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American Quirky Novel in the 21st Century

Gender in American Quirky Novel of the 21st Century:

The Perks of Being a Wallflower and *Looking for Alaska*

Gender v americkom "Quirky" románe 21. storočia:

The Perks of Being a Wallflower a *Looking for Alaska*

Diploma Thesis

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English Philology

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Olomouc 2023

I declare that I have worked independently on the diploma thesis under the professional supervision of Mgr. Elizabeth Allyn Woock, Ph.D., and I have listed all the sources and literature used in it.

In Olomouc on 10.12.2023

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	4
2	Review of Literature	7
2.1	Primary Sources	7
2.2	Secondary Sources	9
3	Methodology.....	14
3.1	Young Adult Literature	16
3.2	Quirky Novel.....	16
3.3	Gender Performativity.....	17
3.4	Manic Pixie Dream Girl	20
3.5	Third-Wave Feminism	22
4	The Perks of Being a Wallflower	26
4.1	Gender Performativity.....	26
4.2	Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model.....	32
4.3	Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'	39
5	Looking for Alaska.....	43
5.1	Gender Performativity.....	43
5.2	Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model.....	47
5.3	Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'	54
6	Discussion.....	58
7	Conclusion.....	63
8	Resumé	66
9	Bibliography	67
10	Annotation.....	70
11	Anotácia	71

1 Introduction

The female protagonists of two primary sources that undergo analysis in the second part of the thesis are both mentioned as an example of 'Manic Pixie Dream Girl' (MPDG) in contemporary literature in a couple of articles and studies, such as Gouck (2021, 2023), Solomon (2017), or John Green, the author of one of the primary sources examined in the analysis section of the thesis, *Looking for Alaska* (2005), himself. There is a great debate in the field of contemporary young adult literature and cinema, whether the trope exists, and if so, whether it develops or stays in its stereotypical portrayal even with the change in culture, feminism, and the concept of gender. New terms, such as 'Manic Pixie Dream Boy' (MPDB) or 'Alt-Pixie' are starting to appear, and I want to not only apply my secondary sources examining the stereotypes connected to MPDG trope but also search these new occurring trends in both novels.

The definitions of masculinity and femininity “vary from one society/culture to another, within any society/culture over time, within each individual over time, and, perhaps most importantly, among different individuals in one group at one point in time.”¹ Femininity is stereotypically centered around “expressiveness and relational qualities,” while masculinity is linked to “forcefulness and assertiveness.”² But certain characters of both analyzed novels are depicted in a way that goes beyond the boundaries of conventional gender. The interchangeable gender identities that these young adults exhibited led me to explore gender theories and apply them to these novels. According to Butler (1990), the performativity of everyone does define their gender. Therefore, in this study I not only examine the MPDG trope, but I also look at the gender performativity of young-adult characters in these quirky novels. I complement this with the feminist theory analysis, specifically, the concept of choice connected to the third wave of feminism, as it is one of the main differences between the second and third waves.

Since there are some theses and articles that examine gender, MPDG, or femininity in both novels, I wouldn't say there is an enormous gap in the field. We could say that I filled this micro-gap because there aren't many if any, analyses of these novels that specifically address the principles of third-wave feminism through the lens of gender performativity. Given that the MPDG trope in contemporary American literature appears to have changed somewhat since

¹ HOFFMAN, R., Hattie, J. A., & Borders, L. Personal definitions of masculinity and femininity as an aspect of gender self-concept. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*. 44, 2005, p. 67.

² *Ibid.*, p. 77.

the term's invention, I would contend that there is room for new research directions, the most important of which involve analyzing the MPDG trope.

All sources examined and used in the analysis are described and reviewed in the second chapter (primary sources in 2.1, secondary sources in 2.2), and the third chapter introduces the methods, terms that I worked with, and the process of analysis. The fourth and fifth chapters are the analyses of two primary sources through the lenses of different theories and concepts connected to gender and femininity. In the sixth, Discussion, section I sum up the themes occurring in the analysis, and by adding more scholarly sources I debate the consensus and disagreements in the field.

In the analysis, I examine two contemporary American quirky novels within the young adult literature genre – *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1999) and *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005). Both novels are written with the first-person narration with male protagonists being the narrators. In these novels, I apply three concepts – Gender Performativity by Judith Butler from the book *Gender Trouble* (1990), and MPDG trope according to Jennifer Gouck's article "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model" (2021) complemented by another article by Gouck, "The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction" (2023), and Claire T. Solomon's "Anarcho-Feminist Melodrama and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl" (2017). In the last part of the analysis, I use the article "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'" by R. Claire Snyder-Hall (2010), and the publication by Roberta Seelinger Trites *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* (1997) to examine two primary sources through feminist theory.

I state my research question as follows: How do the characters of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Looking for Alaska* embody or challenge gender performativity, the MPDG trope, and third-wave feminism within the context of contemporary American young adult quirky novels?

In this thesis, I want to answer more additional questions. How is gender identity expressed in two chosen quirky novels? Does the concept of gender performativity by Judith Butler help or hinder both male and female characters' development of their gender identities? Does non-conforming to stereotypical gender roles affect the socio-economic status of men and women? How can contemporary ideas of femininity and, to a lesser extent, masculinity fit into this trope? Do the novels try to dismantle or approve of this trope? How does the portrayal of the MPDG trope as described by Jennifer Gouck manifest in the main female characters, Sam and Alaska, and what implications does it have for the representation of female characters

in contemporary American young adult novels? In what ways do female characters embody or challenge the principles and themes of third-wave feminism, particularly regarding the idea of 'choice' proposed by R. Claire Snyder-Hall?

I hypothesize that the male protagonists, Charlie and Miles, will not conform to gender norms and stereotypes, and they will not “perform” their gender according to stereotypical male behavior, as they are both the main characters of quirky novels, they are quirky themselves. And this quirkiness will be shown via not being assigned stereotypically male traits, to the contrary, I suppose they will both “perform” their gender mostly femininely. I also anticipate that the main female characters, Sam and Alaska will embody more masculine traits to emphasize the quirkiness of the male protagonist. I suppose with gender fluidity will come also socio-economic changes to stereotypical gender norms, such as some of the female characters being the breadwinners capable of taking care of the whole household, or a weak man not being able to defend others during a physical attack. Both novels being published within 5 years (\pm) from the start of the new millennium, I expect both Sam and Alaska will not perfectly fit into the MPDG trope of only catalyzing the male protagonist; I think they will undergo at least some kind of development as female characters and that they will be shown as deep characters with some power in their relationships. With this being said, I suppose the five-stage narrative model by Gouck (2021) to fit into both of the novels and MPDG to be stereotypically pictured in the literature. I expect all the young female characters to be prevalently feminists with the emphasis on the choice of other women, whatever they might be, and I think older female characters (parents, grandparents of the protagonists) will either not be feminists at all, or they will belong more into the second-wave feminism with the emphasis on the equality and shaming the choices of other women that seem to be putting them into the submissive role to men. And I also suppose secondary sources to work with how men should behave in accordance to feminism, what their role and position may be towards women. I think both Charlie and Miles will be supportive of Sam’s and Alaska’s choices, and I suppose both male protagonists will be submissive to female characters.

2 Review of Literature

2.1 Primary Sources

As already stated in the introduction, two primary sources – novels, are analyzed in this thesis through the lens of three different secondary sources and their core ideas. For the analysis, it is vital to introduce the main sources used in this thesis, and this subchapter is dedicated to it.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky is a moving coming-of-age epistolary novel that deals with the complex world of adolescence, mental health, friendship, and personal growth. This 1999 novel provides a personal look into the life of Charlie, a quiet and perceptive adolescent coping with his emotions and the difficulties of high school. Set in the early 1990s, the novel is composed of a series of letters that Charlie writes to an anonymous friend. One of the main themes of the novel is the search for identity and belonging. The novel also explores topics such as friendship, sexual orientation, drug abuse, and mental health, and raises important conversations about the importance of seeking help, the challenges of coping with mental health issues, and the significance of supportive friendships and therapy. Charlie's journey is marked by his willingness to confront his demons, grapple with personal truths, and make sense of the complexities of emotions.

The novel has generally met with positive responses since its initial publication. The book gained popularity, especially among young readers, and became a hit in the young adult genre. Mostly because of its authentic and perceptive portrayal of the emotionally challenging period of adolescence and the depth of emotional themes that teenagers can relate to. Many readers and reviewers appreciated Chbosky's ability to craft a story that touches on issues such as loneliness, loss, sexual identity, and mental health with empathy and feeling claiming the novel is going to have an impact on the young generation still in the future.³ However, according to *Wikipedia*, there were some reviewers and readers who pointed out the similarities

³ FLEISHHACKER, Joy. "The Perks of Being a Wallflower and Other Tales of Teen Angst and Alienation." *School Library Journal*. August 31, 2012. Retrieved November 27, 2023.

to Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, and suggested Chbosky stolen the structure and the style of writing.⁴ The novel was adapted into a movie by Summit Entertainment in 2012.⁵

Many reviewers praised Chbosky for making the readers the recipients of Charlie's letters.⁶ In his analysis, Matos (2013) asserts that since young adult literature implicitly seeks to educate the reader in some way, the novel's goal is to depict a formation process while purposefully utilizing the formative nature of the epistolary form—and keeping the reader's role as a recipient of Charlie's letters in mind. In the same way that Charlie is compelled to engage with his cultural and social surroundings, readers are encouraged to participate in the story. Matos concludes Charlie was able to achieve his goal of self-balancing within his own social setting thanks to writing. Charlie's writing evolved in a manner that both reflected and reproduced his spiritual and mental growth. "And through his writing, we develop as readers: we indeed become people who are not only capable of listening to Charlie but are also capable of understanding him."⁷

Looking for Alaska

Looking for Alaska by John Green, published in 2005, gets readers into the life of the protagonist, Miles "Pudge" Halter, as he sets off to a boarding school. The narrative unfolds through Pudge's interactions with mostly his roommate, Chip "The Colonel" Martin, and the unpredictable Alaska Young. The novel delves into themes of love, desire, and grief as Pudge navigates the emotional difficulties of his relationships, particularly with Alaska. Her presence casts doubt on his conceptions of life and death, and her mysterious personality calls into the human struggle to understand the unknowable. The author combines humor and philosophical thought throughout the narrative. He dives into the notion that the key to personal development and change is comprehending life is full of suffering. Readers get to see Pudge's emotional development and the significant influence of relationships as he struggles with the aftermath of a tragedy.

The novel evoked a mixed but mostly positive response. After its first release, it did not gain widespread attention, but gradually became popular and critically acclaimed. Upon its

⁴ Wikipedia as paraphrased from Kirkus Reviews, 1999. "The Perks of Being a Wallflower." *Wikipedia*, Accessed November 26, 2023.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Perks_of_Being_a_Wallflower#Publication_and_reception

⁵ "The Perks of Being a Wallflower." *Box Office Mojo*. 2012. Retrieved November 27, 2023.

⁶ FLEISHHACKER, Joy. "The Perks of Being a Wallflower and Other Tales of Teen Angst and Alienation."

⁷ MATOS, Angel Daniel. "Writing through Growth, Growth through Writing: The Perks of Being a Wallflower and the Narrative of Development." *ALAN Review*. 40, no. 3 (2013).

release, *Looking for Alaska* was praised by many readers and reviewers of both younger and older ages for its authentic characters, introspective storytelling, and exploration of themes such as friendship, loss, love, and coming of age.⁸ However, there were discussions concerning the work's appropriateness for different age groups as mostly parents claimed it dealt with adult themes, such as sexuality, drug and alcohol usage, suicide, and it was explicit in both sexual and vulgar content.⁹ Furthermore, some critics have claimed that the novel lacks originality and is a cliched portrayal of teenage life. In general, it is highly praised for its rich emotional content, accurate depiction of teenage experiences, and ability to provoke more in-depth thinking through its themes. The novel hit *The New York Times* Best Seller list for children's paperback books¹⁰ and was adapted into a television series in 2019 on Hulu.¹¹

In their article, Lewis, Petrone, and Sarigianides (2016) claim the novel shows how adolescence is not centered around a set of innate behaviors but rather a series of performances influenced by the standards set by adults. According to their analysis, the novel demonstrates how nondominant ideas of adolescence foster more equitable, respectful, and reciprocal relationships between youth and adults, while dominant ideas of adolescence constrain oppositional, and ultimately diminishing relations between youth and adults. In their analysis, they provide an example of how not only teenagers but also their parents and teachers can reevaluate how they read young adult literature by challenging the genre's messages about youth. For instance, it would be unfair to minimize the Colonel and Pudge's ability to contemplate death as they are only teenagers, and therefore they suggest the novel is more than suitable for young adults to read.¹²

2.2 Secondary Sources

To analyze two primary sources reviewed in 2.1, three core ideas connected to gender or stereotypical roles of female and male characters in novels, are applied. In this section, I would like to offer a review of all secondary sources included in the analysis. All these sources are

⁸ GALLO, Don. "The very Best Possibilities, Part Two." *English Journal* 95.5 (2006): 107-10.

⁹ "Spotlight on Censorship: 'Looking for Alaska'". *Intellectual Freedom Blog*. April 13, 2017. Retrieved November 26, 2023.

¹⁰ "Children's Paperback Books – Best Sellers – Books". *The New York Times*, June 29, 2012.

¹¹ IANNUCCI, Rebecca. "'Looking for Alaska': Premier Date Set for Hulu Limited Series." *TVLine*. June 1, 2019. Retrieved November 27, 2023.

¹² LEWIS, Mark A., Robert Petrone, and Sophia Tatiana Sarigianides. "Acting Adolescent? Critical Examinations of the Youth-Adult Binary in *Feed* and *Looking for Alaska*." *ALAN Review*. 43, no. 2 (2016).

connected to the Gender Performativity concept by Judith Butler, the MPDG trope, and third-wave feminism and its emphasis on 'choice'.

Gender Trouble

Gender Trouble is a critical and influential book written by American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler. First published in 1990, the book has become one of the most important texts in gender studies and feminist theory. In this book, Butler looks at how gender is constructed and understood in society. She argues that gender is not a fixed and natural feature of an individual, but rather the result of performativity, i.e., the behavior and expression of gender within the framework of social norms and expectations (more on the concept of gender performativity in 3.3). In *Gender Trouble* Butler suggests that gender identity and roles are not fixed, but rather fluid and constructed in a process of repeated playing with certain social codes and gestures.

The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model

This article by Jennifer Gouck, published in *The International Journal of Young Adult Literature* in 2021, introduces five-stage model for Young Adult literature with supposed MPDG character in it, as Gouck suggests “despite her pervasiveness across film and television, popular culture, and literature [...] the Pixie remains a wholly understudied figure.”¹³ These five stages, important for the boundaries of the analysis later in this thesis, are Beginnings; Setting Up Mystique; Becoming Friends, Adventuring Together; A Bump in the Road; and Reunions, Goodbyes and The Final Monologue.¹⁴ Gouck chooses the definition for MPDG character and invents the term “Alt-Pixie” (see 3.4). Gouck applies her five-stage model to the typical MPDG novel - Robyn Schneider’s *The Beginning of Everything* (2013) and Gretchen McNeil’s *I’m Not Your Manic Pixie Dream Girl* (2016), text that challenges the MPDG concept. Gouck also touches on the sensitive topic of problematic white male supremacy that this concept might add to.

Anarcho-Feminist Melodrama and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl

In the article “Anarcho-Feminist Melodrama and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl” published in *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* in 2017, Claire T. Solomon delves

¹³ GOUCK, Jennifer. “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model”. *The International Journal of Young Adult Literature*. Vol. 2, No. 1, Nov 2021, p. 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

into the concept of the MPDG archetype and examines its implications from an anarcho-feminist perspective. The MPDG trope is critically analyzed to show how it promotes patriarchal power structures and gender stereotypes. Solomon contends that although the MPDG archetype appears to empower women, in the end, it restricts the agency and nuance of female characters. The article provides a thorough examination of Argentine playwright Salvadora Medina Onrubia's 1929 drama, *Las Descentradas* to demonstrate the influence and frequency of the MPDG archetype. In the play, Solomon reveals “an avant-garde counterpoint of melodrama and metafiction as an ambiguous alternative to capture” (as she analyzes the MPDG trope as “an apparatus of capture”).¹⁵ Solomon breaks down the underlying power dynamics in these story by skillfully integrating theoretical frameworks from feminism and anarchism, and illustrates how the MPDG trope contributes to the objectification of women by looking at specific examples. Solomon’s analysis is well-supported with relevant scholarly references and theoretical frameworks.

The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction

In this article by Jennifer Gouck, published in *Women’s Studies* in 2023, she makes a distinction between Pixie in pop culture, and Pixie as an MPDG trope in Young Adult literature with the former to persist and grow with the audience of contemporary social media, and later as stuck in the position to only help the male protagonist to challenge life, to be silenced and disappear from the narrative. She argues that the Pixie’s enduring popularity is partly due to the favorable societal conditions that have been fostered by two decades of socioeconomic unrest, and partly due to her aesthetics. Gouck suggests this is a reflection of nostalgia as well as its embodiment. Pixie’s persistence might be because young people challenge the norms of Pixie (white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class girl), whereas Pixie in YA still holds onto those attributes. Gouck asserts millennials, who were raised on the Pixie, are realizing the flaws in the patriarchal manifestation of femininity and the fact that girls can be and are three-dimensional, non-White, non-binary, and any other combination of non-normative attributes. MPDG in YA is only silenced and used by the male protagonist; from this contrast, Gouck suggested the (im)persistence of Pixie whose continued existence is

¹⁵ SOLOMON, Claire T. “Anarcho-Feminist Melodrama and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl.” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 19.1 (2017): <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2896>, p. 1.

“demonstrative of the dominance of patriarchal values against which real-life girls must persist.”¹⁶

Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'

This essay by R. Claire Snyder-Hall engages with the multifaceted landscape of third-wave feminism, focusing on the concept of 'choice' as a crucial issue. The paper, which was published in *Perspectives on Politics* in 2010, explores how the concept of 'choice' has become a major source of empowerment, conflict, and negotiation within feminism. In her critical analysis of the third wave of feminism, Snyder-Hall highlights its distinctive viewpoint on autonomy, especially as it relates to matters like sexuality, reproductive rights, and personal agency. The article addresses how the idea of 'choice' connects with racial, class, and other identities to shape a variety of experiences and obstacles while navigating the complexity of this wave's emphasis on intersectionality. She situates this analysis within the broader historical context of feminist movements, highlighting the shifts in focus from earlier waves to the third wave's embrace of individualism and the reclaiming of derogatory terms. Snyder-Hall traces the rise of “choice feminism” and its implications, addressing both its empowering aspects and its potential pitfalls, such as the risk of overlooking structural inequalities. Snyder-Hall examines the claims made by certain feminists that supporting choice may unintentionally support neoliberalism and deflect criticism away from systemic inequalities. Moreover, she explores how digital activism and social media have shaped the current feminist discourse on choice.

Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels

In her book *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* published in 1997, Roberta Seelinger Trites provides insightful analysis of how gender and power dynamics are portrayed and challenged in children's literature by looking at a variety of novels and examining how feminist viewpoints are embodied and portrayed within these narratives. Trites sets the stage for her investigation of feminist voices in children's books by giving a thorough review of the theoretical and historical foundations of feminism at the beginning of her work. Trites shows how these books are essential for empowering young readers and advancing

¹⁶ GOUCK, Jennifer. “The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction.” *Women's Studies*. Vol. 52, No. 5., 2023, p. 540.

gender equality through her thorough analysis. Roberta Trites concentrates on the positive aspects of feminism, such as how women interact with one another in family and community relationships, and how women have reinterpreted patriarchal stereotypes. Thus, she offers a framework that enables parents or teachers to identify and discuss the politics and potential of a children's book with a positive.¹⁷ By closely examining individual novels and analyzing how they subvert gender norms, question societal norms, and advance alternative narratives, Trites reveals an advanced understanding of literary criticism. However, one potential limitation of the book, which Trites admits, is the limited engagement with international or non-Western perspectives.

¹⁷ TRITES, Roberta S. *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*. University of Iowa Press, 1997. *Project MUSE*, <https://doi.org/10.1353/book17661>, summary.

3 Methodology

In this section, I would like to address the data I collected, the chosen period of the primary sources analyzed, and the terms used in the thesis.

At first, I was searching for the concepts and ideas connected to gender and chose the gender performativity concept from *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler, as it offers a wide range of interesting ideas to analyze. Then I selected the MPDG concept described, analyzed, and supplemented with the narrative model by Jennifer Gouck, and I thought about what other theory could oppose it and picked Snyder-Hall's "Defense of Choice" boosted with the ideas by Roberta Trites. I found Solomon's idea of anarcho-feminist MPDG worth adding to the analysis.

I was then searching the Internet, mostly Goodreads,¹⁸ for quirky novels suitable for analysis from the gender theory and feminist perspective. One of the most mentioned contemporary American quirky novels is *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, and I also chose *Looking for Alaska* as almost all John Green's novels are marked as quirky by the readers on Goodreads, and its female protagonist, Alaska, interested me the most from all John Green's female characters. The period I was studying was the contemporary period, specifically the period within 5 years (\pm) of the start of the new millennium. I chose this specific time period because I wanted to see whether and how are the gender and feminist theories reflected in this narrowed span of time. This period is not significant in the world of literature itself, but this era is connected to Generation Z (Gen Z)¹⁹, and their specific generational problems (technology addiction, social media impact, cancel culture,²⁰ environmental awareness, deconstructing of gender concept, breaking the generational trauma, etc.). Thanks to the deconstructionism and challenging everything traditional, both Gen Z and Generation Y before them, millennials²¹ (both of the chosen primary sources are set in the decade of millenials) seemed promising to interesting analysis regarding gender, femininity, and masculinity.

To find and choose the primary and secondary sources, and to close read the novels took me approximately three months, and the analysis then a month and a half. In the analysis of the primary sources through the gender performativity lens, I was interested in all the characters

¹⁸ "Quirky Books," n.d. <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/quirky>.

¹⁹ "Gen Z." In *English Meaning - Cambridge Dictionary*, December 6, 2023. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/gen-z>.

²⁰ "Cancel Culture," December 6, 2023. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cancel-culture>.

²¹ "Millennial," November 29, 2023. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/millennial>.

with significance to the story and I was studying both their conformity and nonconformity to the gender norms and stereotypes. Then the main themes in the gender performativity section of an analysis were stereotypical males and females of the older generation conforming to traditional gender stereotypes and oppose to them the younger generation challenging the gender norms, and both protagonists, Charlie and Miles, somewhere in the middle. In this section, are also the themes of gender fluidity leading to socio-economic changes in stereotypical gender roles, and the impact of society and relatives on gender performativity. With MPDG, at first, I applied the five-stage narrative model by Gouck ²² to find whether the novels fit or deviate from it. In this section, I was only analyzing the main protagonists, Charlie and Miles, and the main female characters, Sam and Alaska, and their relationship. As Gouck (2021) describes appearances, class status, or sex stereotypically connected to MPDG and male protagonists, I analyzed demographic variables, such as gender, age, class, and race. The themes in this section revolve around MPDG and their potential development as characters. Lastly, in the third-wave feminism section, I first analyzed all significant female characters, whether they are feminists or not, and if yes, whether they act according to second or third-wave principles. I analyzed their behavior towards men, whether women are dominant, submissive, or strive for equality, but also their attitude towards other women. I added one paragraph to the analysis devoted to the concept of a man of feminism by Trites (1997) where I observed how men react to women's choices. I did not use any software or special instruments to analyze the data. The overlapping theme of the MPDG and third-wave feminism section is challenging the patriarchal society. In all three sections, the theme of trauma and its aftermath appears.

In part of the analysis, I was inspired by feminist theory analysis questions proposed by Latrobe (2009). Here are the ones I picked as suitable for the analysis: "How are women or girls depicted in the work? Are the important women characters three-dimensional, or round, not stereotypes? What is the novel's point of view? Are there discernible biased points of view regarding women's role in society? Do societal gender expectations and stereotypes cause conflict or limit the character's range of options? Does the character think critically to reconcile real experiences with gender expectations? Does the character demonstrate independence (from gender expectations) in making decisions? If so, does the character pay the social price? Does the character achieve acceptance from other characters and self?"²³

²² GOUCK, "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model", p. 1.

²³ LATROBE, Kathy Howard. *Critical Approaches to Young Adult Literature*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2009, p. 191-192.

In sections 3.1-3.5, I defined the terms Young Adult Literature, Quirky Novel, Gender Performativity, MPDG, and Third-wave Feminism, as they are important for understanding the thesis and analysis clearly.

3.1 Young Adult Literature

“Young Adult (YA) literature” refers collectively to a wide range of both fiction and nonfiction works created especially to connect with teenage readers and address their distinct interests, experiences, and emotional states. “Since the 1960s, the label of young adult (YA) literature has been most commonly applied to fiction with a young adult protagonist that is centered on the developmental and life phase issues associated with adolescence and is created for and marketed to a teenage readership.”²⁴

According to CART, Michael (2008) “YA literature” is inherently dynamic and changes throughout time along with changes in society. “Between 1990 and 2000 the number of persons between 12 and 19 soared to 32 million, a growth rate of seventeen percent that significantly outpaced the growth of the rest of the population. The size of this population segment has also increased as the conventional definition of “young adult” has expanded to include those as young as ten and, since the late 1990s, as old as twenty-five.”²⁵

These novels often deal with themes such as identity, personal growth, friendship, love, and family. A division of the American Library Association, Young Adult Library Services Association, states that because young adult literature covers such a wide range of topics and genres, teenagers with different interests and backgrounds can find it to be an interesting and accessible read. Young readers can relate strongly to well-written young adult literature, which can help them overcome the difficulties of puberty, broaden their horizons, and develop a lifetime love of reading.²⁶

3.2 Quirky Novel

As there are not many, if some, academic works on “quirky” literature that would define it, and the cinematographic term “quirky” seemed to be connected more to the visual side rather

²⁴ JENKINS, Christine. “From Queer to Gay and Back Again: Young Adult Novels with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969-1997.” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 68, no. 3, July 1998, p. 298.

²⁵ CART, Michael. “The Value of Young Adult Literature”. YALSA [online]. 8. 5. 2008 [cit. 2023-10-14]. <https://www.ala.org/yalsa/guidelines/whitepapers/yalit>

²⁶ “About YALSA.” Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), October 25, 2022. <https://www.ala.org/yalsa/aboutyalsa>.

than the contextual side of the movies, I wanted to define what I count as “quirky” for thesis purposes.

Cambridge Dictionary defines “quirky” as “unusual in an attractive and interesting way”²⁷, and, as all narrators, even some side characters, of the two academic sources analyzed in this thesis are peculiar, or unconventional in their actions, or viewpoints, I chose this definition to be the best fit in case of the thesis.

To the definition, I would add that plots of “quirky” novels frequently take strange and unexpected turns. To create a sense of novelty and surprise, they could experiment with timelines, storytelling approaches, or narrative structure. A lot of “quirky” novels use wit, comedy, or satire in their stories. These books frequently examine odd or specialized subjects, and subcultures, that are not commonly seen in pop culture, and characters of “quirky” novels tend to have unusual hobbies.

When choosing the primary sources, I browsed “Goodreads” – “an American social cataloging website ... that allows individuals to search its database of books, annotations, quotes, and reviews”²⁸, and its to-read lists on “quirky”²⁹, I selected two novels that would fit this thesis. They are written by American writers of the contemporary age, all of them belong to the YA category and none of them have fantasy/sci-fi/horror/supernatural features in them.

3.3 Gender Performativity

As this thesis analyzed the primary sources through the lenses of gender and feminist theories, I wanted to mention two different approaches to gender to set a base for the narrower definition of gender by Judith Butler.

There are two main viewpoints on gender; one that divides it from sex, and another that claims gender cannot be separated from it. According to the former theory, gender is “best understood as a description not of physiology but of social roles in relation to one another.”³⁰ This, I would state more liberal, point of view sees gender not as the physical appearance, genitals, and chromosomes, whereas the latter, usually more conservative, theory views gender as “something that resides due to bodies – hormones or biology, etc.”³¹

²⁷ “Cambridge Dictionary | English Dictionary, Translations & Thesaurus,” “Quirky” October 11, 2023. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>.

²⁸ Wikipedia contributors. “Goodreads.” *Wikipedia*, October 7, 2023. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goodreads>.

²⁹ “Quirky Books,” n.d. <https://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/quirky>.

³⁰ STEINBACH, Susie L. *Understanding the Victorians: Politics, culture and society in nine-teenth-century Britain*. Routledge, 2016, p. 132.

³¹ HEPBURN, Alexa. *Feminist critics: heterosexism and lesbian and gay psychology*. An introduction to critical social psychology. California: London Thousand Oaks, 2003, p. 107.

Gender performativity is a concept that was developed by the philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. In this concept, Butler argues that gender is not just something that is given biologically or naturally, but rather something that is created and manifested through repeated social and cultural activities and expressions. Butler claims that gender is not some static and unchangeable identity, but rather something that develops and changes as a result of our actions and interactions with other people.

“Gender is neither the causal result of sex nor seemingly fixed as sex.”³² But Butler suggests gender is connected with sex and calls gender “performative - that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be.”³³ The more we do something and present ourselves in a certain gender style, the more we become that gender. Gender is a continuous process of performance rather than an innate quality, which challenges the idea of fixed identities. “If gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative, then there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured.”³⁴

While “one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors”³⁵, Butler also points out that these performed actions and expressions are maintained and supported by social norms and expectations regarding gender. Culture, society, and power structures play a key role in shaping how individuals become “male” and “female” and how societal norms regarding gender are maintained. Butler emphasizes the interconnectedness of race and gender, stressing how racial dynamics form and impact gendered experiences. “One cannot adequately consider the question of gender without taking account of the ways in which racial hierarchies and racialized subjectivities provide the matrices through which gendered bodies are culturally intelligible.”³⁶

But while asserting that gender is performative, Butler does not divorce it from the physical body and suggests that gender exists within both cultural and physical realities. “Gender is not passively scripted on the surface of bodies, but neither is it an arbitrary or voluntaristic imposition on a brute surface.”³⁷

³² BUTLER, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 8.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

According to Meyerhoff (2014), Butler contributed and reframed gender identity as a social category in a sense that gender (and other social categories) “must be understood as emerging from the lived experience of an individual, and as interpretable within the cultural norms in which that individual was socialized.”³⁸ In her performativity concept, Butler was influenced by J. L. Austin’s (1962) *How to Do Things With Words* where he “argued that language does not merely reflect speakers’ perception of reality, rather that speakers may use language to instantiate reality.”³⁹ An example is the phrase “I promise.” When someone uses this term in the right context, they are genuinely making a promise rather than just describing one.

While Austin concentrated on the performative quality of specific speech actions, Butler expanded on this concept to argue that language, as well as performative acts, build and maintain our sense of self and social categories like gender. “Starting from birth, she suggests, with the formulaic proclamation 'It’s a boy' or 'It’s a girl', society and individuals are busy creating and recreating differences along culturally normative lines. The ways we talk and the ways we talk about each other are an important part of how gender identities are created and understood as normative or as challenging norms.”⁴⁰

In the second part of the thesis, I set a goal to analyze how is gender identity expressed in two chosen quirky novels and whether it helps or rather hinders both male and female characters’ development of their gender identities. It is important to study how authors of selected novels represent femininity and masculinity in both female and male characters, as well as how these differing representations of male and female gender impact characters’ identity building.

Lastly, two terms connected to gender performativity are cisgender and gender fluidity. “Cisgender means a person’s gender identity matches the sex — female or male — designated on their original birth certificate. Gender fluidity refers to changes over time in a person’s gender expression or gender identity or both. That change might be in expression, but not identity or in identity, but not expression. Or both expression and identity might change together.”⁴¹ We analyzed how gender fluidity affects socio-economic status, or what was the

³⁸ MEYERHOFF, Miriam. “Gender performativity.” *The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality* (2014):2.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

⁴¹ KATZ-WISE, Sabra L., PhD. “Gender Fluidity: What It Means and Why Support Matters.” *Harvard Health*, December 3, 2020. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/gender-fluidity-what-it-means-and-why-support-matters-2020120321544>.

connection between trauma and conforming to gender norms, or how society and relatives influence gender performativity.

3.4 Manic Pixie Dream Girl

The MPDG is a cinematic and literary trope characterized by a young female character who is often unconventional, eccentric, or outside of normal social norms. She may have an unconventional style of dressing, hobbies, or way of thinking. This character is usually full of life, energy, and enthusiasm. She is often portrayed as a person with a zest for life and ready for adventure. The MPDG seems to exist mainly to help the male protagonist. Her presence in the story is often designed to greatly influence and encourage the male protagonist. The MPDG often catalyzes his personal growth or change while she is often an underdeveloped character and her development, goals, and motivations may be weak or inaccurate. The MPDG is often an idealized character that can create unrealistic expectations in real life. This can create unrealistic ideas about how a woman should act in the real world or what a relationship should be like.

The term became popular after it was popularized in 2007 by film critic Nathan Rabin in his review of the movie *Elizabethtown*. Since then, it has become a source of discussion about characters in popular culture and their stereotypes.

This trope has come under criticism because such characters can be shallow and underdeveloped and can create unrealistic expectations in real life. Critics argue that such characters are often portrayed as targets for the male protagonists, who often break free or find meaning in life through their presence, neglecting their complex personalities. Rabin himself claims he created the term that 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”.⁴² He adds that in *Elizabethtown*, the MPDG as a trope was a precise one to apply to a main female character but it cannot be generalized as there are not many clear examples of the MPDG in movies or literature.⁴³

With the text “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model” by Jennifer Gouck, which is reviewed in the second chapter of the thesis, I wanted to analyze how contemporary ideas of chosen novels of femininity and, to a lesser extent,

⁴² RABIN, Nathan. “I’m sorry for coining the phrase ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl.’” Salon, 16 Jul. 2014, https://www.salon.com/2014/07/15/im_sorry_for_coining_the_phrase_manic_pixie_dream_girl/.

⁴³ Ibid., N.

masculinity fit into this trope by applying the five-stage narrative model, and found out whether these novels try to dismantle or approve this trope.

Stages of the model are Beginnings; Setting Up Mystique; Becoming Friends, Adventuring Together; A Bump in the Road; and Reunions, Goodbyes, and The Final Monologue.⁴⁴ In the beginning of a prototypical MPDG novel, according to this model, white heterosexual male protagonist (middle-class living in suburbs) is usually introduced as sad, “belonging to a normative, nuclear family. A senior in high school, or close to becoming one, the protagonist’s thoughts are consumed by college applications and graduation. While not unpopular per se, he occupies, or has come to occupy, a social position close to the bottom and, in line with his aspirations to attend a ‘good’ college, is usually considered by his peers to be nerdy. In other words, the protagonist is entirely unremarkable – almost painfully average.”⁴⁵ And then out of nowhere, MPDG appears in his life. The mystique is set up via the protagonist’s description of her as she is usually different from the other girls he has ever met, and most of the time, the MPDG character keeps a secret from everybody in the story. They become friends and spend a lot of time together doing impulsive and adventurous things. After some time of peaceful spontaneity, they have an argument, and the secret MPDG keeps is revealed which leads to the disappearance of MPDG from the narrative, at least for the moment. In the end, they meet again, and generally under dramatic circumstances, there is some form of settlement between them, the MPDG character then vanishes for good, and the novel ends with the male protagonist having a reflective monologue.⁴⁶

Gouck introduces the MPDG character as “white, cisgender, heterosexual, and middle-class [...] that exists solely to enrich the life of the White, cisgender, heterosexual, middle-class male protagonist, who is often in a state of ennui before the MPDG’s arrival or, at the very least, lives an almost overwhelmingly unremarkable life.”⁴⁷ She demonstrates “the (un)intentional impact deviation from this pattern can have on Pixie discourse, as well as the problematic cultural work this discourse performs in service of White masculinity.”⁴⁸

Gouck explains that the ordinariness – created not only by not interesting protagonist but also a suburban setting that, she cites Angel Daniel Matos notes, “historically, imaginatively, and ideologically, ha[s] been associated with notions of white supremacy, homogenization, and

⁴⁴ GOUCK, Jennifer. “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model”. *The International Journal of Young Adult Literature*. Vol. 2, No. 1, Nov 2021, p. 2-3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5-6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3-5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

heteronormativity”⁴⁹ – is supposed to create “a comfortable space into which the reader can easily slip [...] then, ordinariness is problematically equated to a brand of particularly privileged, almost ostentatious, Whiteness.”⁵⁰ And this ordinariness creates the narrative framework for the Manic Pixie to show up in not interesting town and change the protagonist’s perspective.

Gouck also uses the term “Alt-Pixies” (that will be considered and looked for in the analysis); “that is, Pixies which are not straight, White, heterosexual, and cisgender females but rather may be male, homosexual, transgender, of color, or of any other identity that deviates from the trope as it typically appears. Indeed, it may become apparent that these kinds of Pixies do not exist, in which case the model, in combination with other fields of study, can be used to ask why.”⁵¹

3.5 Third-Wave Feminism

“Third-wave feminism” is a label for certain developments in the feminist movement that took place in the early 1990s and continue to the present. Some suggest “third-wave feminism” emerged and ended with “post-feminism” which marked the end of the feminist movement. The usage of the term seems to indicate both that feminism is dead and unnecessary, and that feminism has been successful at gaining women what they wanted.⁵² It is not the goal of the thesis to polemize the role of “third-wave feminism” today, nor to argue about its relevance to “post-feminism”. In this subchapter, I only want to define the movement and its characteristics that are mostly true according to many writers or critics. It is essential to do so to better understand the essay “Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'” by Snyder-Hall (see 2.2), and I apply it to two chosen primary sources.

We can talk about the roots of the movement when Rebecca Walker, daughter of writer and feminist of the second wave Alice Walker, said in an interview for *Ms. Magazine*: “I’m not post-feminist, I’m the Third Wave.”⁵³ In her book *To Be Real*, Rebecca Walker clearly stated that she respects and is inspired by “second-wave feminism” but it does not end with them, nor “second-wave feminism” is suitable to contemporary society anymore. “We want to

⁴⁹ MATOS, Angel Daniel (as cited in GOUCK, 2021). “A perfectly normal life? Suburban Space, Automobility, and Ideological Whiteness in *Love, Simon*.” *Race and the Suburbs in American Film*. Ed. Merrill Schleier. New York: State University of New York, 2021, n.p.

⁵⁰ GOUCK, Jennifer. “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model”, p. 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵² HENRY, Astrid. *Not My Mother’s Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

⁵³ WALKER, Rebecca. “Becoming the third wave.” *Ms. Magazine* 2:4 (Jan-Feb, 1992): 39.

be linked with our foremothers and centuries of women's movement, but we also want to make space for young women to create their own, different brand of revolt, and so we choose the name Third Wave."⁵⁴

It is important to state that "third-wave feminism" is a wide spectrum of concepts rather than a cohesive movement with set boundaries and clear objectives. "Third-wave feminism" emphasizes the importance of inclusion and representation of women with diverse racial, ethnic, sexual, and gender identities. Third-wave feminists support personal autonomy and freedom of choice. They claim that women need to be free to make decisions about their bodies and lives without interference. This involves defending a woman's autonomy and right to make decisions about her reproductive health. The third-wave movement is intensively involved in the fight against sexual violence and harassment; third-wave feminists strongly support survivors of sexual violence. "Third-wave feminism" often opens to the discussion of queer and gender theory and advocates for the rights and recognition of the LGBTQ+ community.

According to Snyder-Hall, "inclusive, pluralistic, and non-judgmental third-wave feminism respects the right of women to decide for themselves how to negotiate the often-contradictory desires for both gender equality and sexual pleasure." She hints that "this approach is sometimes caricatured as uncritically endorsing whatever a woman chooses to do as feminist," and in her essay she "argues that third-wave feminism actually exhibits not a thoughtless endorsement of 'choice', but rather a deep respect for pluralism and self-determination."⁵⁵ She wants to focus more on "women who choose to engage in sex work, turn themselves into sexual objects, or eroticize male dominance rather than on stay-at-home moms."⁵⁶ Snyder-Hall paraphrases Lori Marso's arguments that "even women who embrace feminism often find their attempts to achieve liberty and equality stymied by their own feminine attraction to things that bolster patriarchy, as well as by the dominant gender norms imposed on them."⁵⁷ Snyder-Hall is against calling "choice feminism" as it is called, and rather suggests to use the term "third-wave feminism", as she claims "the term 'choice' trivializes what are often hard decisions. [...] Just looking at the final choice that was made tells us nothing about how much a woman actually struggled to balance competing imperatives, such as gender equality and sexual desire. [...] Calling the decisions women make 'choices' conflates

⁵⁴ WALKER, Rebecca. *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. New York: Doubleday, ed. 2015, p. 17.

⁵⁵ SNYDER-HALL, R. Claire. "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice.'" *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010): p. 255.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, (paraphrased from MARSO), p. 256.

decisions made because of the obligations of religious faith (veiling), the grim realities of economic necessity (staying with an alcoholic husband), or the preconditions necessary for sexual arousal (traditional sex roles) with seemingly elective options like posing for *Playboy* or wearing lipstick and heels. [...] The rhetoric of 'choice' focuses attention on the individual choice-maker and so takes the focus off the ways in which women's choices are often overdetermined by societal structures and cultural traditions."⁵⁸ The third wave of "choice feminism" she promotes views the idea that freedom is more than just the ability to choose as an individual; rather, it is the power to choose your own way of life. Nonetheless, women's choices on how to live their life should still be recognized even though pressuring influences exist and many of our decisions are not the result of perfect "free choice", whatever that may be.

Snyder-Hall explains the difference between feminism of the second and third wave. She says that second-wave feminists fought for "women's rights to self-determination, and due to the cultural norms of femininity, women were denied the opportunity to self-determine and were reduced to being their husbands' helpmates."⁵⁹ Women wanted equal rights and opportunities, or radical feminists aimed for the whole system in society to be destroyed (such as family, heterosexuality, marriage, etc.). "The attempt of second-wave feminists to solve the conflict between gender equality and sexual desire by renouncing heterosexuality could not eliminate the problem desire poses to equality. As it turned out, some lesbians found themselves attracted to and actively embraced the same type of dominance and submission central to heterosexuality. They rejected the ideal of sexual egalitarianism that had been central to second-wave feminism."⁶⁰ Radical feminists called female sex workers the victims central to the male sexual system," but those sex workers took a different stance on feminism by refusing the label of victim and "emphasized their right to pursue their own desires."⁶¹ According to Snyder-Hall, it seems unlikely that third-wave feminism will ever lead to the kind of collective social movement seen in the second wave because of inclusivity but also that debates over feminism should not ever end.⁶²

Walker believed a new feminism (later third-wave feminism) was needed for the sexual liberation of women because it was not right "that in order to be a feminist one must live in

⁵⁸ SNYDER-HALL, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice.'", p. 256.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 256.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 257.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 257.

⁶² Ibid., p. 260.

poverty, always critique, never marry, and want to censor pornography.”⁶³ I wanted to mention here the distinction Snyder-Hall offers in her article, as this was recognized in the analysis of female characters of chosen novels.

⁶³ WALKER, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, p. xxxii.

4 The Perks of Being a Wallflower

The Perks of Being a Wallflower is the first novel written by Stephen Chbosky, American moviemaker and writer, who gained recognition for this novel, as well as for writing and directing its movie adaptation in 2012, for which he was nominated in the Best Adapted Screenplay category for Writers Guild Awards in 2013.⁶⁴ His other well-known movie adaptations are *Wonder* (2017) from novel by R.J. Palacio and *Dear Evan Hansen* (2018) from musical by Steve Levinson and Pasek and Paul. Till recently, Chbosky was writing mostly coming-of-age screenplays and one novel, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, but in October 2019 his first psychological horror novel, *Imaginary Friend*, was published.⁶⁵

4.1 Gender Performativity

Analyzing *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* from the perspective of Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity might be interesting as this novel contains many elements related to issues of identity, sexuality, and social roles. As defined before, gender performativity is a theory that argues that gender and gender identity are not predetermined but are repeatedly performed and interpreted by gender roles and stereotypes.

The novel is narrated by high school student Charlie in form of letters to a friend so the only description of people and places in the book the readers get are from Charlie's perspective. It is not far into the novel that we see Charlie's family in a very stereotypical way. Almost all the other family members except his Aunt Helen, are not called any name by Charlie. This might be the way the author signifies the stereotypes of all of them and attributes them to not one individual but to the whole gender. On the other hand, we know all the names of Charlie's friends that might challenge his ways of living and gender stereotypes.

Throughout pages 6 and 7⁶⁶ we see Charlie's sister "cry for the whole weekend" and listen to sad music because her "first boyfriend started going around with another girl." After a month, "his sister met another boy and started playing happy records again." Charlie describes him and his siblings a little. "I don't think that there is a favorite kid in our family. There are three of us and I am the youngest. My brother is the oldest. He is a very good football player and likes his car. My sister is very pretty and mean to boys and she is in the middle. I

⁶⁴ "WGA Announces Nominations Ranging from 'Lincoln' to 'Looper'." *The Hollywood Reporter*. January 4, 2013. Retrieved December 2, 2023.

⁶⁵ Wikipedia contributors. "Stephen Chbosky." *Wikipedia*, Accessed December 2, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephen_Chbosky.

⁶⁶ CHBOSKY, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. London: Simon & Schuster, 2012, p. 6-7.

get straight A's now like my sister and that is why they leave me alone." Butler claims that "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all."⁶⁷ In the case of Charlie's family members, we can say that women act very femininely, and men masculinely. Sister and mother are both described as beautiful and they cry a lot, and mother is mostly quiet, keeps sweeping the floor⁶⁸, the cooking or washing up on different occasions throughout the book. Oppose to men in the family who are active – the brother plays football, likes cars, and fixes his Camaro⁶⁹, the father is mostly working all the time. One time Charlie recalls a childhood memory where his "dad slapped me [him] [...] and Aunt Helen told my [his] father not to hit me [him] in front of her ever again and my [his] father said this was his house and he would do what he wanted and my [his] mom was quiet and so were my [his] brother and sister."⁷⁰

At the beginning of the school year which is also the beginning of the novel, Charlie comes back to high school after a break dealing with mental struggles after the suicide of his best friend Michael,⁷¹ and has no other friends. He only meets them later in the football game (specifically Sam and Patrick), and some at the party. Charlie's friends tend to break the social and gender norms thanks to what Charlie can experiment with his gender identity and role and experience a lot of emotional growth and identity search which we can understand as a process of "performing" gender, which is in line with Butler's theory. One of Charlie's friends, Patrick, challenges the traditional gender norms by openly expressing his homosexuality and embracing his non-conforming identity. He goes to all the games to "watch the game and scream at Brad, the quarterback"⁷², and as we find out in the middle part of the book that Patrick and Brad are secretly having a romantic relationship, Patrick's cheering at the game and "fangirling" is traditionally a feminine feature. In the class he imitates the teacher (man) using feminine gestures⁷³, he loves to listen to slow ballads, dances and sings in the local theater, and dresses extravagantly. By non-conforming to pre-existing gender norms, he "performs" (not in a sense of performance, but performativity) his gender without the need to fit into the specific gender, in this case, the gender of male. But by deviating from traditional norms, he is aware of potential stigma and discrimination from society. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that

⁶⁷ BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 178.

⁶⁸ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9-11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

are said to be its results.”⁷⁴ Patrick is not “performing” in any of the two gender stereotypes. We can observe his gender might stereotypically be seen as more feminine, but there are instances when Patrick acts more masculine – willing to physically fight and get beaten for loved ones, or in sexual intercourse with Brad being the one in “giving”⁷⁵ that is usually fairly masculine trait –and we can suggest he is free from stereotypes and therefore “performing” his gender in the way true for him, and in his case, it is visible what Butler means by people not being a gender but “always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed; gender proves to be performance— that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be.”⁷⁶

When we look at another gay character in the novel, the already mentioned secret lover of Patrick – Brad, he faces stigma and pressure about how he should “perform” his gender role and sexuality in conformity with heteronormative expectations. By not admitting and feeling ashamed about the homosexual relationship with Patrick, he conceals his identity and feelings, which can be seen as an attempt to “perform” a gender that conforms to society’s expectations while maintaining secrecy about his identity. He is a popular quarterback who has short affairs with girls and works out to look more masculine. After his father finds out about their relationship, beats him up⁷⁷, and Brad not only stops speaking to Patrick but publicly calls him a “faggot”.⁷⁸

To consider the concept of gender performativity in female characters, we should start with Sam, stepsister of Patrick that Charlie falls in love with immediately as he meets her at the football game.⁷⁹ Charlie describes Sam as beautiful: “I just look at her sometimes, and I think she is the prettiest and nicest person in the whole world. She is also very smart and fun.”⁸⁰ Sam looks and behaves girly when with close friends, for example, dances with Patrick and Charlie, does not understand football and other sports and cries in front of Charlie. “She told me about the first time she was kissed. She told me that it was with one of her dad's friends. She was seven. And she told nobody about it except for Mary Elizabeth and then Patrick a year ago. And she started to cry.”⁸¹ Since this scene it might be clearer to both Charlie and the reader why Sam constantly dates different men, chases after them, tries to dominate them but

⁷⁴ BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 51.

⁷⁶ BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 25.

⁷⁷ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 158.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

still tolerates their bad behavior towards her. It may be the moment in her life, when an older man kissed, and possibly harassed, her that caused her to intentionally “perform” as masculine, but she is no good at it. She wears her hair short and wears big, oversized sports jackets that do not belong to any of her boyfriends. Sam also does not perform well at school; she does not study so much and therefore her grades are below average.

One other female character worth mentioning is Mary Elizabeth, a former close friend of Sam, and later also Charlie’s first girlfriend. She is the female character portrayed as the most active in comparison to other female characters. She asks Charlie out on their first date,⁸² she is in charge of the local theater *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, she is an editor of a local magazine,⁸³ and wants to study women’s studies together with other majors. These are just a few examples of her real dominant behavior towards others. Mary Elizabeth’s character illustrates how gender performativity intersects with other aspects of identity, such as political ideology, and shapes an individual’s sense of self.

When it comes to Charlie, we could interpret his quiriness as the way of “performing” his gender that does seem not to comfort completely to traditional masculine gender but with him being raised in a very stereotypical household, it might seem like quirks or defects. Throughout the book he seems to be more feminine, doing more feminine activities and having feminine traits. He cries a lot,⁸⁴ reads a lot in his free time and marks each book he finished last as his “favorite book of all time,”⁸⁵ writes a diary, and writes it in the form of letters (this whole novel), excels at school, listens to romantic tapes originally given to his sister from her boyfriend,⁸⁶ also creates a tape based on his experience of driving a car with an open roof through the tunnel one night with Sam and Patrick,⁸⁷ and overthinks everything, such as he was thinking about how he wanted to be a part of the sports team to have glory days but realized he is maybe living his glory days right now and should enjoy it.⁸⁸ He is not good at sports, does not fancy supermodels,⁸⁹ gives special and oddly specific gifts to his friends and is disappointed with only an ordinary socks and suit,⁹⁰ does not think about himself as of a handsome and capable man. But he has quirks that we cannot assign to any of the two traditional genders, and therefore we can assume that it is just Charlie being who he is without the need to conform to

⁸² CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 119.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9, 10, 14, 29, 47, 78, 103, 129, 144, 166, 196, 210.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71-72.

the norms. He uses fancy words like “incidentally”⁹¹, lets strangers have sex in his room during the party, and observes for a while in the beginning because he does not know what to do but is not feeling awkward,⁹² and pretends different scenarios in his head like he did not see Sam and Patrick for one year, but they had lunch together that day. But Charlie also “performs” the traditional masculine gender by smoking in tense situations,⁹³ thinking about kissing Sam and having sex with her all the time and feeling angry with the thought of Sam and some of her boyfriends sleeping together. Only after meeting his friends, does he start to challenge his gender, and realize it is okay to “perform” it the way he does, even if it is not always conforming, but is still aware of the stereotypical gender norms of his family. He gets to play in *The Rocky Horror Show* dressed only in “a bathing suit, which somebody painted gold [...] and has the best time I [he] ever has in my [his] whole life, I [he] got to pretend that I [he] was singing, and I [he] got to dance around, and I [he] got to wear a feather boa [...]”⁹⁴ But still thinks about “how glad I [he] was that nobody in my [his] family was there to see me [him] play Rocky in a feather boa. Especially my [his] dad.”⁹⁵

There are more examples of Charlie’s family conforming to traditional norms, such as Charlie’s dad who needed to stop playing baseball because Charlie’s mum became pregnant with Charlie’s sister, and he needed to marry Charlie’s mum and find a job.⁹⁶ Or Charlie’s father getting drunk every holiday because he hates his father;⁹⁷ Charlie’s grandfather beating up his daughters so they study more or being negatively shocked how many black people attend Charlie’s high school,⁹⁸ or Charlie’s brother having his untidy bedroom walls full of supermodels. But members of Charlie’s family seem to not be only stereotypically masculine or feminine, as we can learn from some small instances throughout the novel. This can suggest that the concept of gender performativity is correct, and people are not one gender, but rather they become a gender by “performing” in lines of masculinity or femininity. We can see it the most in Charlie’s sister who after the breakup with her boyfriend who beat her starts to behave differently, more actively. She starts to advocate for women’s rights, talks about sexism in

⁹¹CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 15, 21, 23, 73, 128.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

cheerleading,⁹⁹ judges sororities as being harmful to many women,¹⁰⁰ is part of Earth Day Club,¹⁰¹ and goes to the prom by herself and has fun with her friends.

To conclude, Charlie goes through the process of discovering his own identity and role in society. As the book progresses, he comes to understand that gender and sexual identity are not fixed categories but are created over time and through repeated actions and interactions. As we can see, the novel contains diverse sexual identities and orientations, representing the sexual diversity of gender performativity and identities in the real world. This supports Butler's view that gender and sexuality are fluid and complex concepts that can vary from individual to individual. In the analysis, we can also observe how power structures and gender stereotypes are manifested in interpersonal relationships. Some characters are affected and limited in how they can "perform" their gender role, and this can affect their self-esteem and relationships. Some characters in the book conceal their identity, which can be understood as an attempt at Charlie's gender that conforms to the expectations of those around them. This concealment illustrates the powerful influence social pressure can have on how individuals perform their gender identity. We can observe that in the case of characters that are under pressure to conform to stereotypical gender norms (mostly Charlie's family members), typical performativity of their gender mostly hinders both male and female characters' development of their gender identities. Only Charlie's sister starts a journey of challenging the norms, observing, but still "performing" feminine according to stereotypes. Charlie, and his friends, on the contrary, are either "performing" their true gender without conforming to stereotypes and facing the possible backlash from society (Patrick and Mary Elizabeth), or Sam and Patrick's parents who are not conventional in a sense that their mum tells great jokes (skill mostly assigned to masculine gender) but is also described as very pretty ex-actress, and their father cooks incredibly tasty food (more feminine feature, traditionally) but Charlie tells the reader that the father has a great handshake (mostly masculine feature).¹⁰² Some are fighting the stereotypes within themselves but are afraid to "perform" the gender how they want because of family and classmates (Brad). And I would argue that non-conforming (or at least to some point) performativity of their gender mostly helps both male and female characters' development of their gender identities.

⁹⁹ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 74.

4.2 Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model

For a reminder, Gouck's five-stage narrative model in MPDG novels distinguishes these five stages: Beginnings; Setting Up Mystique; Becoming Friends, Adventuring Together; A Bump in the Road; and Reunions, Goodbyes and The Final Monologue.¹⁰³ We will analyze *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* to see whether these five stages are present in it. Gouck also claims that MPDG is stereotypically "white, cisgender, heterosexual, and middle-class",¹⁰⁴ and demonstrates "the (un)intentional impact deviation from this pattern can have on Pixie discourse."¹⁰⁵ After the analysis it should be clear whether MPDG character, Sam, fits into this stereotypical mold and whether she serves as a catalyst for Charlie's actions, whether her portrayal "performs in service of White masculinity,"¹⁰⁶ or whether she is a more complex character with her own struggles and development. After this analysis it should be clear whether Sam is a typical Pixie, or, as Gouck says "Alt-Pixie", and if Sam is typical "Pixie" we should state and argue whether there is or is not another character in the role of "Alt-Pixie".

At the beginning of a prototypical MPDG novel, according to this model, a white heterosexual male protagonist (middle-class living in suburbs) is usually introduced as sad, and mystique is created when an MPDG character appears in his life. It can be assumed Charlie is the white male middle-class protagonist who lives in the suburbs because it is said to be set in the Pittsburgh suburb where author Stephen Chbosky was born,¹⁰⁷ he never mentions any financial problems, and according to some details, such as their parents being able to afford to pay university for Charlie's sister but they are glad Charlie's brother gets scholarship for playing football because they could not afford to pay all of them,¹⁰⁸ we can suppose their family belongs to the middle class. Judging by not only his name but people referring to him as "he" we can say he is male, and from tiny descriptions of his family's appearance (being pale or having green eyes) it might be okay to claim Charlie is white. We can only assume his sexuality, as he never states it, but from various parts of the book, we can guess he is heterosexual. He likes girls (not only Sam), throughout the novel he describes various women as pretty,¹⁰⁹ and he never gives such a description of the beauty of male characters. Finally, he

¹⁰³ GOUCK, "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model", p. 2-3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 3-5.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰⁷ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 17, 23, 48, 74.

tells the reader he feels “both happy and sad, and is still trying to figure out how that could be,”¹¹⁰ and he suggests his family made him this way, and he feels that way especially after his best friend’s suicide.¹¹¹ Later in the book we learn through Charlie’s realization during anxieties, panic attacks and his stay at hospital his Aunt Helen molested him when he was a child,¹¹² which we can assign as one of the sources of his sadness and hidden trauma.

As for the second stage of the narrative model, Charlie meets Sam at a football game. He is not a sports fan or “popular enough to go,” but he used to go there sometimes with Michael as it was “a place to go on Friday when we [they] didn’t want to watch television.”¹¹³ Charlie at first recognizes a classmate from shop class, Patrick, sometimes known as Nothing, and to his surprise walks up to him. Patrick seems friendly and introduces Sam to Charlie: “‘And this is Sam.’ He pointed to a very pretty girl next to him. And she waved to me [Charlie]. ‘Hey Charlie.’ Sam had a very nice smile. [...] Incidentally, Sam has brown hair and very very pretty green eyes. The kind of green that doesn’t make a big deal about itself.”¹¹⁴ We can suggest Sam is of white race, and heterosexual; throughout the novel, we can observe her being involved in a lot of relationships with men, and there is no description or information given for us to assume she is not cisgender. We might say Sam “seemingly appears from nowhere”¹¹⁵, as Charlie at first sees Patrick and talks to him, and only then recognizes another person sitting next to them. Till now we may claim that Sam fits perfectly into the description of the MPDG character, and the whole novel fits into the first two stages of Gouck’s narrative model. The house where Sam and Patrick live with their parents Charlie describes as “a rich house, very clean,”¹¹⁶ from which we can assume Sam belongs minimally into the middle class, if not to the upper class. Gouck suggests “the MPDG character is both intriguing and beautiful, marked by the protagonist as ‘not like other girls’. This intrigue is reinforced by a secret she keeps from both the protagonist and the rest of her peers.”¹¹⁷ The reader only finds out the secret later in the novel, and it is also the fourth stage of the narrative model, so I will clarify the secret later in this subchapter.

The third stage of the narrative model is called Becoming Friends and Adventuring Together, and it follows the protagonist and MPDG characters becoming friends and spending

¹¹⁰ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 8.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8-9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹¹⁷ GOUCK, “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model”, p. 5.

a lot of time together doing impulsive and adventurous things. After the football game where Charlie meets Sam for the first time, they start to sit together with Patrick in the cafeteria during lunchtime, they regularly watch the games from the same spot in the bleachers,¹¹⁸ Sam and Patrick invite Charlie to hang out and party with them,¹¹⁹ and they also introduce him to their group of friends.¹²⁰ There is a moment when they drive together in Sam's pickup truck, and Charlie starts to finally feel close to somebody after his best friend died; he feels "warm [...] [T]he feeling I had happened when Sam told Patrick to find a station on the radio [...] [A]nd finally he found this really amazing song about this boy, and we all got quiet. Sam tapped her hand on the steering wheel. Patrick held his hand outside the car and made air waves. And I just sat between them. After the song finished, I said something. 'I feel infinite'."¹²¹ We can mark this moment as the beginning of a true friendship between all three of them, and the moment when Charlie starts to change his view on the world, other people, and himself. He starts to challenge everything familiar to him (more on that in the analysis of the remaining two stages of the narrative model). "When we got out of the tunnel, Sam screamed this really fun scream, and there it was. Downtown. Lights on buildings and everything that makes you wonder. Sam sat down and started laughing. Patrick started laughing. I started laughing. And in that moment, I swear we were infinite."¹²²

Sam makes Charlie a milkshake and takes care of him after some people at the party stoned him, and Patrick gives a toast about Charlie being a wallflower; that he sees things and keeps quiet about them and he understands, and all the people at the party raise a glass to Charlie.¹²³ Charlie is a nerd who loves to read books, and his English teacher, Bill, is his friend.¹²⁴ And in this moment, Sam and Patrick realize that Charlie is a truly nice person who can keep their secrets, such as Brad kissing Patrick at the party.¹²⁵

Charlie later starts to spend more time alone only with Sam (also only with Patrick, but for analysis of MPDG character Sam is more important to analyze). They both listen to similar bands, and Charlie starts to create mixtapes for Sam. He puts her on a pedestal, as we can observe in many descriptions of her behavior in the novel, but she loves him as a friend and dates a man named Craig. Sam invites Charlie to their local *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*

¹¹⁸ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 37.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹²⁰ Ibid. p. 49.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 42.

¹²² Ibid., p. 48.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

where she plays the character called Janet and for Charlie, it “is very hard to watch because Sam walks around in her underwear and he is really trying not to think about her that way, which is becoming increasingly difficult.”¹²⁶ *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is completely the opposite of what Charlie used to do in his free time, as an introvert and a nerd but he admits that “of all the things he has done that year so far *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is the best,”¹²⁷ and comes back every screening. He also starts to work for Xerox magazine “Punk Rocky” about punk rock and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.¹²⁸ The friendship of Sam and Charlie peaks during Christmas time, they celebrate Christmas together with the whole group of friends at Sam and Patrick’s house, Charlie gives Sam a record that he was given by Aunt Helen, he used to listened to it all the time and decided when he ever meets a person beautiful as this recording, he will give it to her. Sam hugged and kissed him and told him she loved him, but Charlie knew she meant it in a friendly way. And then Sam takes Charlie up into her bedroom and gives him a typewriter. And then she kisses him on the lips because she wants to make sure he will be kissed by a person that loves him (already mentioned in 4.1).¹²⁹ Here, Sam reveals her secret that she was kissed, and probably molested by her father’s friend when she was little. Charlie writes about loving Sam – “it is not a movie kind of love, I just look at her sometimes and think she is the prettiest and nicest person in the whole world. I wrote her a poem, but I didn’t show it to her because I was embarrassed.”¹³⁰ He tries to tell the reader about the photo that Craig took of Sam but “it would be impossible to describe how beautiful it is.”¹³¹

In the fourth stage of the narrative model, A Bump in the Road, after some time of peaceful spontaneity, the protagonist and MPDG have an argument, and the secret MPDG keeps is revealed leading to the disappearance of MPDG from the narrative, at least for the moment. I would suggest that all is true but not the part with the secret of MPDG leading to her disappearance from the narrative. What leads to it is the fact that Charlie, after starting to date Mary Elizabeth by agreeing to attend school dance with her,¹³² but not actually liking her, kisses Sam instead of Mary Elizabeth at the party during the “Truth or Dare” game after being asked to kiss the most beautiful girl in the room. And this leads to Mary Elizabeth breaking up with him, and the group not speaking to Charlie, besides Patrick.¹³³ And this loneliness and

¹²⁶ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 54-55.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77-78.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 147-148.

separation from Sam that Charlie experiences triggers him, and he starts to having panic attacks again, as he used to have after his aunt Hellen's death when he was little, and also after his best friend committed suicide and did not tell Charlie anything. He starts to smoke, take drugs, and re-read books right after he finishes them not to being able to think about anything.

This fourth stage of the narrative model does not last long, as Charlie stands up for Patrick in a school fight, Sam forgives him for what happened at the party and the whole group starts to meet with Charlie again. The night before Sam and Patrick leave for university, as they are seniors and Charlie is only a junior, Sam even invites Charlie into her room where she admits to liking him romantically, and they kiss. "It was like everything made sense. Until she moved her hand under my pants, and she touched me."¹³⁴ Memories are attacking Charlie causing him distress and anxiety, so Sam stops, and they do not have sex. After Sam leaves, Charlie experiences the worst panic attacks he ever had ends up in him starting to black out and thinking about suicide. In the epilogue, exactly as Gouck defines the fifth stage end, we realize that Charlie was molested as a child by his aunt Hellen. He writes it in his last letter to a friend from the hospital, finally feeling better, undergoing therapies, and taking proper medication. He mentions that Sam may come in August to visit him.

Undoubtedly, Sam fits into the stereotypical mold connected with MPDG in YA being the white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class girl that "meets these Western standards of beauty because she is constructed from them."¹³⁵ According to Gouck (2023), MPDG is persistently stereotypical still in contemporary literature, whereas Pixie, a portrayal of MPDG in three-dimensional space, such as actress Zooey Deschanel who manifests MPDG in real life (mostly in 2010s), is evolving. It is happening thanks to millennials¹³⁶ who grew up reading YA with MPDG characters in it and started to realize MPDG portrayal no longer fits into a situation in the contemporary world and politics. Gouck introduces a male version of the Pixie, the 'Manic Pixie Dream Boy' (MPDB); "charming and eccentric, the MPDB's interests in art, music, philosophy, or literature gesture to the 'alternative' (yet heterosexual) masculinity he embodies; seemingly the MPDB is 'not like other boys.'"¹³⁷ In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Sam has the MPDG traits (appearance, class status), also fits into the narrative model introduced in Gouck (2021), as she is the "temporary figure who disappears twice over

¹³⁴ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 219.

¹³⁵ GOUCK, "The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction.", p. 530.

¹³⁶ "Millennial."

¹³⁷ GOUCK, "The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction.", p. 531.

the course of the narrative.”¹³⁸ Gouck (2023) suggests that MPDG’s “transience is not limited to her instability within the plot but rather, the framing of a typical Pixie story means that she is not only transient, but silenced.”¹³⁹ Gouck (2023) explains the silencing of MPDG that she is allowed to speak but only when beneficial to male protagonist’s development in the story, MPDG is never a point-of-view character and the reader never gets to see her thoughts and feelings right inside of her but is allowed to see and feel everything what is happening inside the male protagonist. And usually, the silencing comes right after the moment in the novel, when the male protagonist tells her “how much she changed his life”¹⁴⁰, and therefore the MPDG character is no longer needed. Sam is not the point-of-view character, we never get to know her thoughts right from her mind. Many times, she speaks, immediately after her line Charlie either realizes her beauty, his love for her, or his pain from not being with her romantically. This can prove Gouck’s point of speaking only when beneficial for the male protagonist’s development. But in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Charlie and Sam never have a heart-to-heart conversation where he would tell her how much his life changed thanks to her. Sam starts to confront Charlie about why he had never asked her out on a date and continues with the monologue about her being different now than she was 9 months ago when they only met (the scene right before Sam’s second disappearance).¹⁴¹ To Gouck’s suggestion that Pixie evolves, and one of the forms of the evolution that starts to penetrate the YA literature is the Manic Pixie Dream Boy character. I will not analyze it in depth, but on a surface level, it seems like MPDB is not present in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Charlie is the point-of-view character who undergoes crucial development in life and does not disappear from the story. Patrick does not disappear from the story either. But as Gouck describes MPDB¹⁴², and Charlie fits in almost all the aspects of this description, it might be interesting to analyze it more.

Similar to Gouck (2023), Solomon (2017) operates with the MPDG trope being resistant throughout the times, but Gouck (2023) claims that Pixie in YA is persistent in her stereotypical portrayal and disappearance from the narrative, whereas Solomon asserts MPDG is a modern take on the timeless feminine, with a slight pathology and a strong mythological element, and

¹³⁸ GOUCK, “The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction.”, p. 536.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 536.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 537.

¹⁴¹ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 216-218.

¹⁴² GOUCK, “The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction.”, p. 531.

any peculiar outcomes of her time travel are ascribed to her inherent eccentricity.¹⁴³ Her main point of view is that MPDG trope can be considered as an “apparatus of capture,”¹⁴⁴ and by analyzing the text of her choosing, she asserts that by capturing the MPDG trope, “an anarcho-feminist dream girl is not released from captivity; but the anarcho-feminist “thesis” is released from an idealized consensus into a productive contradiction.”¹⁴⁵ And anarcho-feminist girl here meaning girl with power challenging patriarchal society, not an object. In 4.3, we analyze Sam through the third-wave feminism perspective and argue that Sam, for a major part of the novel does not behave as a feminist, mostly because of her traumatic past experiences with sexual harassment in childhood. There are instances where she thinks she has power over men, but I suggest the initial submission from men’s side is only because of Sam’s beauty, and men only see her body rather than really listen to her.¹⁴⁶ After that, men behave dominantly over Sam. But once she comes to terms with her own struggles connected to her past, she develops as a character and gains more and more natural power in her relationships. In this sense, we might say Sam has the potential of anarcho-feminist MPDG needed to conquer the stereotypical view of MPDG. At the end of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Sam does not disappear for good, as Gouck (2021) proposes in her narrative model as one of the stereotypes connected with MPDG. If we observe Sam after her transition from an anarcho-feminist perspective, we can claim she herself as MPDG behaved at first stereotypically but after she changed a lifestyle she was not released as an ideal anarcho-feminist but rather her as MPDG shifted to a more anarcho-feminist point of view, and we can no longer assert she only fits into the stereotype MPDG is and was even before it gained its name, but that she gained more power throughout the novel and became more important than only serving the male protagonist’s development.

To conclude, Sam is eccentric and full of energy, free-spirited, brave, and open to new experiences. These qualities can act as a catalyst for the development of the protagonist, Charlie. Her presence encourages Charlie to discover his own identity, overcome barriers, and live a full life. She fits into the stereotypical mold of the MPDG character with her appearance, class status, and almost perfectly fits into the narrative model where she disappears twice throughout the novel. Sam can serve in favor of patriarchal dominance in many senses. But I would argue, we completely cannot say that Sam is reducible to just the MPDG stereotype. It seems Chbosky tried to give her character more depth and diversity. Sam has her own internal

¹⁴³ SOLOMON, “Anarcho-Feminist Melodrama and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl”, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 7-8.

¹⁴⁶ GOUCK, “The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction.”, p. 536.

conflicts and experiences pain and insecurities. Her past, including experiences of sexual abuse, adds a layer of depth and complexity to her character that isn't always present in typical MPDG characters. Overall, we could say that Sam has MPDG traits, but is also a character that is authentic and multi-dimensional, with her own pains and growth. Her role in the story goes beyond being a catalyst for Charlie, as she undergoes significant development herself (by starting to date men who treat her well, such as Charlie), and contributes to the overall message of the book. We might question whether there are no other characters who could be playing the role of MPDG, or as Gouck calls it, "Anti-Pixie". The only other character almost always present in Charlie's life and challenging him is Patrick. But we do not see Patrick being described as mesmerizing, as Sam in Charlie's eyes, Patrick has feelings for Brad, not for Charlie, and vice versa, and nothing that Patrick does or says does not cause Charlie any revealing memories needed for him to overcome trauma and anxiety.

4.3 Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'

In this section, I will analyze female characters and their choices, whether these choices are more in line with second-wave or third-wave feminism, as the essay "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'" by Snyder-Hall (see 2.2) debates the difference between the two. Snyder-Hall suggests that third-wave feminists should be able to choose whatever they want to do in their lives, and she is specifically interested in the sexual desires of these women, their position and role in, not only sexual, relationships, and sex workers being deliberately choosing their profession rather than being victims, as second-wave feminists supposedly claimed.¹⁴⁷

There are five significant female characters I would like to analyze. We start with women from Charlie's family – mom, sister, and Aunt Helen. As already mentioned, Charlie's mom is described through Charlie's eyes mostly as a passive character, who got pregnant young, gave up college, and is a housewife. During almost every conflict in her family, her husband speaks to kids, and even if sometimes he crosses a line and yells or says something hurtful, she remains quiet.¹⁴⁸ But when she "says something, she always gets her way."¹⁴⁹ There is a moment in the novel when she gossips and talks badly about some well-known actress with a lady in a hair salon.¹⁵⁰ She teaches Charlie to do chores, and when upset, she takes him shopping with her.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ SNYDER-HALL, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice.'", p. 256.

¹⁴⁸ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 9, 11, 19.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

Her father is an alcoholic, and her husband gets drunk every family dinner they have, and she never says anything. Although her father beat her up and spoke to her not nicely, he made sure she and her sister would make it into the real world and they both went to a college.¹⁵² From everything we know about Charlie's mom from her description by Charlie or her part in dialogues, we might say that she is equal to her husband in a way that he makes money, and she takes care of a house, but teaches children to contribute. She does not complain about her life, does not seem sad, but does not talk much so it is hard to say what she feels inside her. When she speaks, other people listen to her and obey her. But she becomes a housewife and stay-at-home mom not because of her decision but because of her unplanned pregnancy. I suggest we cannot speak about feminism in her case. She is a traditional wife, who gave up a successful career for a family that she takes care of, but there is no proof of her choosing this lifestyle deliberately.

Charlie's sister is more interesting to analyze because we can see the development of her character throughout the book. I already mentioned it in 4.1, just to sum up, she is described as dating a man who beat her, as she continues with the pattern of women in her family being in abusive relationships (her grandmother with an alcoholic, her Aunt Helen having several dysfunctional relationships). She does not talk about it; she just suffers in silence. She enjoys receiving gifts from her boyfriend, and she cares about her appearance but also her grades, which suggest she is equal to men in the sense of the right to education. After the breakup with her boyfriend, she starts to advocate for women's rights, she talks about sexism in cheerleading,¹⁵³ judges sororities as being harmful to many women,¹⁵⁴ is part of Earth Day Club,¹⁵⁵ and goes to the prom by herself and has fun with her friends. We can speak about her becoming a feminist who wants to make sure women are treated equally in every field. We might polemize that her critique of sexism in cheerleading or sororities could be the relic of second-wave feminism, as they saw women as victims in male-dominated backgrounds.

Aunt Helen was not mentioned a lot in the thesis, yet. We know about her abusive relationships, and that a family member used to molest her when she was a child, and she was doing the same to Charlie. She was able to stand up against Charlie's father in an argument but was not able to stand up for herself in her relationships, and she ended up living with her sister and her family, Charlie's family. She was a straight-A student and went to college. I would

¹⁵² CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 66.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 86

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

suggest that she had the will to fight for women's and other people's rights but she stayed in toxic relationships. Therefore, we might say she was a feminist who struggled in life and was not able to run from her past and trauma. Her choices of partners were not completely free but influenced by her past negative experience of being molested, but also by her father beating her up.

As for the other two female characters, Sam and Mary Elizabeth, I would like to start with the latter. At first sight, she seems like a true feminist. She asks Charlie out on their first date,¹⁵⁶ she is in charge of the local theater *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, she is an editor of a local magazine,¹⁵⁷ and wants to study women's studies together with other majors. On the night she and Charlie have sex together at her house for the first time, she orders him to open the bottle of wine while she puts out the fire, she starts to kiss him and leads the whole act. Until she asks Charlie if she is pretty. She seems unsure and unconfident, Charlie has never seen her like that before. After he says she is pretty, Mary Elizabeth completely changes her tone of the voice, she becomes gentler and does not speak much, which is unusual for her.¹⁵⁸ Since this moment we can observe she begins to be dependent on Charlie and his attraction to her. After they break up, she is a complete mess, and soon after she finds another boyfriend, Peter, who does not speak very much, and she can be the one on the dominant side.¹⁵⁹ So I suggest that this is another example of feminist who calls for equality but does not completely stand by it when it comes to an intimate relationship, as she seems to secretly like man's approval but openly speaks about the threat of patriarchy.

And lastly, Sam, the female character we know the most about. In 4.2, I concluded that while she serves as MPDG, as a catalyst to challenge Charlie, she is also a complex character with her own struggles, past, trauma, hopes, and feelings. And therefore, looking at her character through the lens of third-wave feminism might be interesting. She was inappropriately kissed and possibly abused, by a grown man, and this seems to stay in her, as we can observe her being in relationships, where men treat her badly, as we could already see with women of Charlie's family. In the first half of the novel, she presents her choice of living life as a strong independent woman who changes partners and does not care about her grades or her future career. But after her secret is revealed to Charlie, she realizes this really was not her choice, but she was pushed into that direction by her experience and decides to study, better

¹⁵⁶ CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 119.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 136-137.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

her grades, go to college, and date men who see her true value. Therefore, I argue, that as Sam develops throughout the novel, she becomes the feminist standing completely behind her choices, as she conquers her past, and she also starts to support other female students in the college to pursue their choices whatever they might be.

Trites (1997) examines gender, stereotypes, power dynamics, and feminist viewpoints portrayed and challenged in children's literature. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (and *Looking for Alaska*, too) belongs to the young adult, quirky genre. With young adults being on their way from childhood to adulthood, her book is suitable to use in our analysis of both primary sources, as readers of YA might be as young as 10 years old.¹⁶⁰ Rather than searching the books for inequality between men and women, and bashing men, Trites concentrates on the positive aspects of feminism, such as how women interact with one another in family and community relationships, and how women have reinterpreted patriarchal stereotypes. Trites said that man an of feminism is to support women in deciding to raise societal respect. Additionally, the most crucial factor is that women understand exactly what decision they have made.¹⁶¹ I suggest both Patrick and Charlie are true men of feminism who support women's choices even when the consequences of them are not good, for example, when Sam chooses older boyfriend who treats her not right, none of them stop talking to her, judge or degrade her. Charlie also supports his mom in her role as mother and caretaker of their household and never says anything about her being less because she was a stay-at-home mom,¹⁶² or his sister dating a man who beats her. In both Sam's and his sister's cases, everything, eventually, turns out fine. Sam breaks up with Craig, and concentrates on her studies and herself, and Charlie's sister breaks up with her boyfriend, too, and puts herself first, for example by going to her prom by herself with her friends.

¹⁶⁰ CART, "The Value of Young Adult Literature". n.o.

¹⁶¹ TRITES, *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*, p. 7.

¹⁶² CHBOSKY, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, p. 34.

5 Looking for Alaska

Looking for Alaska was written by John Green, “#1 New York Times bestselling author of young adult novels *An Abundance of Katherines*, *Paper Towns*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, and *Turtles All the Way Down*.” Four of his books were adapted into movies or TV series. “He was the 2006 recipient of the Michael L. Printz Award, a 2009 Edgar Award winner, and has twice been a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize.”¹⁶³

5.1 Gender Performativity

In Looking for Alaska, John Green creates a brave, rebellious, and logical female lead, Alaska, whereas the protagonist, Miles (or “Pudge”), exhibits more feminine traits. There are three main characters, Alaska, Miles, and their friend Chip (or “Colonel”), and these are the biggest part of the analysis, but there are plenty of side characters worth mentioning, as many of them “perform” their gender differently as is stereotypically assumed for their biological sex.

There is no character from Miles’s friends or family that we can see at least some part of their background that would conform to the stereotypical view of their gender. The closest to do so is Miles’s mom who can converse for hours about nothing even with strangers,¹⁶⁴ loves tidying up¹⁶⁵ and wants to unpack Miles and make a bed after arriving at his new dormitory in Alabama.¹⁶⁶ All these traits, cleaning and talking too much, are usually expected from females. But she also relaxes while her husband cleans or does laundry. This small description of her that we get from Miles can suggest she does not always conform to society’s stereotypes of her biological sex. Miles’s dad, on the contrary, is portrayed more femininely. He is interested in Miles’s life, wants to talk to him about his interests, such as American history or the last words of famous people, hugs him,¹⁶⁷ and often tells Miles he loves him.¹⁶⁸

But then Miles meets his roommate, Colonel, who talks about his parents. His father seems to perform stereotypical masculine gender as he is a truck driver alcoholic who beats his wife when drunk,¹⁶⁹ and after cheating on her leaves his family.¹⁷⁰ We can see the pattern of

¹⁶³ GREEN, John. “Bio — John Green,” n.d. <https://www.johngreenbooks.com/bio>.

¹⁶⁴ GREEN, John. *Looking for Alaska*. London: HarperCollins, 2006, p. 10.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

his father's behavior in Colonel. He chooses to date, break up, and date again a girl named Sara even though he claims they are not suitable for each other, still, fight,¹⁷¹ and he calls her a "bitch".¹⁷² Colonel embodies certain traditional masculine traits often associated with masculinity. He is portrayed as physically strong,¹⁷³ assertive, and confident, taking on a leadership role among his group of friends at Culver Creek Preparatory School. His performative acts of masculinity include engaging in pranks and dominating his group of friends. But there are also the moments when he does not appear confident, for example when he carries the burden of his lower socioeconomic background and the pressures associated with it. "The Colonel's mom lived in a trailer [...] [T]he place was really one long room, with a full-size bed in the front, a kitchenette, and a living area in the back with a TV and a small bathroom—so small that in order to take a shower, you pretty much had to sit on the toilet."¹⁷⁴ His gender performativity is made more complex by the intersection of gender and class, as he must negotiate both the constraints placed on him by his social situation and the expectations of masculinity in society. Colonel also possesses stereotypically feminine traits; he works hard in school and takes extra classes¹⁷⁵ (whereas his girlfriend is "Weekday Warrior",¹⁷⁶ one of the rich kids who do not have to behave or perform well at school), he has a great sense of fashion, irons his shirt for a date,¹⁷⁷ and is obsessed with truth and fidelity in his relationships.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, Colonel's relationship with Alaska further explores his gender performativity. He is initially drawn to Alaska's beauty and charisma, which aligns with heteronormative ideals of attraction. But as their relationship develops, it becomes a close friendship that goes beyond romantic narratives and questions accepted ideas about intimacy and gender. Through the lens of Butler's concept, we can analyze the Colonel's character and understand how his gender performances are shaped by relationships, personal experiences, and societal expectations. We are encouraged to consider and question the binary conception of gender. The way the Colonel develops as a character emphasizes the fluidity of gender identity.

Butler says that "from the point of view of gender as enacted, questions have emerged over the fixity of gender identity as an interior depth that is said to be externalized in various forms of 'expression'."¹⁷⁹ In the novel, Miles, the male protagonist, defies traditional gender

¹⁷¹ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 70.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39-40.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁷⁹ BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 188.

roles by embracing and expressing his sensitivity and intellectual curiosity. He admits to being afraid of walking alone in the dark, and runs away after Alaska catches his hand.¹⁸⁰ He is also not good at sports, does not like it, and after being hit by the ball he vomits onto his future girlfriend's lap.¹⁸¹ He describes himself as skinny, tries to get muscles, and feels sad about his figure.¹⁸² Miles initially embodies a stereotypical quirky and socially awkward persona. However, as the story unfolds, we witness his transformation and the performative aspects of his gender identity. Miles takes on the nickname "Pudge" and becomes involved in the performative elements of adolescent masculinity, including participating in pranks,¹⁸³ attempting to fit in, and gaining approval from his classmates for example by starting to smoke and paying for cigarettes.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, the examination of Miles's gender performativity is made even more difficult by his attraction to the mysterious Alaska. He engages in performative acts of romance and desire, positioning himself within the heteronormative framework. Miles almost has an erection when Alaska sleeps on his lap,¹⁸⁵ he sees porn for the very first time in his life with Alaska and likes it.¹⁸⁶ But he also forms a close emotional bond with Alaska, which challenges the idea that male-female relationships should be solely driven by sexual desire. He also likes the idea of getting a blowjob offered by his girlfriend Lara but does not know how to do it, so he asks Alaska for advice.¹⁸⁷ Butler's concept of gender performativity challenges the binary understanding of gender and highlights its fluid and constructed nature. Through Miles's journey, we see how his gender performances are influenced by his desires, relationships, and the social context he navigates. Additionally, Miles's character development can be examined through the intersectionality of gender and other identity markers such as class and intellectual pursuits. As a student at Culver Creek Preparatory School, he grapples with the expectations and pressures associated with privilege, for example when Colonel is not interested in being friends with him as he went to a public school.¹⁸⁸ His gender performativity is further complicated by this intersectionality, as he manages the complexities of his social position and the performative elements of masculinity. Miles's character serves as an example of how gender identity can be deliberately shaped by stylized repetition of actions that violate social norms.

¹⁸⁰ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 26.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 70, 91.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

“Gender identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results.”¹⁸⁹ Alaska often exhibits behavior that goes against traditional femininity. She is outspoken, and rebellious, and refuses to conform to societal expectations of how a young woman should behave. On the one hand, she jokes about her breasts being squeezed by a guy on a date,¹⁹⁰ and on the other hand fights for women’s rights (see more in 5.3). She loves to drink, smoke, rebel, and play videogames,¹⁹¹ she is the only one from their friend’s group with a car, specifically a truck, and drives them everywhere.¹⁹² Alaska sells cigarettes to other students, and loves sex – “there is so much to do: cigarettes to some, sex to have”.¹⁹³ She is the leader of all the pranks, as Colonel says: “Alaska was ever Alaska, the larger-than-life creative force behind them”.¹⁹⁴ When we compare Miles with Alaska after they secretly sneaked into and out one of the other student’s house, she jumps out of the window with ease but he is having a really hard time.¹⁹⁵ She also tutors her friends, including Miles, math.¹⁹⁶ From other descriptions used in the analysis it is clear that John Green created his two main characters that do not “perform” stereotypically according to their biological sex. Her character exemplifies how individuals can actively perform their gender identities in ways that differ from normative standards.

Alaska demonstrates the fluidity of gender identity. “The various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all.”¹⁹⁷ She is moody, yells at her friends, loves metaphors,¹⁹⁸ and wants to be a teacher for children with special needs.¹⁹⁹ All of these traits are stereotypically assigned to women. But we might say her emotional complexity and vulnerability challenge the notion that femininity is synonymous with emotional fragility. Alaska’s willingness to express her emotions openly, including her pain and struggles, serves as an example of how individuals can perform their gender identities through emotional expression.

Although the novel primarily explores themes of gender and identity, it also touches on the intersectionality of identity. The characters’ experiences are influenced by various aspects

¹⁸⁹ BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 33.

¹⁹⁰ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 20.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁷ BUTLER, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p. 178.

¹⁹⁸ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 63.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

of their identity, such as race, socio-economic background, and personal histories. The novel explores this intersectionality to show how several aspects of identity can come together to build a person's sense of self, supporting the notion that identity is performative and complex.

5.2 Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model

In this part I analyze whether Alaska Young, fits into this stereotypical mold of MPDG character, whether she catalyzes for Miles's actions, whether her portrayal "performs in service of White masculinity,"²⁰⁰ or whether she is a more complex character with her struggles and development. After this analysis it should be clear whether Alaska is a typical Pixie, or, as Gouck says "Alt-Pixie", and if Sam is typical "Pixie" we should state and argue whether there is or is not another character in the role of "Alt-Pixie".

The character of Alaska initially seems to fit this archetype as described by Gouck;²⁰¹ Miles says her eyes look like "fierce emeralds" (green),²⁰² her face is pale,²⁰³ and her hair has the color of "dark mahogany" (brown).²⁰⁴ This suggests that Alaska is of a white race. She is never described as having any romantic feelings, or relationships of interaction with other women, but there are many instances throughout the novel where we can observe her heterosexual preference and sexual desire, especially toward her boyfriend Jake. "She jumped onto him and wrapped her legs around him. As he held her by her waist, she leaned forward, her pouty lips parted, her head just slightly tilted, and enveloped his mouth with such passion that I felt I should look away but couldn't."²⁰⁵ She describes him as "beautiful, sensual lover",²⁰⁶ sex as "pretty fun",²⁰⁷ and after being asked by Miles, shares details of giving a blowjob.²⁰⁸ As for her class status, we do not have much information, but we know that she buys a lot of books, she is the one buying and selling cigarettes for other students, she is the only one owning a car, and she never talks about any job she may be working in alongside her studies. We can suggest her money is from her father so she may belong to the middle class or even upper class.

²⁰⁰ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 6.

²⁰¹ GOUCK, "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model", p. 2-3.

²⁰² GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 22.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115-116.

Miles seems to fit into Gouck's description of the male protagonist in MPDG novels as well. At the beginning of a prototypical MPDG novel, according to this model, a white heterosexual male protagonist (middle-class living in suburbs) is usually introduced as sad, and mystique is created when an MPDG character appears in his life. Gouck describes the male protagonist in MPDG novels as the one "belonging to a normative, nuclear family. A senior in high school, or close to becoming one, the protagonist's thoughts are consumed by college applications and graduation. While not unpopular per se, he occupies, or has come to occupy, a social position close to the bottom and, in line with his aspirations to attend a 'good' college, is usually considered by his peers to be nerdy. In other words, the protagonist is entirely unremarkable – almost painfully average."²⁰⁹ The novel starts on the day of Miles's birthday party to which his mom invited his classmates even though he has no friends at school and only two of them came.

"They left, and so I sat with my parents and stared at the blank TV and wanted to turn it on but knew I shouldn't. I could feel them both looking at me, waiting for me to burst into tears or something, as if I hadn't known all along that it would go precisely like this. But I had known. I could feel their pity as they scooped artichoke dip with chips intended for my imaginary friends, but they needed pity more than I did: I wasn't disappointed. My expectations had been met."²¹⁰

This passage illustrates Miles living a sad life, at least to an extent. His social position is close to the bottom, he is not very popular. Miles belongs to the nuclear family. We do not know about the year he is in, but he is about to start the Culver Creek boarding school that his father and his uncles attended.²¹¹ With the way Miles described his parents parking their SUV within the boarding school, or him being surprised by the state of his Room we can assume their family belonging into the middle-class. He "pictured plush carpet, wood-paneled walls, Victorian furniture. A bunk bed of unfinished wood with vinyl mattresses was pushed against the room's back window. The desks and dressers and bookshelves were all attached to the walls to prevent creative floor planning. And no air-conditioning."²¹² He also pays for every cigarette some of his friends buy from Alaska.²¹³ Miles talks about himself as being skinny and pale, he is from Florida, and his parents are also described as too pale, so we can assume he is of a white race. He is a nerd; he loves to read American History textbook or watch the History Channel

²⁰⁹ GOUCK, "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model", p. 6.

²¹⁰ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 10.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 18.

on TV, and his biggest passion is remembering the last words of famous people. We learn that he wants to go to Alabama's Culver Creek to find what he calls a "Great Perhaps".²¹⁴ That is all for the first stage of Gouck's narrative model, Beginnings, where there was a male protagonist, Miles Halter, introduced.

In the second stage, the protagonist meets the MPDG character, who seems to appear in life out of nowhere. She is described by the protagonist as "not like other girls" and is both fascinating and gorgeous. She conceals a secret from the protagonist and the other members of her peer group, which adds to the suspense.²¹⁵ Miles first meets Alaska when Colonel goes to her room and asks for cigarets. She tells the story when a boy pressed the boob during the summer. Miles immediately falls in love "with petite but God, curvy girl"²¹⁶, but she pulls out his pants down instead of shaking his hand, and talks about her boyfriend Jake. Miles describes her as "beautiful, smelling of sweat, sunshine and vanilla, and her eyes looking like fierce emeralds. She had the kind of eyes that predisposed you to support her every endeavor. 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."²¹⁷ She seems mysterious, moody as most of the time she jokes about everything, but sometimes she mentions deep thought, such as about the labyrinth of life, whether it is living or dying, the world or the end of it.²¹⁸ Later in the novel we find out her secret being her mom's death (more in the fourth stage of the narrative model).

In the third stage, we see Alaska and Miles becoming friends and spending time on their adventures. He comes to her room after being thrown into the water by some classmates at the beginning of the school year, but she is angry with him and closes the door for no reason,²¹⁹ and the following day acts as if nothing happened and wakes him up by loud screaming, so he tells himself she likes her but he should not be with her as she seems unpredictable.²²⁰ This small, but important detail is different from the scheme of MPDG narrative as prescribed by Gouck, as usually, the protagonist is blindly in love with MPDG character. Their relationship strengthens after she stands up for him in the class with the professor they call "The Old Man",²²¹ and they start to spend more time together alone, as friends. He looks for four-leaf

²¹⁴ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 10.

²¹⁵ GOUCK, "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model", p. 5.

²¹⁶ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 19.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

clover with Alaska, even though it is not the kind of activity he would choose to do, but “when Alaska Young is sitting with her legs crossed in a brittle, periodically green clover patch leaning forward in search of four-leaf clovers, the pale skin of her sizable cleavage clearly visible, it is a plain fact of human physiology that it becomes impossible to join in her clover search.”²²² He also stays in campus with her to spend Thanksgiving together – she digs a bottle of wine from the ground, where she left it, they read Vonnegut’s book *Cat’s Cradle* laying in the grass, and end up almost kissing.²²³ She flirts with him on different occasions,²²⁴ and he wants her but knows she is dating Jake, and hesitates because, as already mentioned, Alaska is moody and unpredictable. We learn that the name Alaska, which she chose herself when seven years old, means “that which the sea breaks against”²²⁵, and that can be either interpreted as Miles changing for her, or that everything bad happens to Alaska. She speaks about her realizing where the state of Alaska is “and it was big, just like I wanted to be. And it was damn far away from Vine Station, Alabama, just like I wanted to be.”²²⁶ Alaska hints more and more at the struggles she faces inside her. She uses metaphors from *Moby Dick*,²²⁷ and tells Miles she did not want to go home for Thanksgiving because she is “scared of ghosts, and home is full of them.”²²⁸ Till this point, we do not have any other information about her family than her mom used to be a “hippie” and father “Republican type” and they wanted to call her Harmony Springs/Mary Frances Young, therefore she changed her name.²²⁹

In this novel, the fourth and fifth stages of Gouck’s narrative model are interconnected, and the relationship between Alaska and Miles is described differently than in this prototypical model. At first should be Bump In the Road, where the protagonist and the MPDG character argue, and shortly after, her secret is made public. This is typically where the terrible background of MPDG is revealed, and for a while, the MPDG vanishes from the story. In the last stage named Reunions, Goodbyes, and The Final Monologue, the protagonist and the Pixie are reunited, and generally, under dramatic circumstances, there is some form of settlement between them. The MPDG then vanishes for a second and last time from the story. Shortly after, the book closes, with the male protagonist's final pages devoted to a philosophical and/or contemplative monologue.²³⁰ Miles and Alaska argue after she comes crying to tell him

²²² GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 39.

²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 76-77.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²³⁰ GOUCK, “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model”, p. 5-6.

Colonel stopped trusting her after she ratted out some of her classmates. Miles asks her why she did that and it seems like Alaska feels not understood, and tells Miles that “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.”²³¹ This is the time when Alaska disappears from the narrative for a while, but the secret is still unrevealed, therefore I suggest the two last stages of the narrative model are joined. They start to talk and meet normally, as if nothing happened, and hang out with each other. One evening all the friends drink together and play the Best Day/Worst Day game, where Alaska tells them about having her best day at eight years old with her mom at the ZOO, and soon after she reveals her worst day was the day after when her mom fell to the ground, screamed and instead of calling 911, Alaska only stared at her mom slowly dying.²³² After the secret is revealed, she seems strange and quite. On the last day Miles and Alaska spend together they play Truth or Dare, and they kiss passionately. “She moved my hand from her waist to her breast, and I felt cautiously, my fingers moving slowly under her shirt but over her bra, tracing the outline of her breasts and then cupping one in my hand, squeezing softly. ‘You’re good at that,’ she whispered. Her lips never left mine as she spoke. We moved together, my body between her legs.”²³³ Miles adds they never got naked or anything serious, but it felt like having sex. They drank a lot of alcohol, and in one minute she changed, started to panic, and insisted on going somewhere in the car, and the boys let her. The next day they got the news of Alaska dying in the tragic car accident, and they later found out that during their night together she realized it was the anniversary of her mom’s death and she forgot to put white daisies on her grave. The novel ends with Miles’s monologue, his “way out of the labyrinth”²³⁴, where he polemizes about Alaska’s death and her current whereabouts. In his writing, he says he “does not believe that she was only matter. If you take Alaska’s genetic code you add her life experiences and the relationships she had with people, and then you take the size and shape of her body, you do not get her. There is something else entirely.”²³⁵ I suggest that this note shows Alaska was not a prototypical MPDG character. She served as catalyst for Miles to change his thinking and way of living at the current moment, but she was a complex character with her struggles. Alaska is not the character that would add to the strength of a white patriarchy, as she literally fights against it (see 5.3). As for the Alt-Pixie character, there is no other character that would change Miles in any way.

²³¹ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 88.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 105-109.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

Like Sam in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Alaska fits into Gouck's (2021, 2023) description of MPDG in YA; she is a white, heterosexual, cisgender, middle-class girl who at least once disappears from the narrative. There are also a few instances where we can speak about silencing Alaska. She is not the point-of-view character so the reader cannot see inside of her, only through Miles's eyes. According to Gouck (2023), the narrative framing of the novel contributes to the Pixie's innate superficiality, as any thoughts or emotions she may convey are filtered through the heterosexual, white, cisgender, middle-class, male protagonist. And then the Pixie is perceived as a two-dimensional object rather than a fully realized girl because of this mediation.²³⁶ Gouck (2023) herself gives an example of not completely silencing Alaska but "muffled" in a way Pudge sees her body, which is therefore highlighted and given priority, and not hears her talking to him.²³⁷ "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."²³⁸ On many instances, when Alaska speaks, it is for Miles to start thinking about his view of other and life, but when Alaska remembers her mom and her death, I would argue that it is solely for the purpose to get the reader know Alaska better. Same as in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Alaska and Miles in *Looking for Alaska* do not have a heart-to-heart conversation about how Alaska changed Miles's life but Miles reveals it in his final monologue. "Before I got here, I thought for a long time that the way out of the labyrinth was to pretend that it did not exist, to build a small, self-sufficient world in a back corner of the endless maze, and to pretend that I was not lost, but home. But that only led to a lonely life accompanied only by the last words of the already-dead."²³⁹ But after he came to Culver Creek boarding school, his friends, mostly Alaska gave him a completely new perspective. In the case of this specific novel, I propose the analysis of *Looking for Alaska's* Miles as MPDB, as he seems exactly as Gouck (2023) describes MPDB - "charming and eccentric, has interests in art, music, philosophy, or literature gesture to the 'alternative' (yet heterosexual) masculinity he embodies; and seemingly is 'not like other boys.'"²⁴⁰ And to contrary to *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* where Sam undergoes a change of her lifestyle and choices that leads to her character's development, Alaska does not

²³⁶ GOUCK, "The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction," p. 536.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 536.

²³⁸ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 22.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 196.

²⁴⁰ GOUCK, "The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction," p. 531.

have a chance to develop. This might be another sign in *Looking for Alaska* that Miles is MPDB.

Solomon (2017) came up with the idea of “capturing the MPDG trope”. “The MPDG trope scavenges culture for gestures of resistance such that errant, questionable, radical, decentered and otherwise nonconforming femininity is arrogated to its purview.”²⁴¹ She compares the evolution of this specific eccentric feminine gender trope (nowadays called MPDG trope) to “organisms resembling each other.”²⁴² And similarly to Gouck (2023), Solomon suggests persistent MPDG as stereotypical depiction of eccentric femininity, and comes with an idea of not releasing the anarcho-feminist ideal, but rather the anarcho-feminist “thesis” releasing from an idealized consensus into a productive contradiction.”²⁴³ Alaska is different main female character than Sam from *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Sam undergoes a change and starts to develop as a character and woman, whereas Alaska does not develop throughout the whole novel, and eventually dies. On the other hand, Sam becomes interested in her choices and feminism only after her realization and following change, but Alaska fights for women’s rights and against their objectification since the beginning of the novel, and presumably since her early teenage years. I would argue Alaska is in the position of power in her relationships, and in 5.3 we claim Alaska is indeed a feminist who stands objectively in favor of equality between women and men. Alaska might be anarcho-feminist with her power over men, but as she disappears from the narrative without any chance to actually help herself but fulfilling the stereotypical MPDG faith by helping Miles to realize his potential, there is no capturing of MPDG as evolved and released from the stereotype.

To sum it up, Alaska’s quirky nature, her love of practical jokes and intricate plans, and her capacity to bring spontaneity into Miles’s life fit the standard traits linked with the stereotype. Her arrival at the Culver Creek boarding school injects excitement and intrigue into Miles Halter’s life. Her unpredictable nature draws Miles into her world, contributing to his personal growth and self-discovery. Miles’s intellectual growth is influenced by her love of reading and philosophical conversations, which prompts him to consider the purpose of life. She challenges his assumptions and encourages him to contemplate his existence and delve further into philosophical issues. She has her own struggles, emotional depth, and trauma stemming from her mother’s death, which haunts her throughout the novel. Alaska’s character is not limited to only being a source of inspiration for Miles. She grapples with her own demons

²⁴¹ SOLOMON, “Anarcho-Feminist Melodrama and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl,” p. 2.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 2.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 7-8.

and undergoes her own emotional journey, which is explored in depth as the narrative progresses. Alaska's depth of character is demonstrated by her inner challenges, which include guilt and a fascination with the purpose of life. Her emotional suffering goes beyond the usual MPDG superficiality, but I would argue she does not undergo any significant development throughout the novel, and not only disappears from Miles's life, but literally disappears from the world, as she dies, and there is no chance for her growth for us to suggest her portrayal conquered the MPDG stereotype. The complicated relationship between Miles and Alaska is depicted in the book. Their relationship is characterized by emotional intimacy and common intellectual interests, in addition to a hint of romantic passion. Their relationship is more realistic emotionally than the shallow romanticism typical of MPDG. Her passing leaves a lasting impact on Miles and the other characters, forcing them to confront the fragility of life and the profound questions that Alaska herself grappled with. Gouck's five-stage narrative model is applicable to this novel, but I suggest the last two stages, The Bump in the Road and Reunions, Goodbyes, and The Final Monologue are interconnected and not entirely as this model prescribes. And I would add that even though Alaska mostly fits into the stereotype of MPDG in YA, the depiction of both Miles and Alaska does not add to the white supremacy, as Miles seems to not have prejudices connected with stereotypes towards other people, Alaska fiercely fights against the patriarchy (see 5.3), and in their relationship, Alaska dominates Miles through the whole novel.

5.3 Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'

This section will examine the decisions made by female characters and whether they align more with third-wave or second-wave feminism. The essay "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice'" by Snyder-Hall (see 2.2) discusses this distinction. According to Snyder-Hall, third-wave feminists ought to have the freedom to pursue any career path they choose. She is particularly interested in the sexual preferences of these women, their status and role in relationships outside of the sexual sphere, and the idea that sex workers choose their careers voluntarily rather than as victims, as some second-wave feminists supposedly claimed.²⁴⁴

Besides Alaska, there are some side female characters – Colonel's girlfriend Sara, Miles's Russian girlfriend Lara, Colonel's mom, Dolores, and Miles's mom. Dolores is not a mother by her choice, she got pregnant with a husband who treats her badly and leaves her. She seems to get used to the fact she is the breadwinner and housekeeper for Colonel and her, as she is the

²⁴⁴ SNYDER-HALL, "Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice.'", p. 256.

best cook in Culver Creek,²⁴⁵ and Miles adds she is the funniest mom he ever met. But from this information, it is hard to talk about Dolores being a feminist but not being able to make the choices she wanted, or whether she is in a submissive role to men, and does not think about fighting for her choices or rights. Colonel's girlfriend Sara and Miles's Russian girlfriend Lara are the only other girls besides Alaska in the Culver Creek boarding school, and I claim they are not feminists, and Alaska is the only one fighting for feminism. They never mention anything connected to their rights, male dominance, their choices of lifestyle, etc.

But in a group that is dominated by men, Alaska provides the only feminist perspective. She expresses her feminist views loudly. She lashes out violently at times, claiming that women shouldn't be objectified. When asked by Colonel how to iron, she tells him "not to impose the patriarchal paradigm"²⁴⁶ on her, and she is fixated on breaking out of it. After Colonel comments on Lara's "great breasts" as the reason for Miles to date her, Alaska yells at him "not to objectify women's bodies."²⁴⁷ She not only tries to teach men to validate women more, but she also objectively stands for the truth she believes in and point on the injustice imposed by other women. When Sara tells Alaska's boyfriend, Jake, that Colonel has a "hard-on" Alaska, "Alaska goes ballistic: No woman should ever lie about another woman! You've violated the sacred covenant between women! How will stabbing one another in the back help women to rise above patriarchal oppression?!"²⁴⁸

Alaska embodies several characteristics that align with the principles of third-wave feminism. She defies social conventions, embraces her distinctive features fearlessly, and is fiercely independent. Her disobedient attitude and refusal to conform to gender norms are perfect examples of third-wave feminism's emphasis on empowering women to express themselves freely and break conventional gender roles. Alaska exhibits agency and takes a proactive role in creating her own identity throughout the whole of the novel. She is intelligent, funny, and very curious. She participates in thoughtful conversations. Her quest for knowledge and pursuit of knowledge challenges the idea that women should be restricted to particular positions or have lower intellectual capacities. Furthermore, the complex depiction of Alaska delves into the intersections of gender, sexuality, and power relations. She represents every aspect of human life as she negotiates her aspirations, relationships, and personal challenges. Her character questions heteronormativity and conventional ideas of romantic relationships,

²⁴⁵ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 85.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62-63.

emphasizing the significance of consent and autonomy in close relationships. Her proclaimed hero is Edna St. Vincent Millay, a poet who loved sex.²⁴⁹ Alaska introduces Miles to porn, and gets angry that “they just don’t make sex look fun for women, the girl is just an object.” And continues that sex should be intimate and tender. “This is not a man and a woman. It’s a penis and a vagina. Just by how they’re doing it, it’s objectification. He can’t even see her face! This is what can happen to women. That woman is someone’s daughter. This is what you make us do for money.”²⁵⁰ But she sometimes shows her different view, for example when she explains how she likes to have sex hard, and mentions Jake’s penis being “hung like a horse”²⁵¹ which makes him a good lover, even though she usually holds an opinion that women should be treated gently. There are a few examples of her choices that show her being a true third-wave feminist in sense of fighting not only for the equality of women and men but also for sexual liberation. She does not put herself in the position of the victim because she likes sex, and she likes it hard, and she is willing to help men with stereotypical women’s duties without always lecturing on male dominance in patriarchal society. For example, she iron the shirt for Miles’s date with Lara,²⁵² but we previously saw her comment on Colonel imposing a patriarchal paradigm on her.²⁵³ Or when she decides to cook the lunch with Colonel’s mom, Dolores, although 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.”²⁵⁴ But from this we can also assume she holds the stereotypical view of boys not being a good cooks.

Alaska is portrayed as a feminist in part because of her emotional complexity and vulnerabilities. She defies preconceptions and demonstrates the richness of her character by displaying a range of emotions and experiences rather than being reduced to a one-dimensional character. It is crucial to remember that a critical analysis of Alaska's character must consider the authorial viewpoint of John Green as well as the limits of his depiction. Although she represents some elements of third-wave feminism, it is important to view her as a fictitious character rather than a complete depiction of feminism or a single feminist viewpoint. Through her portrayal, Green explores concepts of self-expression, intersectionality, and the complexities of personal identity.

²⁴⁹ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 83.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81-82.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

In her book, Trites (1997) focuses on the positive aspects of feminism, such as how women interact with one another in family and community relationships and how women have reinterpreted patriarchal stereotypes, rather than looking through books for instances of inequality between men and women and criticizing men. According to Trites, one goal of feminism for men is to assist women in making choices that will increase social respect. Furthermore, the most important thing is that women know exactly what choices they have made.²⁵⁵ Same as in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, Miles and Colonel support female characters in their choices, either by accepting Colonel's mom is a full-time mom and breadwinner to her family, and even admiring her, or by not challenging Alaska's temper, her love of pranks and rebellion, or her decision to drive drunk, what eventually kills her.

²⁵⁵ TRITES, *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels*, p. 7.

6 Discussion

My findings indicate that my hypothesis was partially true. The male protagonists, Charlie and Miles, do not conform to gender norms and stereotypes, and they do not “perform” their gender according to stereotypical male behavior. Them being quirky characters in quirky noels, this quirkiness is shown via not being assigned stereotypically male traits, to the contrary, they both “perform” their gender mostly femininely. The main female characters, Sam and Alaska embody more masculine traits. With this gender fluidity come also socio-economic changes to stereotypical gender norms, such as Colonel’s mom being the breadwinner capable of taking care of the whole household. Or with Alaska being dominant over the whole group of boys, making them prank other students, and driving them everywhere, as she is the only one with a car. The analysis also shows plenty of examples in both novels of how society and relatives influence gender performativity to either challenge or conform to stereotypical gender norms and roles. We could have seen it for example with Charlie and his family, where they were mostly traditionally feminine or masculine, and therefore Charlie never knew he could behave differently than other men in his family and still be masculine, or as Butler (1990) says, does masculinity. On the contrary, Colonel, whose father was stereotypically depicted as a drunk and violent husband who cheats on his wife and leaves, what made Colonel start to challenge the gender norms, and he openly started to perform in a more feminine way with ironing, talking about emotions, and trusting people infinitely. Also, the theme of trauma and its aftermath is in either gender conformity (Colonel’s father), non-conformity (Patrick), or fluidity (Charlie, Miles). Connell (1995) built her theory of multiple forms of masculinities on Butler’s concept challenging conventional gender roles by positing that there are various definitions of masculinity that provide power to individuals based on their particular environment and cultural background.²⁵⁶

Sam and Alaska do not perfectly fit into the MPDG trope of only serving as catalysts for the male protagonist; but I argued that only Sam underwent the development needed to be released from this stereotypical trope, not both of them, as I supposed in the introduction. The five-stage narrative model by Gouck (2021) fits into both of the novels (with *Looking for Alaska*’s fourth and fifth stages connected), and both Gouck (2023) and Solomon (2017) claim MPDG tends to be still stereotypically pictured in the literature as only serving as a catalyst for

²⁵⁶ CONNELL, Raewyn W. *Masculinities*. Cambridge, MA: Polity, 1995, p. 54.

the male protagonist without her power and struggles, which proved to be true in *Looking for Alaska*, but not truly in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*). Gouck (2023) asserts that MPDG is a persistent trope that existed before this term was coined as an enigmatic, eccentric, quirky female character. Similarly, Professor Kittredge in her interview for *The Ithacan* proposes “characters from way back were like this”. She gives an example of such a female character – Holly Golightly from *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* saying these characters had more complexity to them, but they can be seen as “the beginning stages of that” trope. After Rabin coined the term MPDG, “it took on its own meaning, and it became romanticized. It was a good thing to have these quirky characters that would save you from your miserable life.”²⁵⁷ As Gouck (2021) describes appearances, class status, or sex stereotypically connected to MPDG and male protagonist, I analyzed demographic variables, such as gender, age, class, race. The themes in this section revolve around MPDG and their potential development as characters, and one of the big themes is challenging the patriarchal society that overlaps with the third-wave feminist section. As Gouck (2021, 2023) and Solomon (2017) describe, MPDG is stereotypically a girl with no development to her character and is a part of the protagonist’s story to challenge him and change his life in a significant way, but she herself disappears for good or is at least silenced, according to Gouck (2023). I expected this to be true, but also with the novels being set in the millennial era, and published during the period of Gen Z, I supposed the deviation from the stereotype of some degree picturing MPDG with her struggles, development, and power in her relationships. In Sam’s case, the development happened in the final stages of the narrative model, but till then she completely fit into the MPDG stereotypical mold. In 4.2, I raised the question of whether Patrick or Charlie himself are not, what Gouck (2021) calls ‘Alt-Pixies’, and similarly to this idea, American Library Association’s Kehoe (2015) suggests “the Charlie/Sam/Patrick dynamic shows what this trope means: it’s not about the MPD girl or boy, it’s about the straight character waking up.”²⁵⁸ Solomon (2017) mentions the anarcho-feminist ideal not exactly being released from the stereotypical portrayal of female in a position of a catalyst to the male protagonist but speaks about the thesis of the trope being released. This does not hold true for Alaska, as she never gets to develop and evolve as a character because she not only disappears but literally dies. She is not released from her faith, but

²⁵⁷ KITTREDGE, Katharine. “Summer Scholar Analyzes ‘Manic Pixie Dream Girl’ in Pop Culture.” Interview by Alyssa Rodriguez. *The Ithacan*, September 2, 2016. <https://theithacan.org/11980/life-culture/lc-features/summer-scholar-analyzes-manic-pixie-dream-girl-in-pop-culture/>.

²⁵⁸ KEHOE, Tara. “YA Literary Tropes: The Manic Pixie Dream Girl (and Boy).” American Library Association, October 15, 2015. <https://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2015/10/14/ya-literary-tropes-the-manic-pixie-dream-girl-and-boy/>.

throughout her interactions with not only Miles but every other character in the novel, besides her mom, we observe the feminist side of her character. According to Gouck (2023), MPDG does not have the qualities of a woman with power, but Alaska obviously does, which is the divergence from the trope. But Kehoe (2015) asserts the opposite opinion that Alaska is “the epitome of the MPDG”, as she might be “one of the only MPDGs who actually suffers from bipolar disorder (a.k.a. 'manic depression').”²⁵⁹ Gouck (2023) mentions the silencing of the MPDG character as means of patriarchal dominance. There are instances of at least partial silencing of both Sam and Alaska when male characters do not hear what females have to say but only see their bodies. Neither Gouck (2021, 2023) nor Solomon (2017) hints at the role of trauma within the MPDG trope, and from my findings, it is hard to settle on it. Both Sam and Alaska have childhood trauma that they struggle with, but as already mentioned, only Sam overcomes it.

I expected all the young female characters to be prevalently feminists with the emphasis on the choice of other women, whatever they might be, and older female characters (parents, grandparents of the protagonists) to be either not feminists at all, or they belong more into the second-wave feminism with the emphasis on the equality and shaming the choices of other women that seem to be putting them into the submissive role to men. Most of the female characters of the younger generation (Sam, her friends, Charlie’s sister, Alaska, and some students in Culver Creek) proved to be interested to the power and equality between men and women, and also the relationships among women and freedom of their choices, even sexual preferences, such as Alaska loving hard sex. Not every female character acted as a feminist since the beginning, though, for example, Charlie’s sister and Sam both started to contemplate female equality only after the breaking points in their lives. And I also supposed secondary sources would work with how men should behave in accordance to feminism, what their role and position may be towards women, an issue that Trites (1997) addressed. Both Charlie and Miles prove to be supportive of Sam’s and Alaska’s choices, and both male protagonists are submissive to female characters. The overlapping theme of the MPDG and third-wave feminism section is challenging the patriarchal society. Alaska is a prime example of a third-wave feminist with her objectively seeking the equality of men and women without anybody being privileged, and fights for women to make choices that they like regarding every aspect of life, also sex life. In *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, there is a character more significant

²⁵⁹ KEHOE, Tara. “YA Literary Tropes: The Manic Pixie Dream Girl (and Boy).” American Library Association, October 15, 2015. <https://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2015/10/14/ya-literary-tropes-the-manic-pixie-dream-girl-and-boy/>.

to the feminist perspective – Mary Elizabeth who similarly to Alaska embodies the fight against white patriarchy, but she is more violent and does not accept all choices other women make and seeks the privileges for women over men. I claimed Alaska is portrayed as a woman of power in her relationships who does not allow her, and other women to be sexualized or sexualize others. There are some instances of silencing Alaska, but I would argue the novel is not sexist. Hualalata et. al. advocate otherwise, that Miles and Colonel try to show “who is in the power”²⁶⁰, and provide already mentioned example of Alaska thinking it is sexist to leave cooking for women, but it is still better than “crappy boy-prepared food”²⁶¹. Hualalata et. al. (2022) marked Alaska’s response as a satire and Miles and Colonel ignored her and Colonel’s mom to play video games. According to Hualalata et. al., “this is a clear example of how sexist behavior and speech, and attitudes can be passed down from generation to generation, either directly or indirectly,”²⁶² hinting at Colonel’s father.

While there is mostly consensus in the literature on gender performativity and its application to the characters, the MPDG trope is a debated topic with some, such as Gouck (2021, 2023) claiming it is a tiring persistent concept, and others who suggest MPDG, or at least its potential, can be released, Solomon (2017). I found article by Hualalata et. al. (2022) that analyzes *Looking for Alaska* as a sexist novel, whereas based on the examples I analyzed in 5.3, I am not in agreement with this interpretation. As already mentioned, some sources, Trites (1997) or Hualalata et. al. (2022) lacked the diversity of race, and class within their analysis.

Overall, my findings are not statistically significant, but they hold significance in adding another argument and analysis to the field of literary analysis through the gender, or feminist perspective. I would not say there is a gap in the field as some theses or articles that analyze gender, MPDG, or femininity in both novels exist. But there are not many, if any, analyses of those novels through the gender performativity lens, and those that specifically address third-wave feminism’s principles in them, therefore we might say I filled this micro-gap. I would argue there is a space for a new path of research mostly with analyzing the MPDG trope in contemporary American literature, as it seems to change a little bit since the invention of the term. I think both novels, but *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* especially, do not have to be analyzed only with traditional white, heterosexual MPDG feminine characters in mind, but

²⁶⁰ HUALALATA, F. et. al. “Sexism in Green’s ‘Looking for Alaska’.” *Journal of Teaching English, Linguistics, and Literature*. Universitas Negeri Manado. Vol. 2, No. 1, Nov 2022, p. 12.

²⁶¹ GREEN, *Looking for Alaska*, p. 85.

²⁶² HUALALATA, F. et. al. “Sexism in Green’s ‘Looking for Alaska’,” p. 14.

they have potential characters diverging from the stereotypical trope, such as Charlie or Patrick. Gouck (2021) calls them 'Alt-Pixies', and this is an interesting approach to the MPDG trope that would be worth applying to more YA quirky literature. Another path could be examining the MPDG characters of these novels to argue how many of them we can claim suffer from actual bipolar depression, as Kehoe (2015) raised this question.

7 Conclusion

In the analysis, I examined two contemporary American quirky novels within the young adult literature genre – *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky (1999) and *Looking for Alaska* by John Green (2005). In these novels, I applied three concepts – Gender Performativity by Judith Butler from the book *Gender Trouble* (1990), and MPDG trope according to Jennifer Gouck’s article “The Manic Pixie Dream Girl in US YA Fiction: Introducing a Narrative Model” (2021) complemented by another article by Gouck, “The Problematic (Im)Persistence of the Manic Pixie Dream Girl in Popular Culture and YA Fiction” (2023), and Claire T. Solomon’s “Anarcho-Feminist Melodrama and the Manic Pixie Dream Girl” (2017). In the last part of the analysis, I used the article “Third-Wave Feminism and the Defense of ‘Choice’” by R. Claire Snyder-Hall (2010), and the publication by Roberta Seelinger Trites *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children’s Novels* (1997) to examine two primary sources through feminist theory.

I successfully answered my research question: How do the characters of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Looking for Alaska* embody or challenge gender performativity, the MPDG trope, and third-wave feminism within the context of contemporary American young adult quirky novels? And my findings show I was partially right in my hypothesis. I supposed that the male protagonists, Charlie and Miles, would not conform to gender norms and stereotypes, and they would not “perform” their gender according to stereotypical male behavior, as they are both the main characters of quirky novels, they are quirky themselves. And this quirkiness would be shown via not being assigned stereotypically male traits, to the contrary, I suggested they both would “perform” their gender mostly femininely. I also anticipated that the main female characters, Sam and Alaska would embody more masculine traits. I supposed with gender fluidity would come also socio-economic changes to stereotypical gender norms, such as some of the female characters being the breadwinners capable of taking care of the whole household, or a weak man not being able to defend others during a physical attack. All of that proved to be true and supported by Judith Butler’s theory supplemented with the theory of various masculinities by Connell (1995). Both novels being published within 5 years (\pm) from the start of the new millennium, I expected both Sam and Alaska would not perfectly fit into the MPDG trope of only catalyzing the male protagonist; I thought they would undergo at least some kind of development as female characters and that they would be shown as deep characters with some power in their relationships. With this being said, I supposed the five-stage narrative model by Gouck (2021) to fit into both of the novels,

and MPDG to be stereotypically pictured in the literature. I expected all the young female characters to be prevalently feminists with the emphasis on the choice of other women, whatever they might be, and I thought older female characters (parents, grandparents of the protagonists) would either not be feminists at all, or they would belong more into the second-wave feminism with the emphasis on the equality and shaming the choices of other women that seem to be putting them into the submissive role to men. I stated that, rather than the two of them, only Sam experienced the development required to be freed from this trope. Both Gouck (2023) and Solomon (2017) assert that MPDG is still stereotypically pictured in literature as only functioning as a catalyst for the male protagonist without having her own power and struggles, which proved to be true in *Looking for Alaska* but not truly in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. The five-stage narrative model by Gouck (2021) fits into both of the novels (with *Looking for Alaska*'s fourth and fifth stages connected together). Kittredge's (2016) idea of characters that are now called MPDG existed before supported the proposal of both Gouck (2023) and Solomon (2017) of specific persistent feminine characters. Gouck (2023) raised a question of the existence and importance of MPDB and Alt-Pixies, to which I proposed an answer in 4.2 and 5.2, and advised this topic should be addressed more and a new path of research should be created. And I also supposed secondary sources to be working with how men should behave in accordance to feminism, what their role and position may be towards women. I thought both Charlie and Miles would be supportive of Sam's and Alaska's choices, and I supposed both male protagonists would be submissive to female characters which proved to be true and well supported by Trites (1997). Another question raised from the analysis is whether *Looking for Alaska* is sexist or not. Hulalata et. al. (2022) gave examples proving the novel's sexist character, but I did not agree.

Even though my results don't reach statistical significance overall, they are still important because they offer a different viewpoint and analysis of the field of literary analysis from a feminist or gender perspective. Since there are theses and articles that examine gender, MPDG, or femininity in both novels, I wouldn't say there is a gap in the field. We could say that I filled this micro-gap because there aren't many, if any, analyses of those novels that specifically address the principles of third-wave feminism through the lens of gender performativity. Given that the MPDG trope in modern American literature appears to have changed somewhat since the term's coining, I would contend that there is room for new research directions, the most important of which involve analyzing the trope. Furthermore, I believe that both novels — *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* in particular—have potential characters who defy the stereotype, like Charlie or Patrick, and cannot simply be interpreted in

terms of the traditional white, heterosexual MPDG feminine character. Gouck (2021) calls them 'Alt-Pixies', and this is an interesting approach to the MPDG trope that would be worth applying to more YA quirky literature. As Kehoe (2015) pointed out, an alternative approach would be to look at the MPDG characters in these books and debate how many of them have bipolar ('manic') disorder.

8 Resumé

Táto diplomová práca sa zameriava na analýzu dvoch súčasných amerických románov pre dospelých s dôrazom na „quirky” postavy – *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) od Stephenha Chbosky a *Looking for Alaska* (2005) od Johna Greena.

V „quirky” románoch vystupujú zvláštne zaujímavé postavy, ktorých zvláštnosť a vymykanie sa zo spoločnosti rovesníkov je atraktívna, nie negatívna. Zväčša patria do žánru románov pre dospelých, teda „young adult” románov.

Prvá časť práce obsahuje review primárnych a sekundárnych zdrojov použitých v druhej časti práce, a takisto časť opisujúca metodológiu výberu zdrojov a analýzy krok po kroku. Táto časť takisto poskytuje definície termínov, s ktorými pracuje druhá časť práce.

Druhú časť tvorí predovšetkým analýza už spomínaných primárnych zdrojov, „quirky” románov cez perspektívu rôznych genderových a feministických teórií. Analýza každého románu sa rozdeľuje na tri časti podľa teórií, ktoré sú na ne aplikované. Prvou je teória genderovej performativity, ktorú opísala vo svojej knihe *Gender Trouble* (1990) Judith Butler. Tento concept polemizuje o binárnosti gender, a navrhuje, že ľudia sa s genderom nerodia, ale ho postupom času a pod vplyvom spoločnosti, stereotypických vnímaní mužskosti a ženskosti „performujú” (pozn. nedá sa preložiť ako hrajú či vystupujú). Tento koncept je doplnený o teóriu viacerých mužskostí vyvinutých Connellovou (1995), podľa ktorej muži môžu byť mužní, i keď nemajú vlastnosti a schopnosti typicky pripisované mužom v spoločnosti. Druhou teóriou v analýze románov je tróp „Manic Pixie Dream Girl” – excentrickej ženskej postavy slúžiacej iba ako katalyzátor diania a premeny zmysľania hlavného mužského hrdinu, ktorá po vykonaní tejto svojej jedinej úlohy zmizne z deja. Ona sama sa ako postava zvyčajne nevyvíja a nikdy nie je rozprávačom príbehu. Analýza sa prevažne venuje článkom Jennifer Gouck (2021, 2023) a Solomon (2017), ktoré skúmajú stereotypickosť tohto trópu a jeho historický vývoj. Posledná časť analýzy sa venuje najmä ženským postavám skrze feministickú perspektívu, špecificky možnosti voľby, ktorá je typickou črtou oddeľujúcou feminizmus druhej vlny od tretej, ktorú rozoberá Snyder-Hall (2010) vo svojom článku.

V časti Diskusie sú opísané témy prelínajúce sa oboma románmi vyplývajúce z analýzy, návrhy na nové výskumy v tejto oblasti a zodpovedanie výskumnej otázky položenej v úvode práce.

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10 Annotation

Name and surname: Bc. Kristína Granátová

Department, faculty: Department of English and American Studies, Faculty of Arts, UP

Title: Gender in American Quirky Novel of the 21st Century: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Looking for Alaska*

Supervisor: Mgr. Elizabeth Allyn Woock, Ph.D.

Number of pages: 71

Number of characters (without spaces): 143 676

Number of characters (with spaces): 171 092

Year of defense: 2024

Abstract: This thesis examines the gender, stereotypical femininity and masculinity, and feminism in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Looking for Alaska*, by the applying gender performativity theory by Judith Butler (1990), investigating the 'Manic Pixie Dream Girl' trope as described in Jennifer Gouck (2021, 2023), and studying the choices women make as Snyder-Hall (2010) asserts 'choice' being one of the main differences between second and third-wave feminism.

Keywords: Stephen Chbosky, John Green, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *Looking for Alaska*, Judith Butler, gender performativity, gender, Manic Pixie Dream Girl, MPDG, feminism, third wave feminism, concept of 'choice' within feminism

11 Anotácia

Meno a priezvisko: Bc. Kristína Granátová

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Názov práce: Gender v americkom “Quirky” románe 21. storočia: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* a *Looking for Alaska*

Vedúci práce: Mgr. Elizabeth Allyn Woock, Ph.D.

Počet strán: 71

Počet znakov (bez medzier): 143 676

Počet znakov (s medzerami): 171 092

Rok obhajoby: 2024

Abstrakt: Táto práca skúma gender, stereotypnú ženskosť a mužskosť a feminizmus v dielach *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* a *Looking for Alaska*, a to aplikáciou teórie rodovej performativity vyvinutej Judith Butlerovou (1990), takisto skúmajú tróp „Manic Pixie Dream Girl“ opísaný Jennifer Gouckovou (2021, 2023) a skúmaním rozhodnutí žien, keďže podľa Snyder-Hall (2010) „voľba“ je jedným z hlavných rozdielov medzi feminizmom druhej a tretej vlny.

Kľúčové slová: Stephen Chbosky, John Green, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, *Looking for Alaska*, Judith Butler, genderová performativita, gender, Manic Pixie Dream Girl, MPDG, feminizmus, tretia vlna feminizmu, koncept voľby vo feminizme