imagining of the Katherines. In *Paper Towns* the concept and theme of complex imagining is such a large part of the plot that is hard to miss. It is present in both Quentin imagining Margo and Margo imagining Quentin. It is also presented in the viewing of the side character of Lacey, who is first shown as a shallow and Margo assumes she has betrayed her by not telling about Margo’s boyfriend cheating on her. However, Lacey turns out to have known nothing about it and she even joins Quentin and the others on the road trip, during which she gets to show more of her personality. Hazel has a different role from the other female characters, because all is told from her point of view, and one of her defining roles is that of a

cancer patient. She does share the role of being an object of attraction, but even more she is the one falling in love. Augustus shows some manic pixie dream boy qualities, but also develops during the story, as Hazel also notices.

All in all, the theme of misimagining is rather explicit in the books. The biggest problem would seem to be that of having the female characters not having much life outside and without relation to the main male characters. Admittedly, the narration does restrict the ways in which characters besides the main character can express themselves. Perhaps just giving the characters more lines or more background story would have made them more believable as characters and less reliant on the male character's viewing of them.

### 3 Other characters

In order to see how the female characters are viewed, we should look more closely at focalisation and how the male characters or male focalised narrations are unreliable. Green himself critiques the male characters and their views at times, but does he manage to make it obvious enough in the books that the boys are affected by patriarchal views and personal opinions that make them both more realistic as characters and more unreliable as narrators who are deducing female characters' personalities? In the first part of this chapter I look at the main male characters and the ways in which they show unreliability.

Partially in relation to patriarchal ideas but also expanding to other areas, I will then discuss stereotypes and the ways in which they are both useful and harmful. The stereotypes affect both the reader's view of the characters as well as the main characters' view of the other characters. Of course, there are also the stereotypes, patriarchal views and personal opinions which affect the author, but those are often very hard to decipher from those that are intentionally used to build the narrating character.

In the third part of this chapter I discuss the minor characters in the books, with concern mostly on the aspects of gender. This is done for example by looking at how many male and female minor characters there are in the books.

#### 3.1 Main male characters and focalisation

The main male characters are Miles or Pudge, Colin, Quentin and Augustus. Augustus is the only one of the boys who is not a focalizer. This means that in Green's books, narration happens mostly from a male perspective. Because the boys are likely to have built-in models and stereotypes about other people, they may at first imagine a person of that "type" to be, affecting their trustworthiness. Other things that affect the trustworthiness of the narration and views of other characters are for example the boys' feelings towards and relationships to the characters they come across. Another more implicit source of unreliability is the fact that they are telling their own story – here I make the assumption that the third person narration in *An Abundance of Katherines* is Colin himself – and are therefore perhaps biased in the way they present both themselves as well as other characters and the events.

From the Gale group's webpage I found an interesting comment on the narration in *Looking for Alaska*: "Miles's narration is alive with sweet, self-deprecating humor", *School Library*

*Journal* contributor Johanna Lewis commented, ‘and his obvious struggle to tell the story truthfully adds to his believability’” (ic.galegroup.com). This idea that struggling to be truthful actually adds to believability was interesting, since it adds believability to the character of Pudge, but lessens the believability of his account on Alaska. Green himself comments on the reliability of narrators in relation to *Looking for Alaska* as follows:

One of the challenges of reading a novel that’s written in the first person is that you have to decide how much to trust the narrator. ... In *Alaska*, I think Pudge is trying his best to be accurate to his experience and memory, but it’s also clear he is writing all this down at some point in the future. From the structure of the novel and from a few moments of foreshadowing, I think it’s pretty clear by the end of the book that he knew about Alaska’s death before he started telling the story. And when you look back at the dead, I think they are inevitably more beautiful. (Green 03.08.2012 onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com/)

Following Rimmon-Kenan’s example, this would mean that the narrator is Pudge after Alaska’s death and the focalizer is Pudge before her death (Rimmon-Kenan 73). The foreshadowing in the book can be seen for example when Pudge describes Alaska falling asleep “From a hundred miles an hour to asleep in a nanosecond” (88), which reflects the way she dies driving her car directly into a police car. The narrator being Pudge after Alaska’s death is supported by the structure of the novel, because there is a tense change from past to present for just under two pages after Pudge realises Alaska is dead (142–143). Green explains this choice of tense change by saying that tenses exist because experiencing time is complicated, and that “When Pudge is talking about Alaska’s death, he is telling you a story that for him is still happening, a story that he hasn’t processed and put behind him. For me at least, that’s how trauma works” (Green 16.10.2014 onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com). This would suggest that Pudge is narrating the events otherwise in past tense, but when he comes to the realisation of Alaska’s death, he is taken over by the trauma, and feels the need to express it in present tense.

Besides his struggle to be truthful and limited knowledge about other people’s thoughts brought on by the fact that in Green’s novels the focalisation of the focalizer is fixed (Rimmon-Kenan 76), instead of changing from one character to another, Pudge’s narration is affected by his feelings for Alaska. Green addresses this as a common occurrence when being in love:

...when you’re romantically enthralled with someone, you see that person as more beautiful than other people might. So I think Pudge’s descriptions of her beauty are probably shaped by his memory and his experience. (And while some other people–Takumi and Jake

for instance—also find her physically attractive, the Weekday Warriors never express much physical attraction to her.) (Green 03.08.2012 [onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com/](http://onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com/))

In chapter 2.2 I discussed the physical appearance of Alaska and the way in which Pudge is obsessed with her body. This is also a rather natural part of being infatuated, since sexual attraction is often a large part of it. But there is a considerable amount of focusing on her body, which I think does easily make the reader also objectify Alaska. Pudge does not see any problem in his way of viewing her and does not discuss it, allowing the patriarchal view of seeing women as objects for men to look at as they please to stay unproblematised. Pudge's feelings cause him to see Alaska as more flawless than she is, although he also recounts the times when she is not being very nice. Pudge sees Alaska in an incomplete way, which causes him to "romanticize her, which makes it difficult for him to understand the reality and seriousness of her pain" (Green 02.08.2012 [onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com](http://onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com/)). Pudge is not the only one, since the Colonel does not understand her either, and he has known her for a longer time. We are not told whether Alaska's boyfriend Jake knows her better, although the boys call to ask him about Alaska's last phone call (186). The Colonel summarises what Jake tells him, and they do not even ask Jake his opinion, only about what happened. The boys are basing everything on their view of her, and Pudge continues to think his view is the closest to the truth. In Pudge's narration, there is a kind of wish to know Alaska the best and thereby be the most important to her. This is however impossible, since Alaska dies and leaves him wondering about who she was. Pudge does eventually realise this when he says that "I would never know her well enough to know her thoughts in those last minutes" (218), showing that he understands her complexity as a human. Even if Pudge realises his idea of her will never be perfect, he does not go deeply into how he got her wrong or realise that he has no right to think he knew her better than anyone else. And even though he regrets that they let her drive drunk, he does not express regret at how he was only interested in the fun features and the physical features of Alaska.

In Colin's case in *An Abundance of Katherines*, the narration consists of the narrator, who uses the third person and the so-called centre of consciousness also known as the focalizer (Rimmon-Kenan 73) and is telling the story in past tense. Rimmon-Kenan explains that the only difference between third-person centre of consciousness and first-person retrospective narration is the identity of the narrator (73). In *An Abundance of Katherines* this is however complicated, since it could be argued that the narrator is in fact Colin as a retrospective narrator. One clue for retrospective narration is the fact that story telling is a theme in the book, exemplified how Colin



starts out as a poor story teller and grows to be a good one. Green comments on this choice of narration in the following way:

I felt like KATHERINES needed to be written in third person, because it's about a guy whose brain does not lend itself to narratives, and who struggles to tell stories in ways that other people find interesting. For a while I tried to write it in first person with all these tangents and footnotes to the foot and the story never really moving forward. But it was infuriating to read, and I felt like it was already challenging enough to empathize with Colin. My hope was that creating a little narrative distance would make it easier to understand Colin. (Green 02.08.2012 [onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com](http://onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com))

He does not reveal whether the narrator is Colin, but the fact that Green attempted to use first person narration may hint that the narrator really is him. In the above quote, we also find out that Colin's brain works in a way that differs from the norm and that a first-person narration made it harder to empathise with him and understand him. Having a highly functioning brain and failing to understand how other people think does bring to mind a person on the autistic spectrum. To answer the question of Colin being possibly autistic, Green wrote:

I'm a novelist, not a doctor, so I won't attempt to diagnose any of my characters. But I was conscious of the way people on the autistic spectrum struggle to read certain social cues, and the way their brains process and store information. (Green 06.08.2012 [onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.com](http://onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.com))

Green does not directly say that Colin is on the autistic spectrum, but it is a valid interpretation. In the book, he does not have a diagnosis and is merely considered gifted with intelligence. Green has said that he does not consider Colin a very likeable character because he lacks empathy for other people, but that during the story he gradually learns it, especially in relation to telling interesting stories (02.08.2012 [onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com](http://onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com)). In the last few phrases of the book he even feels a strong connection to Hassan and Lindsey and everyone, and is feeling "not-unique in the very best possible way" (215). I would agree that Colin is somewhat annoying and hard to like most of the time, and I myself struggled more with empathising with him than with the other main characters.

Colin's struggles to understand how other people think could be a source of reliability, in relation to the character and also to the narrator. This shows for example in the way he and Hassan have a system, where Hassan tells Colin what is interesting and what is not, in order for Colin to understand "what other people did and did not enjoy hearing" (26). The footnotes in *An Abundance*

of *Katherines* support Colin being the narrator, since they expand on ideas that Colin would find interesting, but would not perhaps be interesting to all audiences of the story. An example of this is when at the mention of learning the first ninety-nine digits of pi, a footnote shows the ninety-nine-word sentence Colin made to help memorise them (63-64). *An Abundance of Katherines* is the only of Green's books to use footnotes, and Green gives a comment on using them:

1. They can function as a kind of competing narrative that comments upon and—for lack of a better word—problematizes the central narrative. 2. Also, sometimes exceptionally intelligent people (like David Foster Wallace or Colin or E. Lockhart's Ruby Oliver) feel this need to qualify and refine and analyze everything they say, because they feel this urge to be both understood and intellectually precise. [--] But I think that at least on some levels, precision and clarity are in competition with each other.\* As discussed in the novel, human memory is not in the accuracy business; it's in the narrative business. (Green 4.8.2012  
onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com)

The idea of being understandable and being accurate come across very clearly in the novel, and Colin's misremembering will become a large part of it. Problematizing the central narrative, as Green expresses in the above quote, is found in the way that the character is ironised, both in the footnotes and in the regular text. I must admit I am not sure whether this ironising has the effect of making the narrator more reliable or less reliable. The ironising is done through humour and by making Colin seem pitiful, as can be seen when Colin's fascination with *Katherines* is explained: "When it comes to girls (and in Colin's case, it so often did), everyone has a type. Colin Singleton's type was not physical but linguistic: he liked *Katherines*" (15). There is humour in the fact that he is obsessed with girls, which makes him seem perhaps a bit desperate, and in the fact that it is weird to like a person because of their name. Green comments on making Colin's relationship with girls awkward:

[The factory producing tampon strings] seemed like a gentle and funny way to get at Colin's massive discomfort with actual human women. Like, obviously he is obsessed with romantic relationships and being in them, but he is also majorly freaked out by the reality of girls, because he is so busy romanticizing them. (Green 02.08.2012  
onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com)

The romanticising is especially present when he is remembering his relationships with *Katherines*. Colin does not however seem all that "freaked out by the reality of girls" in any of the encounters in *Gutshot*, I would rather say he is equally awkward regardless of gender.

A few parts in the book showcase Colin's unreliability excellently. The narrator says that "it occurred to Colin that the kiss didn't feel nearly as good as the sound of her asking if she could be his girlfriend" (47). What is interesting is that she actually asks it the other way around: "Do you want to be my *boyfriend*" (47). Colin is misremembering and expressing the situation in a way that makes the Katherine feel more submissive. I would be most suspicious of the reliability of his views on the Katherines, since he paints himself as the victim most of the time. This changes however, when his theorem shows that he must have dumped Katherine Mutsensberger (136) and a phone call to her confirms it, forcing him to re-evaluate the trustworthiness of his own memories and to reconsider his identity as a "dumpee" (164-166). Colin later says that "I just completely misremembered it. I mean, I always assumed that all the things I *did* remember were *true*" (203). This shows that he learns about how unreliable his own mind can be, which could then show in the narrator, if they indeed are Colin.

In *Paper Towns*, the narration is again that of a first-person narrator with a fixed male focalizer and it is written in past tense. Quentin is again similar to Pudge as a character, in the sense that his obvious feelings for Margo make him see her in a glorified way. Unlike Pudge, Quentin becomes very aware of how other people view Margo, such as when he discusses Margo with Lacey (122, 185). As I discussed in chapter 2.2, there are a lot of mentions of characters – Quentin included – looking at Margo's body. Quentin, like Pudge, does not question viewing her in an objectifying way, although he does it less himself. This shows a certain acceptance of the male gaze, and the patriarchal structures behind it. Quentin attempts to figure out her personality throughout the book, but when he is spending the night at an abandoned mini-mall, he starts to understand how little he knows about her (169-175). He has this idea before he meets Alaska again, thinking that "I know how long, and how badly, I wrongly imagined her" (267), but at that point he really does not: he still thinks he know knows her better, as proven by his idea of Margo wanting him to save her. Quentin expects to find Margo changed, perhaps because he himself has changed, but after seeing her looking exactly the same as ever, he realises "What a treacherous thing it is to believe that a person is more than a person" (282). It takes meeting Margo to put his quest to an end and make him realise that no matter how much he imagines her as a person, he will still not know her exactly. Besides Quentin's prominent level of explicit self-awareness and revelations, what makes *Paper Towns* different from *Looking for Alaska* is that Quentin and Margo have a conversation. They are both able to express their thoughts, disappointments, feelings and misimaginings, and therefore Margo gets the chance to show more of her character than Alaska does. Quentin is also willing to accept his mistakes, and even though he would like to be with

Margo, he knows their plans are too different (303). Even if Pudge is very intelligent, I would argue Quentin learns to act more mature during the story, proven by the fact that he lets Margo go, instead of trying to change her mind or by changing his own plans complete.

Also in *The Fault in Our Stars* there is first-person narration in the past tense. There is one exception to the past tense, and that is the ending lines of the book: “I do, Augustus. I do” (313). Here she is replying to a letter Augustus wrote before his death, answering him that she is happy with the choices she has made – about who to hurt in life by allowing them to get attached to a sick person. There is of course the allusion to marriage vows. This break from past tense also emphasises the fact that Hazel still loves Augustus, even after his death. Hazel’s focalisation is different from all the other narrations, because she is more explicit about how she is feeling, partly because her physical condition affects her so much and she describes her pains and breathing issues. She also expresses clearly how she is feeling towards Augustus and her family and how she fears hurting anyone who gets too close. She is philosophical and intelligent, much like Pudge, but her mental qualities are much more collected and connected to her everyday life. Pudge and Hazel also share their poetical thinking, and perhaps Quentin too to some extent.

Since Hazel is the focalizer, Augustus acts as the focalised. There is a lot of dialogue where Augustus is allowed to express himself, and he is much more present than the female characters in the other books. After Augustus’ death, Hazel does not try to guess what he would be like, because she got to know him to the extent that it is possible to know another person. She does want to know what he was writing to her (282) and as it turns out, he was trying to get Van Houten to write Hazel a eulogy and wrote notes for that (310-313). They end up being his final message to Hazel, able to reach out even after his death, unlike Alaska. Augustus is a well-rounded character: we learn of his past as a promising basketball player (30), his family is present at many occasions and we learn of his favourite book (34) and band (36). He is fond of metaphors and symbols, as evidenced by his how he finds it fascinating that the Funky Bones sculpture “essentially forces children to play on bones. The symbolic resonances are endless, Hazel Grace” (87). He is aware of his good looks and often jokes about it: “‘Seriously, don’t even get me started on my hot bod. You don’t want to see me naked, Dave. Seeing me naked actually took Hazel Grace’s breath away,’ he said, nodding toward the oxygen tank” (251). They even have a heated disagreement on religion (168-170), but come to terms with their differing opinions. Augustus often mentions his fear of oblivion and being forgotten (12, 235). Augustus shares the story of his previous girlfriend, and how her personality changed as she was dying of cancer (175), and as his cancer starts to take its toll on him, the relationship between him and Hazel becomes strained at times (241). Hazel however stays by his

side even during tough times, such as when Augustus has gone out alone in the middle of the night and his gastronomy tube is malfunctioning (244). Even if Augustus starts out as seemingly too perfect to be true, he shows himself to be a human, with fears and weaknesses. Through dialogue, his actions and Hazel's narration we learn that he wishes people thought he was something out of the ordinary, but Hazel believes it is enough that he is special to her (240). Hazel describes Augustus to Kaitlyn as follows: "He wasn't perfect or anything. He wasn't your fairy-tale Prince Charming or whatever. He tried to be like that sometimes, but I liked him best when that stuff fell away" (302). Augustus might seem like the whimsical manic pixie type, and he does whisk Hazel away in an adventure and helps her grow as a character, but his character to me is flawed enough and complex enough to rid him off that reputation. What I would say is a problem with the character is that he does not seem to do much outside of seeing Hazel: there are no mentions of him meeting other people or going to do something with his family. He is on stand-by, ready to be part of Hazel's story at any given time. But this can perhaps be explained with Hazel being the narrator, and merely leaving things out.

In general, the narrating characters are all quite well rounded as characters regardless of gender. The narrations are quite similar on the surface, except for *An Abundance of Katherines* with its third-person narration. The male characters are as focalizers in charge of how the females are viewed, and often those views remain problematic even when the characters have revelations about human relationships. From the characters, Colin is the only one who is highly ironised, but only partly. His way of deindividualizing Katherines is problematic because it is also dehumanising, although he does give some details about each one, for example when he recites his whole history of Katherines to Lindsey (200-207). Quentin and Pudge have the issue of not seeing the problem of sexualising girls, and of being so infatuated that their judgement is impaired. I would argue that the male characters are written in a way that makes them somewhat realistic, and their attitudes towards female characters are plausible. Hazel's narration seems to more feeling-oriented than that of the males' – perhaps a stereotypical viewing of females that has slipped from the author's own worldview.

### 3.2 Stereotyping

Using stereotypes, or to be more precise categories, is a way of making shortcuts to identifying character. Being able to place a person in a certain category can make communication faster, but there is a risk of over-simplifying and harmful generalisation. The category might turn

into a fixed stereotype, and sometimes people struggle with understanding that stereotypes are both often false and definitely not all a person is. In John Green's books, boys' stereotypical views of girls are used as a way of showing authentic thinking. In some cases, this is done as to suggest that those stereotypes are wrong and thus that seeing past them is the way to truly know a person. In other cases, stereotypes appear as they would in normal thinking, adding to the realism of the characters. Also, there is the question of how much of it is Green's own stereotyping and unintentional generalisation. Since the boys are at times objectifying, is there enough evidence to say it is ironic or disapproved of? Stereotyping does not only affect the girls, but all the characters.

In Michael Pickering's "Stereotyping: the politics of representation" (2001), Pickering mentions that the main problem with stereotyping is that it "may operate as a way of imposing a sense of order on the social world in the same way as categories, but with the crucial difference that stereotyping attempts to deny any flexible thinking categories" (3). Pickering uses categories in a more positive sense, and emphasises that they are not fixed and they should not be thought of as the elemental structure of thought (3). Pickering states stereotyping is twinned with the concept of the Other, and both "address the same cultural and psychological processes of involved in self/other relations" (Pickering x-xi). The Other brings out the we/them separation more clearly, whereas stereotyping focuses more on looking at the other. Pickering explains that as non-European people have been seen as the Other to white European people, women have also been seen as the Other to the seemingly superior men (61). He also discusses Simone de Beauvoir and her writings on how men have constructed stereotypes on women (62). One of the most important points from de Beauvoir is that men have perceived themselves as subjects, thereby making women objects and reducing them to being "the second sex" (Pickering 62). Another important point Pickering mentions from de Beauvoir is that "there is no essential feminine nature, that femininity, in whatever version of it, is an artificial construct" (63). I rather agree with Pickering and de Beauvoir, and the famous quote by de Beauvoir rings true: "One is not born a woman; rather one becomes a woman" (Pickering 63). The role and nature of the female is perhaps one of the hardest stereotypes to break. Even though stereotypes are "usually considered inaccurate because of the way they portray a social group or category as homogenous," according to Pickering locking people with certain characteristics in a category may give a sense of security (Pickering 4), explaining why stereotypes are still alive and being spread. What I thought related to writing and other forms of media the most from Pickering's text was this:

We either reproduce a given stereotype in our occasional uses of it, as a short cut in representing a sense of order to ourselves, or we refuse the stunted abbreviation of a social

group or subculture which a stereotype entails by opting for a more particularised, less one-sided description. This is the dilemma which stereotyping faces: to resort to one-sided representations in the interests of order, security and dominance, or to allow for a more complex vision, a more open attitude, a more flexible way of thinking. (Pickering 3-4)

This means that the author has the choice to either uphold a stereotype by making use of it, or break the stereotype by writing more complex and flexible characters. Green seems to do a bit of both in his novels.

The stereotype that is the most evident and most widely discussed in relation to Green's books is that of the manic pixie dream girl. Green himself has admitted in an interview on the BWI Titletales Web site to having "female characters who seem larger than life, what he calls 'the mysterious-beloved'" (ic.galegroup.com). Green develops this idea more by saying in the same interview that "We all know this spell ... the way we see the people we love as inherently More than other people" and explains that he wanted to break that spell by writing *Paper Towns* (ic.galegroup.com). In *Paper Towns*, he manages to show that Margo is more than Quentin imagines her to be, but what troubles me is that we learn this from the boy's perspective: Margo is a way for him to learn about himself and the world, and even if she gets to go to New York she is not given much of a story on her own. The same goes for Pudge and Alaska, even though in their case even less of the "true" Alaska is shown. Even if Green claims to make stories that fight the stereotype, the female characters of Margo and Alaska, and perhaps of Katherine, are not given enough room to be more than plot devices that enhance the male character's self-discovery. This shows in the way that even if the theme of imagining complexly is very present in the books, some readers still find the manic pixie stereotype present in the characters.

In *Looking for Alaska*, Pudge has stereotypical American teenage boy qualities: he is unsure about his social skills and feels alone (4-5), he is interested in sex but very inexperienced (126-127) and he struggles with some school subjects (30) while being interested in others (214-216). At first look, he is a rather typical white Christian male main character. However, he breaks the stereotype of a tough male in the sense that he expresses himself in a very sensitive way. He likes religion and the last words of famous people and thinks at times in a very beautifully intelligent way, such as "Like all energy, we can only change shapes and sizes and manifestations" (221). This seeming sensitivity and intellect is in contrast with the way he is childishly narcissistic, failing to see that not everything is about him, especially concerning Alaska's death. This shows for example when he considers Alaska's last night and how he wants to be the last person she loved:

It was not enough to be the last guy she kissed. I wanted to be the last one she loved. [--] I hated her for not caring about me. I hated her for leaving that night, and I hated myself, too, not only because I let her go but because if I had been enough for her, she wouldn't have even wanted to leave. She would have just lain with me and talked and cried, and I would have listened and kissed at her tears as they pooled in her eyes. (171)

Pudge is not thinking about Alaska here, he is thinking about himself and how he should have been enough for her. It is almost as if he is placing some of the guilt on Alaska herself. This narcissism could be understood as quite typical teenage thinking and it contrasts greatly with Hazel in *The Fault in Our Stars*, who is continuously thinking about the wellbeing of others, like her parents. All in all, Pudge is perhaps more typical than stereotypical, since he is in the position of privilege, being a white male.

Other stereotyping that is mentioned in passing is Asians being good at mathematics and computers, as Takumi jokes: "I hope you didn't bring the Asian kid along thinking he's a computer genius. Because I am not" (103). This shows the characters being aware of the stereotype, but not conforming to it. Takumi likes rapping, which is something that is stereotypically associated with African-Americans instead of Asian-Americans (113). The rich kids, also known as Weekday Warriors, are also stereotypical: they are rich and therefore arrogant (13, 35–38). However, both the Weekday Warriors and the main characters do pranks on one another, and are both equally hostile. There does not actually seem to be any other real reason to dislike them, then the fact that they are Other, since they live outside of the school.

Stereotypes relating to gender are directly addressed a few times. When the Colonel does not know how to iron his shirt and asks Alaska to do it, she yells at him not to "impose the patriarchal paradigm" on her (34). Later, when Pudge and friends have arranged for a male stripper to talk at a school event as a prank, sex, gender, and male objectifying are discussed (208). The stripper explains the gender stereotypes quite clearly: "boys are much more likely to objectify girl's bodies than the other way around. Boys will say amongst themselves that so-and-so has a nice rack, while girls will more likely say that a boy is cute, a term that describes both physical and emotional characteristics. This has the effect of turning girls into mere objects, while boys are seen by girls as whole people" (208). This is the most direct way this topic is discussed in the book. Since it is a prank, Lara shouts at him to take off his clothes as a way of showing a female objectifying a man, and the stripper does a short act in honour of Alaska and in order "to subvert the patriarchal paradigm" (208). However, Pudge does not get a revelation from the speech and does not see how objectifying he has been towards Alaska. But the speech in fact makes Green's use of stereotypes



about teenage boy behaviour more apparent to the reader, and questions the Colonel's comments about Lara's breasts (59) and Pudge's overall obsession with Alaska's body, even if Pudge himself does not realize it.

In *An Abundance of Katherines* Colin is struggling with the stereotype of a prodigy: "What is the point of being alive if you don't at least try to do something remarkable" (33). He believes that he should already have achieved remarkable things, since not all child prodigies turn into adult geniuses (10). From the age of four he has been waiting for a "Eureka moment", like the one Arkhimedes had in a book he read (3,4). His parents also try to force him into being a genius: "It pains me to say this, Colin, but if you wish to continue to grow intellectually, you need to work harder right now than you ever have before. Otherwise, you risk wasting you potential" (12). So not only is he pressuring himself into the role of a genius, his parents are also enforcing on him the stereotype: geniuses do not waste time on fun things like road trips, they work to improve themselves all the time. Colin learns that he does not have to comply with that stereotype, by having his "Eureka moment" about how "The future will erase everything – there's no level of fame or genius that allows you to transcend oblivion. The infinite future makes that kind of mattering impossible" (213). This both makes him become a genius by having such a moment of revelation, and lets him stop worrying about being one. He even switches from writing the graphs for his theorem to just writing. His strict self-applied stereotype breaks and he understands "There is room enough to be anyone" (214).

Since Hassan is a Muslim, some stereotypes relating to that are expressed. When Hassan meets Lindsey, he introduces himself as "Hassan Harbish. Sunni Muslim. Not a terrorist" (32), and Lindsey goes along by replying "Lindsey Lee Wells. Methodist. Me, neither" (32). This happens again with Hollis, who replies smilingly "Well. That's a relief" (55). Again, the characters are expressing knowledge about the stereotype of all Muslims being terrorists, but showing they do not really believe in such views. Hassan preparing to defend himself also shows a stereotypical viewing of Southerners being closed minded about other religions than Christianity. Lindsey is made out to be very stereotypically girlish and vapid (30–31). This is shown by the fact that she reads a gossip magazine (30), has pink nails (31) and is supposedly doing "typical *Celebrity Living*-reader crap: avoid talking to [the boys]" (32), even though she has been nothing but nice to them. Lindsey slowly changes Colin's view of her, by both expressing her intelligence (43) and talking about herself and her experiences throughout the latter part of the novel.

Besides Lindsey flouting the stereotype of a popular dumb girl, gender stereotypes are handled on a few occasions, such as when the narrator explains Colin's theory about kissing and

how there is always a risk of being rejected: “boys, basically, want to kiss girls. Guys want to make out. Always” (76). Therefore, he feels that girls should be the ones to initiate the kiss, because they are “less likely to be rejected than guys” and so that girls “will never get kissed unless they want to be kissed” (76). This is illogical, since it implies that girls are not interested in kissing and that girls are in some way responsible for getting kissed against their will. It also falsely implies that all boys at all times want to kiss. However, some ironising can be found from the fact that Colin the narrator does appear to be mocking Colin the character, since after explaining the kissing theory he mentions that “Unfortunately for Colin, there is nothing logical about kissing, and so his theory never worked. But because he always waited so incredibly long to kiss a girl, he rarely faced rejection” (76). There is therefore an attempt at flouting the stereotype of boys being the ones to make the first move and girls being more passive, but it is not completely persuasive.

In *Paper Towns*, the most obvious negativity toward females is Ben’s rhetoric, and his use of the term “honeybunny” or variants of it is excessive (13, 14, 16, 19, 65, 87, 89, 124, 125, 195), such as saying “You’d better be calling me to say that there are eleven naked honeybunnies in your house, and that they’re asking for the Special Feeling that only Big Daddy Ben can provide”(65). Quentin tries to tell him that it “sounded more sexist and lame than retro-cool, but he refused to abandon the practice. He called his own mother a honeybunny. There was no fixing him” (16). Using this term suggests that Ben has a patriarchal or belittling view of women, or at least a lack of understanding of what is appropriate. The term is used so much throughout the book that it is not funny anymore, which seems like an intentional way of handling such casual sexism. However, even if Green makes Ben’s sexist rhetoric annoying and embarrassing, Ben is not actually criticized for it: he even gets Lacey as a girlfriend and continues to use the term even after that. He is also contradictory, since he attacks a guy for calling Lacey “a bitch” while shouting “SHE’S NOT THE BITCH, YOU ARE” (206). He gets very angry, when considering he often refers to girls in a demeaning way. There is also a mention of Ben crowding Lacey and Colin mentions that even he could feel a little claustrophobic talking to Ben, and he is not “even a hot girl” (121). This is a kind of typical male, if not stereotypical, way of asserting oneself over the other. From Colin’s comment, it can also be assumed that while Ben may not respect personal space regardless of gender, it is different somehow more different when he is talking to a girl. Ben also makes sexual jokes about Quentin’s mom (14, 145) and Radar and Ben together joke about Quentin’s grandmother (18). Lacey does at one point stop the boys – Ben in particular – when they are joking about testicles and she feels it is inappropriate (202). This kind of joking is again Green’s way of using the stereotype of crude teenage boys to add to the authenticity. Quentin jokes about Lacey presuming that a gas

station cashier would be a guy, adding “don’t be so sexist” (251), showing a different kind of humour while at the same time making explicit a stereotype about gas station employee mostly being imagined as men. Quentin shows complying to gender stereotypes when he says: “Dude, I don’t want to talk about Lacey’s prom shoes. And I’ll tell you why: I have this thing that makes me really uninterested in prom shoes. It’s called a penis” (132). This shows that Quentin thinks shopping and shoes are feminine, and males should not be interested in such things.

Augustus in *The Fault in Our Stars* has been described a manic pixie dream boy – and not completely without reason. Matt Patches claims in *Vulture.com* that Augustus Waters is too perfect: “He’s a bad boy, he’s a sweetheart, he’s a dumb jock, he’s a nerd, he’s a philosopher, he’s a poet, he’s a victim, he’s a survivor, he’s everything everyone wants in their lives” (Patches). He claims that even “When cancer creeps up on Gus a second time, crippling everyday life, it barely rattles his persona” (Patches). However, he is discussing the films and not the books. I would argue that such articles have led to people questioning also the book character and asking Green about the manic-pixieness of Augustus. Green has defended the character quite a few times, for example on his tumblr account: “Augustus Waters is not a Manic Pixie Dream Boy, and Hazel’s initial misimagining of him (and Gus’s initial wish to be misimagined) falls away pretty quickly” ([fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com](http://fishingboatproceeds.tumblr.com)). This I find to be plausible, since even though he at first is very confident, asking Hazel to watch a movie with him after they have just met (17), he also shows insecurity about his leg when he and Hazel are about to have intercourse (206). He is also shown as weak and miserable, when Hazel goes to help him when his gastronomy tube is malfunctioning: “a pitiful boy who desperately wanted not to be pitiful, screaming and crying, poisoned by an infected G-tube that kept him alive, but not alive enough” (245). Green talks in some detail about Augustus’ character development on another tumblr-blog:

Augustus is a big name. It’s the name of the first emperor of the Roman Empire, a name one associates with confidence and bravado and marble statues and stuff. Gus is a much shorter, smaller name—the kind of name that appears in children’s picture books, for instance. In some ways, they’re opposites: the one a big, strong man; the other, a fragile and endangered little boy. I tend to believe that the hero’s journey is the journey from strength to weakness, and I guess I wanted Gus’s story to be the journey from Augustus Waters to Gus. Hazel calls him Gus more as she knows him better, as the manic pixie dream boy falls away and she comes to know and grapple with and love this fragile, desperate, beautiful boy. So, like, when they’re on the plane together and his facade breaks down and he gets nervous and excited about flying for the first time and she can’t help but like him, that’s Gus. When he’s

using big words slightly incorrectly, that's Augustus. (Green 27.12.2012  
onlyifyoufinishedtfios.tumblr.com)

This change from Augustus to Gus is very clear in the books, and Augustus is given a better opportunity to lose the manic-pixie-title than Alaska and Margo are, because his character development is more evident. This is because he gets more dialogue than the girls and because he is actually more present during the course of the book: Margo is absent because of her journey to Agloe, and after Alaska's death a lot of the is still going on. Even though Augustus dies as well, he dies later in the book than Alaska, and he also gets to have his thoughts brought out after his death in his letter to Van Houten (310-313).

In *The Fault in Our Stars*, there is also continuous talk about the stereotype of the cancer patient. A cancer patient is supposed to be depressed (3), and Augustus mentions the trope of "the stoic and determined cancer victim who heroically fights her cancer with inhuman strength and never complains or stops smiling even at the very end" (173), to which Hazel adds that they are also "kindhearted and generous souls whose every breath is an Inspiration to Us All" (173). Augustus and Hazel break this stereotype by seeing and acknowledging the bad sides and making humour of those. Their humour is often dark and bordering on inappropriate. From the story of Augustus' ex-girlfriend Caroline, we learn that she had a tumour which made her mean – even calling Augustus "Stumpy" (175) – and that it was really difficult being with her in the final days (175-176). Of course, Augustus' own fight with cancer ends with him losing, and he becomes quite depressed and desperate, as proven from when he finds himself unable to fetch cigarettes alone and his gastronomy tube becomes infected: "I hate myself I hate myself I hate this I hate this I disgust myself I hate it I hate it I hate it just let me fucking die" (245). The stereotype of a cancer patient fighting strongly and beautifully is proven wrong by the realistic description of how horrible it is to die painfully of a disease at such a young age.

The girls are stereotyped first in the sense that they are depicted as girly. This comes up with Lindsey in *An Abundance of Katherines*, who acts even more girly around her boyfriend, although because she is not really being herself it becomes ironised. Deviation from typical girly things also shows in that her room lacks pink, unlike the rest of the house (107). From *Paper Towns* we get, in my opinion, the most stereotypical depictions of teenage girls. Becca Arrington is said to be "hot, but she is also 1. aggressively vapid, and 2. and absolute, unadulterated, raging bitch" (38). Seeing teenage girls as unintelligent and vain is very typical. There is also the stereotype of beautiful looking people being mean. Sara, the Colonel's girlfriend in *Looking For Alaska*, fits this same stereotype of beautiful but mean girl. Lacey from *Paper Towns* is also depicted as a girly girl,

especially at the beginning. This comes from showing her looking attractive and wanting to be prom queen (118), and allowing her to be emotional about Margo's revenge (119) and she cries again after a fight with Becca (183). Even though she stays girly during the whole book, she does get to show more characteristics, such as organised (251) and speaking her mind (205, 283). Hazel is also a rather typical teenage girl: she watches America's Next Top Model (6) and is very much in touch with her own emotions throughout the whole book. However, in *The Fault in Our Stars* an even more stereotypical depiction of a girl happens with Hazel's sociable friend Kaitlyn, who takes her shopping and likes to gossip about boys (42-44). With Margo and Alaska you of course get the stereotype of a manic pixie dream girl, and on the surface both of them fit that stereotype very well. Margo gets to break that stereotype, while Alaska stays bound by it

Pickering brings out an interesting problem with stereotypes and representing women, since "huge difficulties are involved in defining the 'reality' evoked in calls for more 'realistic' images of women in the media" (Pickering 15). What Pickering means by this, is that there is a lot of debate on whether the problem with stereotyping is that women are depicted in an unrealistic way or in a too realistic way (Pickering 15). Pickering exemplifies the first case with "falsely representing women, for example, as innately promiscuous and wanting sex with men at any tie" and the second case with "accurately representing women's many domestic services to men" (Pickering 15). In Green's books, I would say it is false representing, that the girls are almost always on some level romantically interested in the male character. An accurate representation that serves to strengthen a stereotype is for example the way teenage girls are depicted. There is some truth to it, but the stereotypical depiction does not really bring anything new or benefit the way girls are represented in the literary genre.

The main characters acting in a typically teenage way especially in relation to being attracted to the opposite gender helps the reader quickly form an idea about the characters and lets them know the narration is affected by the characters being teenagers. John Green has been accused of making his teenage characters be too philosophical, which is not something you would usually associate with teenagers. But it does let them break from being "stupid teenagers" and show that they are able to think in mature and complicated ways. Practically all characters comply to gender normative behaviour, which strengthens gender stereotypes. All in all, I would argue that Green does not use racial stereotypes on his characters, but he brings them up for discussion like he does with stereotyping Muslims as terrorists. He does use gender stereotyping and age stereotyping to build his teenage characters, which makes them perhaps realistic but presents the girls especially in a very one-sided manner.

### 3.3. Minor characters and gender

Stereotypes tie quite closely to minor characters, since minor characters often function with very little information, and a stereotype can carry a lot of information without having to be written out. What I'm interested mostly in relation to minor character is that is the amount of named female and male characters close to equal? This forces this chapter to have a bit of listing, but I think it is beneficial to see, whether gender plays a role in the amount of characters.

*In Looking for Alaska* there is a lot of named characters. Pudge's friends include Chip Martin – also known as the Colonel – Takumi, Lara and Alaska. At the beginning of the book at Pudge's going away party only two people arrive, Marie Lawson and her boyfriend Will (4). Other minor characters that are given names are Alaska's former roommate Marya and her boyfriend Paul (23), Justin who honked Alaska's breast (14), one-armed Clay Wurtzel who beat him at T-ball in third grade (45), basketball player Hank Walsten who always has marijuana and another player called Wilson Carbod (46), a Harsden Academy basketball player Travis 'the Beast' Eastman, Alaska's boyfriend Jake (61) Chandra Kilers who collects Cabbage Patch Kids (86), twin sisters Ruth and Margot Blowker (86), Joe and Marcus (87), Tommy Hewitt (117), Lara's roommate Katie (192), Maxx the male stripper (203), school founder Phillip Garden (207). Pudge's mother mentions a former teacher named Mrs. Forrester and their family friends the Johnstons, whose genders remain unknown (197). The school staff that is mentioned are Mr. Starnes, nicknamed the Eagle (16), Dr. Hyde also known as the Old Mand who teaches religion and has a wife who has passed away (138). Madame O'Malley teaches French (30), and according to Alaska she makes good stuffing at Thanksgiving dinner (77), depicting a woman stereotypically associated with cooking. The school cook is also a woman called Maureen (22), again showing a stereotypical depiction of what jobs women have. The colonel's mother Dolores is also good at cooking (91). Named weekday warriors include Kevin Richman, Sara (the Colonel's girlfriend 33), Longwell Chase – and his briefly mentioned dead aunt Hollis Burnis Chase (73), Holly Moser (86), Jeff (109), Brooke Blakely (159). That is a total of 14 females to 20 males. The males also seemed to have more recurring roles than the females. Pudge's parents remain unnamed, and we learn more about his father than about his mother, for example that he went to Culver Creek Preparatory School too and was quite wild as a teenager (7). He even helps Pudge with their big prank (201-203). We learn that Pudge's mother would have disapproved of the way the Colonel put all his clothes in the same drawer (12) and that she is decent cook (22), both of which are not very interesting details and fit the stereotype of mothers being neat, organised and home-oriented. At a later point, Pudge's father discusses books

with him and his mother teaches him how to cook (97), again complying to the stereotype. The Colonel's parents are mentioned (37) and he shares that his father cheated on his mother and left them (117). Alaska's parents are mentioned a few times, for example when she tells how their personalities were so different that they could not agree on a name (52) and at her funeral they meet her father (151), and later an aunt is mentioned (153). Lara also tells a short story about when she came to the United States from Romania with her parents (116) and Takumi discusses his grandmother's death and visiting his grandfather in Japan (118). There are not too many unnamed characters, there are three goth girls applying makeup (46), an unnamed male person at church (151), an unnamed girl at French class (157), a male police officer (162), and a woman working in a liquor store (190). So two unnamed male characters and five unnamed female characters, although the goth girls are mentioned as one and Pudge does not interact with them. The members of the school jury are referred to as just that or as "kid", and therefore are not gendered (58). The last words that Pudge remembers are from male authors and historical figures, such as John F. Kennedy (18) and Henrik Ibsen (11). The only exception is Princess Diana's last words (143). This shows the way our history and literature is shaped by the patriarchy, since the last words of women seem to be less recorded and the lives of remarkable women are too often left in the shadows. I also noticed that no female character has a nickname, but several males do, both adult and teenage.

*An Abundance of Katherines* has Colin start off with only one friend, Hassan. Besides Lindsey, the other characters he meets cannot really be called friends. The problem with the characters in this book is that a lot of characters are mentioned who are not actually present. Named minor characters Colin actually meets in this story or in the past include Colin's tutor Crazy Keith (44), The Other Colin (51), Chase 'Jeans Are Too Tight' and Fulton 'Short One Chewing Tobacco' (51), Katrina (52), Lindsey's mother Hollis (54), Marie Caravolli (114), KranialKidz competitors Karen Aronson and Sanjiv Reddy (114, 117), Townsend Lyford who takes them hunting (157) K-2's friend Amy (203), Jerome from smart-kid camp (203), piano prodigy Robert Vaughan (203) and Roy, who is the director of operations for Gutshot Textiles (191). They interview Starnes, an old man who used to work at the factory (75) and Colin remembers his old English teacher Mr. Holtsclaw (83). Other interviewees include Zeke, Katherine Layne (102), the five nursing home residents Jolene, Gladys, Karen, Mona, and Roy Walker (125). Mable Bartrand is from the nursing home for the even more elderly people (183). Characters who are only mentioned include Ellie Mae (73), Robert Caseman (19), Lindsey's friend Janet (197), Lindsey's grandparents Grace and Corville Wells (185) Dr. Dinzanfar (81), Caroline Clayton (82), Mary (83) Zeke's two sons Cody and Cobi (99) and Helen and Marcus (125). Colin's father remains unnamed

(5), while her mother's name is revealed to be Cindy (17). What we learn of their personalities is that his father seems to want to push him to become a genius (12) where as his mother would not mind if he learned to be a bit more "normal" (90). They are both highly educated and his mother teaches French and father is a sociology professor (17). The named characters amount to 19 females to 20 males. Hassan's parents are referred to as Mr. and Mrs. Harbish (14), so I am undecided on whether that counts as being named. Unnamed minor characters include Colin's father, a female professor (18), woman working at Hardee's (28), a female waitress at a sushi restaurant (36), Katrina's ex-boyfriend (122), ungendered waiter (142), a guy who makes moonshine (146), male nurse (183), and Lindsey's father (139). The gender ratio of unnamed characters is four females to six males, which again is quite equal. Also, the roles are relatively equal and not particularly stereotypically divided.

What throws this books gender ratio of is the 19 Katherines. John Green comments on the dehumanising way they are presented:

[--] the important thing to me was that Colin really doesn't distinguish among them (except for K-19), because to Colin this whole process is identical, and he's so focused on HIS role in it (as dumpee) that everyone else is dehumanized/diminished. (Green 26.08.2012  
onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com)

So even if the Katherines are presented as separate characters in certain occasions (203-207), they are part of a singular event to Colin. Whereas Hassan and Lindsey really grow as characters, Katherines remain the same in Colin's memories. This shows that there is a great imbalance in how the characters get to develop.

*Paper Towns* starts off with Quentin having two male friends, Radar and Ben Starling. Lacey becomes his friend as they search for Margo together. Angela, Radar's friend, is not that much a part of their group, perhaps most importantly because she does not join them on the road trip to New York, which ties the others together. From Quentin's school, named characters include Ben, Marcus also known as Radar, Margo, Lacey, Angela, Cassie Hiney and her prom date Frank (11, 19), Quentin's former girlfriend Suzie Chung and her new boyfriend Taddy Mac (13), Becca Arrington (13), Margo's boyfriend Jason 'Jase' Worthington (13), bully Chuck Parson (17), Karin (43), Clint Bauer (94), Ashley (94), Jasper Hanson (96) and Lacey's ex-boyfriend Craig (119). Named minor characters also include Mrs. Feldman and Juanita Alvarez, who Margo asks questions about the man she and Quentin find dead, Robert Joyner (7) Becca's father who is referred to as Mr. Arrington and Dwight (40, 42) Gus in the SunTrust building (55), Mary Beth Shortz (61), English



teacher Ms. Johnston (63) teacher Mr. Jiminez (89), Detective Otis Warren (101), female teacher Dr. Holden (123), Betty Parson (198), and the urban explorers Ace and the Carpenter (204). Quentin's parents are both therapists (6) and sentimental (197), but only his mother's name, Connie, is revealed (101). From Margo's family, we learn that her little sister's name is Ruthie (29) and her mother's name or nickname is Deb (102). This gives us 17 named female characters to 16 named male characters. There are also some unnamed characters, such as Radar's parents, who have the world's largest collection of black Santas (22). Unnamed characters also include a woman cashier (32), guy working at Walmart (35), male SeaWorld security person (76), a female gas-station employee and later a male one (252, 264), Hispanic female driver (257). These amount to four unnamed characters of both genders, whose roles are equally divided.

In *The Fault in Our Stars* Hazel's parents are more fleshed out than those of the other main characters and they are a bigger part of the story, even though they remain unnamed. Her mother really likes celebrating anything possible (40) and his father is very emotional (116). Augustus' family includes his sisters Julie and Martha (32), their husbands Chris and Dave (249), his nephew Daniel, his father Mark (55) and mother Emily (230). Hazel's support group includes Patrick (4), Isaac (6), Michael (10), Lida (11), Jamie – whose gender is not specified (14), James (14), Alisa (18), Ken and Lucas (129) and Susan (130). They also recite a list of people who have died: Maria, Kade and Taylor – again, it is unclear whether these two are girls or boys, Joseph, Haley, Abigail, Angelina, Gabriel (14) but Hazel does not mention the rest of the list. There are some named medical personnel, such as Doctor Jim (4), Doctor Maria (25), male Dr. Simons (115) and nurse Alison (106). Others include Isaac's girlfriend Monica (16), Hazel's friends Kaitlyn and Matt – though the latter is only mentioned (40), Derek Wellington (42), a little girl named Jackie (46), Peter Van Houten and his assistant Lidewij Vliegthart (67), Augustus' ex-girlfriend Caroline Mathers (72), Isaac's brother Graham (134), Daniel Alvarez who buys Hazel's swing set (125), teacher Mr. Martinez (219). These amount to 19 named female characters and 21 named male characters. Unnamed characters include Jackie's mother (47), Isaac's male surgeon (15), two female nurses (74, 263), Isaac's mother (77), TSA guy at the airport (141), a female gate agent (143), lady behind the ticket counter (144), two female flight stewardesses (146, 220), male taxi driver (156), man in the tram (161), restaurant hostess (162), male waiter (163), woman in a boat (165), Monica's mother (229), Augustus's two unnamed nephews (249), a minister whose gender is not specified (272), Lidewij's boyfriend (304). This means there are 11 unnamed female characters and 8 unnamed male characters. What I find slightly problematic, is that the nurses and flight attendants are all female, which are very stereotypical jobs for women.

In all the books, the amount of male and female minor characters is very equal, and the roles are mostly well divided to avoid unnecessary stereotyping. The exception to this is the female nurses and flight attendants in *The Fault in Our Stars*, although I highly doubt Green had the intention of strengthening such stereotypes. This is why I wanted to look into minor characters as well: to see whether the stereotypes are present in a character that is less refined. Another thing I came to wonder is that female characters are often described by the way they look, and their interests are not presented all that much. They do not get to have weird parents who collect black Santas, like Radar does, or have weird and perhaps disgusting manners of speech, like Ben does. They do not get nicknames like the Eagle or Pudge. They are plainer and more normal, and for that reason I think they are also often less interesting.

The amount of characters is important, because it shows how much a certain gender is being represented in the books. Because minor characters work on minimal information, stereotypes often offer a shortcut to presenting a character. In the next chapter, I continue with the theme of representation.

## 4 Representation

Having discussed stereotypes that are to be found in Green's books, I will now analyse representation. According to Pickering, representations are words and images that stand in for different social groups (xiii) in different forms of media. This does not simply mean the same as a stereotype, because while stereotypes are inflexible and usually work towards reinforcing existing power relations (Pickering 3), representation can change and be either restricting or liberating. Pickering opens the concept of representation more by stating that

They provide ways of describing and at the same time of regarding and thinking about these groups and categories. They may also affect how their members view themselves and experience the social world around them. Public representations have the power to select, arrange, and prioritise certain assumptions and ideas about different kinds of people, bringing some to the fore, dramatizing and demonising them, while casting others into the social margins, so that they have little active public presence or only a narrow and negative public image. (xiii)

This shows how important representation is: it can change individual's views of themselves and the way they look at the world. Misrepresenting some groups on purpose is an age-old way of keeping them from gaining social power or sympathy – and its uses vary from war propaganda to situational comedy TV series. Negative public representation leads to negative attitudes towards a group, whereas positive representation can be a means to accepting groups.

Besides misrepresentation, Pickering mentions under-representation and over-representation (xiii). When looking at Green's major characters, it is impossible not to notice that they are all white, heterosexual people from an economically well-to-do family and that most of them are male. Certain groups of people are therefore over-represented and others under-represented, which is not uncommon in literature. What makes it problematic is that groups outside the white heterosexual male exist and deserve to be represented by well written main characters also in young adult fiction. However, when that is the writer's own background, it is understandable that that is what he has the most knowledge and experience on.

Speaking for and speaking of people presents the speaker with the opportunity to create images of groups of people and such power should be used with care (Pickering xiii). This is especially important for an author such as John Green, whose audience is large and consists largely of young people who are forming their view on other people in part according to the media they are exposed to. Having good and varied representation adds in my opinion to the realism of the book,

since real life is full of all kinds of people, not just white male protagonists. There is a danger that the representation of for example African American characters or females is seen as filling a quota or being forced. But even then, it is worth it to have representation of varied characters since that normalises what should already be normal: different kinds of people presented in equally interesting roles in all forms of media.

I analyse representation in John Green's books first in relation to minorities and then in relation to his target audience, that is teenagers and more specifically teenage girls. I then discuss why authenticity is important in characters and whether Green's female characters feel authentic.

#### 4.1 Minorities

In the four Green novels I study, there are few characters representing minorities. Green himself has commented on this in a question and answer session on reddit.com:

[Writing economic, religious or racial minorities] gets to one of the (many) big weaknesses in my writing so far, which is that even when I've focused on characters who are marginalized – by mental illness or physical disability or whatever – my central characters have been white, relatively well-off, and either Christian or Jewish. This reflects my own experience, but of course as an author my job is not merely to reflect my own experience. For a long time, I felt like the most important thing I could do was to lift up and support work by diverse authors whose work better represents the breadth of American life, and I still think that's important[...] But I think ultimately my books are not as good or as interesting as they could be when I always put people that share a certain set of privileges at the center of the story. So yeah, the answer to your question is yes. I will try to do better. (John Green 3 reddit.com)

This comment shows that Green is in fact conscious of his lack of minority characters. However, it is hard to blame the author for writing on the basis of his experience and his social context, since that is the most easily accessible source of inspiration. Green also brings out a good point about representation in stating that supporting work by diverse authors is important, and that is indeed an effective way of bringing attention to the experiences of people who belong to other ethnic groups or minorities. But as for his novels, the representation of minorities is minimal.

In *An Abundance of Katherines*, the narration shows some understanding of the heterosexual context, as when telling about Colin's theory of who should initiate a kiss: "And that person, at least in high-school heterosexual relationships, is *definitely the girl*" (76). This shows that the narrator

focalised by Colin knows his experiences as a white male are not universal, but he also is not interested in anything but his own experience. All in all, sexual minorities are not represented in the books and discussions about sexual orientation are mainly jokes, while there is not much talk of characters from sexual minorities. Lindsey does ask if Colin's theorem works for gay couples as well, and the gender of the people the theorem is applied to does not matter (138). Sexual identities are discussed as jokes, when the character fails to show a "normal" heterosexual romantic interest towards a person of the opposite gender. This is apparent in *An Abundance of Katherines*, when Colin and Hassan discuss Hassan kissing Katrina: "You fugging kissed a girl. A *girl*. I mean, I always sort of thought you were gay" (133). This joking about gayness continues with Hassan saying: "I might be gay if I had a better-looking best friend" (133). Colin replies a comment that comes quite close to fatshaming: "And I might be gay if I could locate your penis under the fat rolls" (133). They go on to joke about penises in a stereotypically boyish way of dealing with an emotional situation (133). ).

A similar situation of joking about sexuality when failing to be romantically attracted to the opposite gender can be found in *The Fault in Our Stars*, when Kaitlyn and Hazel are talking about how Hazel is unsure about her feelings for Augustus: "'Maybe...are you gay?' 'I don't think so? I mean, I definitely like him'" (95). This presents being gay as the only option for not wanting to have a romantic relationship with an attractive member of the opposite gender. In *An Abundance of Katherines*, on the other hand, two minor male characters – Chase and Fulton who are referred to as JATT for Jeans Are Too Tight and SOCT for Short One Chewing Tobacco (51) – are arguing and Lindsey calls them an old married couple, who "instead of being in love with each other, they're both in love with Colin [Lindsey's boyfriend, not the main character]" (176). This makes Lindsey's boyfriend Colin laugh, while the boys "repeatedly asserted their heterosexuality" (176). This kind of joking makes fun of the way the boys are close friends and argue light-heartedly and of the way they look up to the other Colin. But at the same time, there is the notion of laughing at the possibility of a boy being in love with a boy, which does not reflect belonging to a sexual minority in a positive way. In *Looking for Alaska* Pudge says he and the Colonel are like an old married couple (118), since they seem to know each other well. Pudge does not mind the idea of presenting himself as like married to another male, but seems to like the closeness. When the Colonel knocks on the door like the principle to scare Pudge, Pudge and Takumi jump in the shower with their clothes on to not get caught smoking (185), the Colonel jokes about leaving a note the next time the two other boys need privacy (186). Takumi then also jokes about how after the shower he now feels

close to Pudge (186). These jokes are presented in a more positive and neutral way, than the joking in the other books I mentioned, and there is no emphasis on homosexuality being embarrassing.

Religious topics are dealt with at least in three of the books, *Paper Towns* being the only one that does not have overtly religious themes. *An Abundance of Katherines* deals to some extent with Islam and Muslims. As I mentioned before in 3.2 about stereotyping, Hassan knows his name sounds Muslim and therefore introduces himself as not-a-terrorist. This shows how people who are Christian and have Anglo-American names are privileged: they have not been as closely tied together with the crimes of those of their religious faith as is the case with for example Muslims. Green comments on Hassan's religion as follows:

Well, I wanted to take a Muslim character to the American South, and I wanted to write about a religious American Muslim whose life involved but was not entirely defined by religiosity. [--] And I wanted to put him in a small Southern town that most people—including Hassan—associate with intolerance because my experience has been that when people, even deeply prejudiced people, encounter and interact with those they imagine as Other, there is a mutual revelation that the Other is not so bad (or even other) after all. (Green onlyifyoufinishedkatherines.tumblr.com)

Hassan does not really encounter prejudice, but he is prepared for it. There are many parts in the book where Islam and how Hassan obeys or disobeys his religion are discussed. Hassan drinks half a beer, which Colin mentions is haram, forbidden (110). Colin blames Hassan on moral relativism, when Hassan explains what haram things he thinks are not a problem, such as having a dog compared to lying to his mother (87). Later Hassan discusses how he never does anything, and includes in his rant a list of religious things such as giving to the poor and celebrating Ramadan (196). At another point, Colin and Hassan discuss that Hassan is not allowed to eat pig, and the footnotes mention that Judaism also forbids it, but that “Colin was only half-Jewish, and [--] he wasn't religious” (156). Colin's Jewishness is evidenced by his hair being a “jew-fro” (55) and when he mentions that neither him or Hassan are Christian (24). In the same situation, there is also a brief mention that Katherine, also known as K-19, was a Christian before she became an atheist (25).

In *Looking for Alaska* the world religions course Pudge is attending deals with the topics of the book: “‘What is the nature of being a person? What is the best way to go about being a person? How did we come to be, and what will become of us when we are no longer? In short: What are the rules of this game, and how might we play it?’ *The nature of the labyrinth*, I scribbled into my

spiral notebook, *and the way out of it*" (32). Pudge is not religious, but understands when his teacher says that religion matters in the same way as history matters (33). The religious points of views discussed in the class are Christianity, Islam and Buddhism (50, 69–70, 82, 100, 118, 151, 158, 173-174, 195, 215–216). Takumi mentions his grandmother's funeral in Japan was a "little Buddhist and a little Shinto" (118), but does not discuss his own religion. Pudge ponders about the afterlife from the point of view of those three religions (82) and after Alaska's death comes to the conclusion that there is some kind of a soul and that human energy recycles, so combining something from all religions (220). However, as Green comments "The idea [Pudge] expresses at the very end of the novel—that he believes it is possible for he and Alaska both to attain mutual forgiveness—is a really super Christian idea" (Green, [onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com](http://onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com)). Therefore, Christianity is still most represented.

In *Paper Towns* it is briefly mentioned that Margo is Jewish (30), but it is never really developed further. Religion all in all is not discussed all that much in the book, although there is some discussion about death. In *The Fault in Our Stars* Hazel and Augustus have a disagreement on religion (168-170), since Hazel is an atheist and Augustus a Christian, his family even more so. The debate is mostly about whether there is an afterlife, a topic which is of course relevant to the couple, since cancer makes death present in everyday life. To me it would seem, that religion is more used with the male characters and it adds to their personality and spirituality. Hazel is of course developed as a character, but it is interesting that she as a female character is presented as atheist, whereas male characters are given religion.

In the books, all main characters' families represent a rather traditional family model: all main characters have both their parents alive and present, all are heterosexual. There is little to no discussion of class differences, although in *Looking for Alaska* it is shown that the Colonel's mother lives in a trailer park and they are very poor, which explains to some extent why the Colonel dislikes the rich kids so much (91). But otherwise, the characters mainly come from well-doing families.

In John Green's books ethnicity is shown in a few characters. At times the ethnicity is not explicitly defined and characters could be imagined in different ways, as can be seen from this question and answer on Tumblr:

Q: I imagined Alaska as a multiracial girl/WOC and The Colonel as well, does it annoy you if people picture your characters than how you describe them or would you encourage it?

A: If I recall correctly, I was conscious about not identifying either the Colonel or Alaska by race, so I'll continue not doing that. But yeah, I think those are certainly valid imaginings.  
(Green 06.08.2012 onlyifyoufinishedalaska.tumblr.com)

Even if it was a conscious decision not to have explicit ethnicity for some of the characters, potential representation is not true representation, and therefore I only look at explicit cases of ethnic representation. In *Paper Towns* Marcus or Radar, as he is mostly referred to as, is black (12), and his family even has a black Santa Collection (195). His girlfriend Angela is also African-American (19). Takumi in *Looking for Alaska* is the only character of Asian descent (22). In the same book, Lara is from Romania and it shows in her accent (102). In *The Fault in our Stars* there are some European characters as Hazel and Augustus visit the Netherlands, but ethnicity is not discussed. Hassan's ethnicity is mentioned as "of Lebanese descent" (8) but it is not discussed beyond that, only that he is a Muslim. All in all, there is rather little representation of non-white people. The main characters are all Caucasian and characters with ethnic characteristics only appear as minor characters, and even then as a minority.

Another category of people who are often not represented well are physically disabled people and people with mental illnesses. I have already discussed Colin's potential autism and Hazel's and Margo's potential depression, and Alaska's depressive and manic qualities, but the characters are not explicitly said to have diagnosed conditions. They give room to read them as having mental illnesses, but having them explicitly out there would be better representation. In *The Fault in Our Stars* the cancer patients have varied disabilities, such as Augustus' prosthetic leg and Isaac losing his eyes, and in the support group, there are children and teenagers with all kinds of disabilities. The book therefore gives a lot of representation for people with physical disabilities, both through main characters and minor characters. In the other books, there are no characters with physical disabilities.

To summarise, in Green's novels minorities are not being represented all that much. Green himself expresses his lack of representation of minorities as a problem with his books. There are a few mentions of ethnicities, such as Hassan and Radar, but only on minor characters. There is no deviating from the heterosexual norm, and homosexuality is sometimes used as a joke. Religion is discussed, and Christianity and Islam are most represented. The characters are mostly from financially well-doing families, with the exception of the Colonel. Mental illness is not explicitly represented, since none of the characters are diagnosed in the books, except for Hazel, who however claims to not have depression. Physical disabilities are most represented in *The Fault in Our Stars*, since cancer has taken its toll on so many characters, including both main characters.



## 4.2 The target audience

As young adult fiction, Green's books are mainly marketed for teenagers. From the Gale Groups biographical information, we learn why Green has chosen to write young adult fiction:

As he said in his Printz acceptance speech (reprinted on his Web log), "I like writing for teenagers because they are still trying to figure out how to be people in un-selfconscious, forthright ways – because they are still open to the idea that a single book might change their understanding of how to be a person." He added in an interview for the *Penguin Putnam* Web site that the "big questions – about love and religion and compassion and grief – matter to teens in a very visceral way. And it's fun to write teenage characters. They're funny and clever and feel so much so intensely." (ic.galegroup.com)

As the above quote shows, Green finds teenagers a good audience, since they are open to growing as a person and teenage characters can perhaps get away with reacting more strongly than adult characters would. Green expresses such views again in a reddit.com session, saying that teenagers approach big questions in an unironically excited way (John Green 1 reddit.com). Teenagers also make for good characters since they are both doing things for the first time and finishing their childhood at the same time (John Green 1 reddit.com). Lastly, Green mentions that teenagers make good readers, since the books you read in your teenage years are "part of how [you] discovered not only [your]self but also the full reality of the other. Those books helped me to imagine other people complexly, and to understand that the grief and joy of others was as real as my own" (John Green 1 reddit.com). This expresses a wish to be a positive influence and have his books be a part of teenagers growing up.

In addition to being mostly teenagers, many of the readers are female and especially *Paper Towns* and *The Fault in Our Stars*, which have been turned into movies, have been targeted for teenage females. This shows, for example in a vlogbrothers' video titled "Where's Margo! A Nerdfighter Event!" where Hank Green sings a song about Margo from *Paper Towns* and members of the nerdfighter community have taken pictures of themselves with the book: apparently, most of the pictures have been submitted by females. There is also a Nerdfighter census, which maps out some statistics about members of the Nerdfighter community. According to Hank Green's analysis of the 2014 census, 72 percent of the community are female and the largest age group is 16-to-18-year-olds with 33 percent (hankschannel, 29.5.2014). 85 percent of the community members are non-Hispanic white and are from the United States (hankschannel, 29.5.2014). More than 87,000 of the 100,000 people who answered have read a John Green novel (hankschannel, 29.5.2014). These

statistics would suggest that the main audience for Green's books too is mostly Caucasian teenage females from the United States.

Todd comments on writing in a genre directed at females that "The method [of considering ideology when looking at literary history] can also be added to the study of popular culture, so that genres that have been despised as popular or feminine can be illuminated and the uncanonised can be connected with the canonised in startling ways, to break down the 'aristocracy of discourse'" (99). This shows that literature that has been targeted at women has not been considered canonical or "good" literature, and terms such as "chick lit" and "chick flick" have a disparaging connotation attached to them. Green's books are certainly in danger of being seen as "just chick lit", as there is a lot of romance and talk of feelings in the books. But just as "chick lit" has much more to it than romance, so do John Green's books, since the themes vary from dealing with your own inevitable death and learning to imagine other people as complexly as possible.

Women as romantic characters who only focus on their feelings is of course not a good representation of all women. Varied representation of women in the media is important, because it shows that women are complex characters and that they are equal to men. Hazel does get to have romance, but her feelings and experiences touch on much more than that. On the American Association of University Women's website I found some interesting thoughts by Katie Broendel on representation and why it matters. "It's about giving a voice—and representation!—to a multitude of experiences rather than seeing and hearing from a select few" (Broendel, The American Association of University Women). With Green's books, the female characters are sadly not very diverse, but to that I would say, neither are perhaps his male characters.

To put it shortly, John Green enjoys writing to a teenage audience, because they feel strongly and think open-mindedly. His audience consists mainly of white American females between the ages 16 and 18. In Green's books the representation of women is rather narrow, since the females are not very diverse and because they are so strongly affected by the male narration. Their role is too often tied to romance and they do not get to be as weird or original as the boys. Broendel also brings out a good point from Susan J. Douglas: "'Why should policy makers pay attention to media images of women? Because the media—and especially (although not exclusively) the news media—may not succeed in telling us what to think, but they certainly do succeed in telling us what to think about'" (Broendel, The American Association of University Women). Media shapes the way we view others and ourselves, and that is why it is important to strive for good, varied and authentic representation.

### 4.3 Authenticity

Blakey Vermeule wonders about why humans wilfully invest their emotions on fictional characters and gives interesting examples of people not liking to be tricked into believing something is real when it is fabricated, but in other cases also getting more inspired by a story which they are told is partially true (18–20). It seems believable that authors strive towards realistic characters because real life stories affect people greatly, although this seems unfair to stories with a clearly fictional setting, such as fantasy or science fiction. John Green's books are young adult fiction and take place in a rather realistic world, so plausibility of the world in the books should not be a problem. The plots do sometimes involve highly improbable things, such as a handsome boy flying you to Amsterdam to meet your favourite author or finding a girl who has left town for good by following clues she did not really leave. But I would say even that does not necessarily make the characters less authentic.

Even though Sara Mills' article on authentic realism mostly focuses on female authors, and she also highlights autobiographical works and writing in a way that is accessible to all women regardless of level of education (52-53), I found her text helpful in looking at authenticity. Mills' mentions that there is such a thing as a women's experience, which is shared by all women in the sense that the patriarchy affects all women (55), but I do not agree that biological functions make the female experience (55), since that leaves out for example transsexual women. According to Mills, "Male writers have portrayed women as stereotypes or as mythical figures in the past, and authentic realist critics demand a change to figures which are closer to the way women are in real life" (58). I have already discussed how Margo and Alaska have been viewed as manic pixie dream girls, and these stereotypes regarding women are found in Green's books. As Mills expresses: "women, instead of being represented simply as housewives and sex objects, are seen as individuals who can have a range of occupations and modes of being" (58). Although housewives and sex objects are not the biggest issue in Green's books, the point of representing females as individuals still stands. Although Mills' seems critical about men being able to reflect the reality of women in their characters (61), I would argue that it is indeed very much possible, since imagination can birth worlds completely different to ours. If the author is perceptive enough of his own society and informed enough about what kind of a character they are writing, it should not be impossible to see how another gender's experience differs from their own. I agree with Mills on that the gender of the author matters (72), but the end product is what shows success or failure.

Green's own thoughts on writing from the perspective of a teenage girl – something he has no personal experience on – can be found in a reddit.com questions and answers session:

I never thought, like, “I am trying to write from the perspective of a teenage girl.” I thought, like, “I am trying to write from Hazel's perspective.” I wanted to be very specific to Hazel's experience. I of course don't know anything about contemporary teenage girls, but I also don't know anything about being the parent of a teen girl, or living in Skullbone Tennessee, or etc. So it's always an act of imagination to try to inhabit a character, and that's why I love writing: It's a way out of the prison of my own consciousness. (John Green 2 reddit.com)

This would mean that writing Hazel acted as a possibility for Green himself to improve his imagining-skills by stepping out of his comfort zone. According to Cheryl Lange, “gender is socially constructed. It represents accepted ideas about what it means to be male and female. Gender rules can deter male writers from trying on the female persona, as well as influence the critics who may assume that male authors are unable to do so” (6). Green's switch to female narration shows a will to understand the female experience better, even if gender rules and critics might be deterring. I also agree with gender being a social construct, since it is a more modern way of looking at womanhood than merely looking a biology. Lange also points out that “strict gender ideals leave little room for differences, forcing readers to assume that all male writers are patriarchal and all female writers are feminist” (6), which I again agree with. The emphasis should be on attempting to write interesting characters, not on who is allowed to do what.

What perhaps make Hazel feel more authentic is that she has a more realistic view on life is partly due to her pessimism and dark sense of humour: she is less naïve than the male narrators. Her style of narration is also rather direct and diary-like, unlike with the boys, whose narration is more polished and less expressed like a teenager would express it. This allows Hazel to express her thoughts immediately, even though the book is written in past tense:

I liked Augustus Waters. I really, really, really liked him. I liked the way his story ended with someone else. I liked that he took existentially fraught free throws. I liked that he was a tenured professor in the Department of Slightly Crooked Smiles with a dual appointment in the Department of Having a Voice That Made My Skin Feel More Like Skin. And I liked that he had two names. (31-32)

Even if this shows how romanticising Hazel can be –she is actually the only main character to go from romanticising to having sexual intercourse in the books – it feels almost confessional and intimate. Especially *Looking for Alaska* and *An Abundance of Katherines* have more obvious ways of showing the narrator knows how the story will end. Mills explains that form and language are a way to make the reader “feel close to the characters and the events in the text” (69). Hazel's

language is rich and interesting and feels authentic, with her exclamations of “WHAT IS THIS LIFE” (78) and her intelligent references to for example Maslow (212) and her sense of humour, as evidenced by her rant on the “ridiculous construction that a scrambled egg-inclusive meal is *breakfast* even when it occurs at dinnertime” (138).

In her analysis, Mills discusses sexual and non-sexual relationships between women (65-66), and this got me to thinking that that is one of the biggest problems with authenticity in Green’s books: relationships between females are barely existent. Alaska’s mother is dead, her roommate Marya got kicked out of school, and she does not have any close female friends, not even Lara is that close to her. Lindsey has strong relationship with her mother, but she does not seem to have close female friends. She mentions someone called Janet once, and even if she says Katrina is her friend, they barely interact. Margo’s relationship with her parents, and thereby with her mother is poor. She is fond of her little sister Ruthie, but not a lot of their relationship is shown. Her friendships with Becca and Karin are not depicted all that much, and even Lacey does not know too much about what she really is like. Even Hazel, who as the narrator we get a closer look on than the other girls, has few female friendships. She has a good relationship with her mother and an alright relationship with Kaitlyn. She does get to share some things with Kaitlyn that she does not share with Augustus – mainly things about Augustus. However, she spends more time with Isaac than with Kaitlyn. Compared to the male characters, Hazel does not get as much friendship as the boys do.

As I mentioned before, the girls do not get to be as weird as the boys do, which might affect the authenticity either way. Ben, with his exaggerated character and use of “honeybunny” did not feel particularly authentic for me. But the odd detail of Radar’s parent’s black santas did make his character more interesting. Hazel’s authenticity and realism comes in part from the same things I have discussed already, such as her teenage qualities, that could be considered stereotypical. Her thoughts about not wanting to hurt her parents awake understanding in the reader, and even if she thinks sometimes in an exaggeratedly intelligent way, her thoughts are relatable.

Margo and Lindsey also express relatable thoughts. Lindsey has her trauma of bullying and she feels the need to change herself in order to fit in. Margo feels out of place in her hometown, and feels like nobody gets her. I do find Alaska’s thoughts the hardest to find relatable, since she is so often talking in a dramatic way or is in a fit of emotion. Most of the discussion about how Alaska feels and thinks happens without Alaska, and this distances her from the reader.

Authenticity ties into representation in the sense that authentic characters are a good reflection of how people can be in real life. Stereotyping is used to give easy access to a mental image about a character, but it can have the effect of either adding to the authenticity or taking away from it, depending on the way the reader views the stereotype. If they agree with the stereotype, they will find the character more authentic. If they disagree, the character will seem poorly constructed.

The characters are not always moral or good: Miles and Alaska break a lot of rules by smoking and drinking at school grounds. But they are not necessarily meant to be seen as good role models. Mills comments on authenticity and role models, saying that “the demand for realism, truth to life, clashes with the demand for role models, since the reader cannot ask for a reflection of reality, if at the same time she is asking for something idealised” (78). The characters are teenagers, and therefore act in ways teenagers do. Sometimes that involves stupid or immoral things. Even if the characters are not role models, it does not mean that nothing can be learned from them and their story. As Vermeule puts it, “literary characters are tools to think with” (245).

## 5 Conclusion

After discussing the characters in John Green's novels from many different points of view, I find summarising some of my findings easier than others. Some questions that I asked myself when I set out to write this thesis have eluded me, and I will discuss them in a short while.

What is to be made of these female characters? I would argue that they are not entirely realistic, in the sense that some qualities seem exaggerated: the immense mystery of Alaska and Margo remains, and Lindsey's chameleon-like qualities seem a bit unreal. Hazel on the other hand is implausibly smart and mature for her age, though as readers we should not underestimate teenagers and their intelligence. They are not particularly diverse, since they represent no minority, unless Hazel's illness is counted as belonging to a minority. There are some manic pixie dream girl qualities, and stereotypical views on how girls are seen as for example vain.

The books do not entirely succeed in breaking stereotypes, except in the sense that the boy does not always get the girl in the end and that certain attitudes are ridiculed at times. What John Green should receive credit for is the attempt at making his readers think: since the male characters do reflect on themselves and get positive and negative feedback, they can help readers understand the situation better and they may even learn to imagine other people more complexly. Green also shows his own progress as a writer, as can be seen from the following quote:

Well, it was important to me when writing *Alaska*, too, but in the respond to that novel it became obvious to me that I hadn't made my point about imagining people complexly as clearly or forthrightly as I'd wanted to. (The nature of the story arc in *Alaska* makes it difficult to give Alaska, as a character, the agency she deserves.) I also think I was inundated with examples of people imagining their romantic others as more than human. [--] All writing and reading is really deep down about empathy, so hopefully this has been a consistent theme in my books, but with *Paper Towns* I really wanted to put it front and center. (Green 02.08.2012 [onlyifyoufinishedpapertowns.tumblr.com](http://onlyifyoufinishedpapertowns.tumblr.com))

This ever-developing theme of imaging complexly is made more and more obvious, and Green's switch to writing from a female perspective shows a way of doing just that. Green's presence on social media and the internet makes it possible for readers to find answers to what the author has meant, but it does not change the fact that some of the themes have remained unclear to readers.

In chapter 2 I looked at the main female characters. In relation to character I found out that Green considers plots as ways to present characters and that characters present readers with

opportunities to experience feelings in a safe environment. As I studied Green's books in relation to narration and focalisation I learned that there is a male focalizer and female focalized characters in all books except for *The Fault in our Stars*, where the roles are reversed. All books have first-person narration with a homodiegetic narrator, except for *An Abundance of Katherines* where the narrator may be Colin or not, but it is however written with third-person narration. The narrators have limited knowledge, which ties in with the theme of failing to imagine that other people are just as complex that you yourself are. In the cases of the three male narrators, the focalised girls' thoughts cannot be directly expressed. However, characterisation is also built through appearance, actions, possessions and dialogue, although all is still given through the focalizer. The female character's physical descriptions revolve around attractiveness to male characters, and the male possessive gaze objectifies the females. Hazel does admire Augustus' physical appearance, but is not as fixated on his body as for example Pudge is fixated on Alaska's body. Hazel is more conscious of her own looks and clothes than the male characters are, and her body image is affected by the changes the cancer has brought. Self-presentation is when the characters actually get to express themselves, instead of being interpreted by the narrator. The female characters have different roles, for example Hazel shows the life of a cancer patient and Margo works as a way of exemplifying misimaginings, but they are all connected by the role of being a love interest. The fact that they are all so tied to the main male characters lessens their independence as characters.

In chapter three I focused on the other characters in John Green's novels and came to the conclusion that the male characters are not criticised all that obviously in the books. Colin is ironised the most, but Ben's use of "honeybunny" continues and Pudge stays rather narcissistic about Alaska's death throughout the book. The boys – and Hazel as well – are affected by patriarchal views and personal world views, but this is not made obvious. It does show in the themes of misimagining and romanticising. Next, I looked at stereotyping and discovered that although there is some stereotyping, there is not too much of harmful stereotypes in the books, although some can be seen in the way the girls are presented as attractive, normal and mysterious and the boys are more goofy, weird and funny. Regarding minor characters, I looked at the amount of female and male characters and learned that their amounts are very equal in the books. The roles that the characters have are more often non-stereotyping than stereotyping, although *The Fault in Our Stars* had some stereotypical jobs for females.

In chapter four I discussed representation and the fact that it can help build your image of both other and yourself, and therefore it is important that there is good and versatile representation available. In looking at minorities, I discovered that Green's books have very few of them, and



therefore do not give good representation. Minorities were discussed in relation to ethnicity, religion, sexuality, class, mental illness and physical disabilities. Of those, *The Fault in Our Stars* has representation of physical disabilities, *An Abundance of Katherines* shows Hassan as a Muslim and the Colonel showcases a background of little income, and in *Paper Towns* African-Americans are represented by Radar and his family. Sexual minorities are not present, and the representation of mental illness is questionable, since only Hazel has an actual diagnosis. After minorities I turned to looking at Green's target audience, which is mainly white American females who are between 16 and 18. The target audience matters, because Green is presenting female representations to an audience in the progress on defining themselves. I also found out that genres directed towards female audiences are considered somehow "less literary", although for example Green's books present the reader with very deep and important topics. Lastly, I discussed authenticity and how it has been considered problematic when men write female characters. I however come to the conclusion, that although the female experience is different from the male experience, it is also very varied in itself. I also find myself in favour of the idea, that good background work and good imagination make writing characters with a different gender than one's own possible. Authenticity comes from form, language and characters that reflect real life well. One of Green's biggest flaws in making authentic female characters, is that there are very few female relationships that would go to any depth.

In the introduction I asked several questions, and I will now attempt to answer them according to my findings. What is good representation of female characters and is there such in popular mainstream literature? Good representation of female characters is diverse, authentic and shows females also without relation to male characters. Green's books do not completely fail or succeed in any of these points. What are the ways in which females are characterised and do they differ from how males are characterised? I found the females to be more characterised by their looks and by stereotypes than the males, since the males got to have much more peculiar qualities and flaws. Other characterisation came from dialogue, actions, possessions and self-presented opinions and stories. What makes a character feel authentic? A character feels authentic, when the reader is able to view them as a real human, while at the same time knowing that they are indeed fictional. Authenticity comes from both characterisation and the way it fits with how we view ourselves and others.

I did not manage to answer all my questions. Further studies should be done to deepen the analysis on minor characters, since I did not study how the minor characters interact and communicate with each other and the main characters, and whether gender affects it. The characters could also be looked at from the perspective of whether they are well-rounded and developed or

not, and whether gender plays a role in it. I succeeded in deepening my understanding of the books and analysing what makes the books problematic, but a stronger basis in theory would have helped in making my arguments stronger.

I chose this topic, because of my love for these books and my interest in feminism. I had been hearing a lot of criticism about Green's characters and novels in general, and wanted to take a closer look to see if they really were as problematic as people made them out to be. Luckily, even after studying these novels, I still like them, although they are not without their issues. I do find some of the characters problematic, but they remain compelling and amusing to me. Studying female representation and female characters is important, because we live in a society where the female is still too often considered Other and patriarchal gender roles restrict the lives of women. With varied representation and interesting characters, it is possible to spark empathy and understanding. But most important is that girls can see themselves represented as individuals and not merely as objects for male consumption. The wish is simple enough, and it should be expressed both in real life and in relation to literary characters: Imagine me complexly.

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