In Search of Identity in Contemporary American Literature: The Case of John Green’s *Paper Towns*

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master Degree in Anglo-American Studies

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Candidate Declaration Form

I, Hadjer DJEGHROUD

Candidate of Master at the Department of English, Larbi Ben M’hidi University, do hereby
declare that the dissertation entitled: In Search of Identity in Contemporary American
Literature: The Case of John Green’s Paper Towns, in partial fulfillment of MA Degree in
Anglo-American Studies is my own original work, and it has not previously, in its entirety or
in part, been submitted at any university.

Date: 28/06/ 2018
ID number 13/34044851
Signature of the candidate
Dedication:

To my Parents, my Sisters, my Grandparents;

To all my family members;

And especially, to the Love of my Life.
Acknowledgements:

Thank God for being my guide in my life. My thanks also go to our Prophet Mohammad (Peace be upon him) as our light in this hard life.

My special thanks go to my mom and dad, who have always been there for me,

My two beautiful sisters, who enlighten my world.

My grandparents who have basically raised me, may God bless them all.

And, my beautiful cat “Sergie” who has helped relieve my stress.

At last but not least, my partner in crime, my dream and hope for life Who has always encouraged me and supported me every step of the way.

I would also like to thank my Supervisor Mr. Salah Eddine AAID, for his support, and for his wise guidance to make my work a success;

And, I would like to record my special thanks and regard to my Examiner Mrs. Naima HAFSA, who accepted to read and scrutinize my dissertation.
Abstract:

Identity is a very serious case; it is the reason of some nations’ conflicts. This explains why it has been a theme of study to many researchers. What is more important is the process of “Identity formation” and how it sets the teenagers’ life upside down and makes them feel lost in their own body. This dissertation attempts to analyze John Green’s *Paper Towns* (2008) in a way that evokes identity and precisely the process of forming the identity of the teenage characters in the novel at this very critical age. The aim of this research is to prove the change in the teenagers’ life while they are trying to form their identity, and how it is very important for them to build an identity of their own as a basis for their adulthood. The enigma to be solved in the research is why did Margo all of a sudden disappear? To what extent is the process of “Identity Formation” related to her decision? The psychological approach seems to be the best approach to analyze the personality of each character in the novel, and to answer the questions asked. To get to this point, this study is divided into two chapters: The first one mentions the different theories of “Identity” and of course “Identity Formation” on which the second chapter is based. For, the second chapter, it analyzes in depth *Paper Towns* and tries to relate the theories previously mentioned with the characters’ personalities. Reading Green’s *Paper Towns* in this research’s context truly proves the importance for teenagers to form their identity, and how it helps them to find themselves by building an identity of their own; and so, sets them back on track. To sum up, the research done proves how important it is for a teenager to build his identity, and that is what *Paper Towns* portraits through the psychological development of the two characters Margo and Quentin, and how they end up finding themselves.
Résumé:

L'identité est une affaire très importante. C'est même la raison des conflits de certaines nations. C'est pour ce là que c'est devenue un thème d'étude pour plusieurs chercheurs. Ce qui est plus important, c'est le processus de «formation de l'identité» et comment il bouleverse la vie des adolescents et les fait se sentir perdus dans leur propre corps. Cette dissertation tente d'analyser Paper Towns ou La Face Cachée de Margo (2008) de John Green d'une manière qui évoque l'identité et précisément comment les personnages adolescents dans le roman forment leur identité à cet âge très critique. Le but de cette recherche est de prouver le changement dans la vie des adolescents pendant qu'ils essayent de former leur identité et qu'il est très important pour eux de construire leur propre identité comme une base pour leur âge adulte. L'énigme à résoudre dans la recherche est pourquoi Margo a-t-il soudainement disparu? Dans quelle mesure le processus de «formation de l'identité» est-il lié à sa décision? L'approche psychologique semble être la meilleure approche pour analyser la personnalité de chaque personnage dans le roman, et pour répondre aux questions posées. Pour ce là, cette étude est divisée en deux chapitres: le premier mentionne les différentes théories de "l'Identité" et bien sûr "la Formation de l'Identité" sur laquelle le deuxième chapitre est basé. Car, le deuxième chapitre analyse en profondeur Paper Towns et tenter de relier les théories précédemment mentionnées avec les personnalités des personnages. Après avoir lu Paper Towns dans le contexte de cette recherche, il prouve vraiment l'importance pour les adolescents de former une identité et comment cela les aides à se retrouver en construisant leur propre identité; et ainsi, les remet sur la bonne voie. Pour conclure, l'étude confirme qui est très important pour un adolescent de former son identité, et c’est justement ce que Paper Towns a encadré à travers le développement psychologique des deux caractères Margo et Quentin et comment ils arrivent à définir leur identité.
ملخص:

الهوية هي قضية بالغة الأهمية. فهي سبب صراعات بعض الدول، مما يفسر نيتها ما يكشفه من الحظر لتصبح موضوع دراسة للكثير من الباحثين. وما هو أكثر إثارة للاهتمام هو عملية "تشكيل الهوية" وكيف تزعم حياة المراهقين وجعلهم يشعرون بالضياع. يحاول هذا المقال تحليل رواية جون غرين بابير تاونر (2008) بطريقة تثير بالضبط الهوية وكيفية تشكيل المراهقين لهويتهم في هذه الفترة الحرجة من العمر. والفرض من هذا البحث هو التدليل على التغيير في حياة المراهقين أثناء محاولة تشكيل هويتهم وأنه من المهم للغاية بالنسبة لهم لبناء هويتهم الخاصة كأساس لمرحلة البلوغ. اللغة المراد حلها في البحث هو لماذا اختفت مارغو فجأة؟ ما هي صلة "تكوين الهوية" بقرارها؟ و عليه فإن النهج النفسي هو أفضل طريقة لتحليل جميع الشخصيات في الرواية ونلابجة على الأسئلة المطروحة. الوصول لهذه النقطة، تم تقسيم هذه الدراسة إلى فصولين: الفصل الأول يحتوي على النظريات المتعلقة بـ "الهوية"، وبالطبع بـ "تشكيل الهوية". أما الفصل الثاني فسيحل بعمق بابير تاونر وسيحاول ربط النظريات التي سبق ذكرها في الفصل الأول مع الشخصيات في الرواية. أخيرًا، مطالعة بابير تاونر بصدد هذا البحث بظه حقا للمراهقين أهمية تشكيلهم لهويتهم وكيف يساعدهم ذلك في ايجاد أنفسهم عن طريق بناء هويتهم الخاصة. وبالتالي، تعيدهم إلى المسار الصحيح. خصصا، أن الدراسة تؤكد مدى أهمية تكوين الشخصية عند المراهقين و هذا ما يعوض بابير تاونر من خلال التطور السكيولوجي لكل من الشخصيات مارجو و كويتن و كيف تمكنا من بناء هويتهم.
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Introduction:

Literature is a vast field of study, it treats different topics: racism, culture, poverty, romance, adventure, identity and many others. Usually, the writers try to expose to their readers, their personal point of view about the topic they are writing about. Many works have seen light in a very tragic situation, so literature was used as a way of escape to the awful reality that the people were living in. Often, authors used literary works to bring some optimism to the readers’ bad living situation that was initially used during the post world wars. And as time passes by, the literature becomes more and more personal and treats common individuals’ matters.

Many works have been written involving the theme of “Identity”; naming, R. J. Palacio’s *Wonder* (2012) and Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* (2012). Identity is a very important ingredient in defining the true self and differentiating it from the others. During the twenty first century, a new genre of literature has emerged the “Young Adult” genre. It deals with the teenagers’ problems that they face every day. One of the most important issues that teenagers struggle with is “Identity Formation”. It is a complicated process that starts since the childhood and becomes difficult during teen hood. In Erik Erikson’s theory, the most difficult phase of the previous process is the fifth one entitled “Fidelity, Identity vs. Role Confusion”, the one discussed in this study. Unfortunately, only few writers have involved this theme in their works, and no one has done an analysis based on that.

To shed light on the process of “Identity Formation”, and precisely the fifth stage of this developmental process in the teenager’s mind; this study has chosen the novel entitled *Paper Towns* (2008) by John Green. This bestselling author of “Young Adult” genre only writes about teenagers and the different problems of the coming of age. His works always
reflect the reality in which teenagers live, and in the previous novel it reflects the search of Identity.

The reason behind choosing this topic is to investigate the process of “Identity Formation” and show how big of a deal it can be in the teenager’s life. *Paper Towns* is the story of teenagers who are about to form their identity, but are lost in this big world. Many questions can be asked about the novel like, why did Margo disappear mysteriously? Why would a teenage girl constantly run away from home? Why is Margo so different than her friends? How is Quentin portrayed in reference to Margo?

This study is based on different books and articles related to the topic of “Identity formation”; such as, Erik Erikson’s book *Childhood and Society* which talks about his theory of “Psychosocial Identity Development”. In Leon Festinger’s article "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes" in *Human Relations*, he talks about the theory he developed coined as “The theory of social comparison”. On his part, Michael Argyle in his article "James E. Marcia, Ego-Identity Status" from *Social Encounters*, explains the theory of James Marcia: “Identity Status Theory”. The study is also based on a previous dissertation entitled “The True Meaning of Margo Roth Spiegelman’s Big Decision to Leave the Town as Seen in John Green’s Paper Towns”, submitted by Kasih Ratnaningtyas in 2016, plus many other books and articles which are all mentioned in the bibliography.

The topic of this study is “Identity Formation”, and so it has to do with the individual’s identity. And so, when analyzing the characters of the novel, we go deeper into their personality and the way they think. So, the psychological approach seems to be the best approach to analyze the personality of each character and to answer the questions asked. Also, the study compares between the personalities of the two main characters in the novel (Margo and Quentin.)
This dissertation is divided into two chapters: The first chapter entitled “Theoretical Background of Identity in American Literature” studies the different background theories of the concept of Identity and its relevance to the American Literature. It also involves the “American Identity” and the theories about “Identity Formation”. The second chapter entitled “Reflecting Identity Formation in John Green’s Paper Towns”. It involves a short biography about the author of the book “John Green”, and as its title indicates it analyzes in depth the novel Paper Towns. Focusing on the two main characters of the story (Margo and Quentin) based on the theories mentioned in the first chapter, and providing all the necessary information about their personalities and the way they think. While it tries to answer the subject in question.
CHAPTER ONE: Theoretical Background of Identity in American Literature.

Identity is a very important theme in various contexts, and it has a major role to play in defining oneself. This chapter studies the different background theories of the concept of Identity and its relevance to the American Literature. Three main sections are developed: the first one is concerned with the different theories of Identity and personality, the second section deals with the American Identity and the theories about Identity Formation of adolescents while the last section highlights the importance of the theme of Identity in American literature through time.

I. The Concepts of Identity & Personality

1. What is Identity

The term Identity is usually related to the Self; although, it has no set definition. It is both ambiguous and slippery at the same time. It has been used in various contexts, yet it has successfully reached the idea that has been expressed. Identity comes from the Latin root *idem* which means “the same”, but the term itself implies similarity and difference. In fact, the later has made a paradox about the concept (Buckingham, 2008: 1).

On the one hand, identity is something people share with others. In other words, it defines a relationship within members of the same society, from which derives national identity, cultural identity, or gender identity. On the other hand, identity is different from one person to another, it is said to be personal and unique to each and every body. Unfortunately, the “identity theft” has emerged. In the UK, and because of this problem, the government requires the introduction of identity cards to put an end to people stealing other people’s identity. (1) This unethical behavior is also found among western teenagers, for instance they
fabricate a fake ID card in order to buy liquor from the store or even to attend a night club party.

The common sense tends to consider “identity” as an essential concept existing. In fact, this view is strongly rejected; and to clarify this notion, its definition has to be concerned in the dictionary. It clearly states that identity covers four senses: social identity, personal identity, collective identity, and multiple or shared identity. So, it is precisely the polysemic character of this notion that generates a paradox about its definite role in a certain situation. In order to use the appropriate sense of this notion, a consideration of the subject matter should be carefully done.

2. The Senses of Identity

Considering the four senses of the notion of identity, each one should be defined separately from the other ones.

Social Identity

Social identity is an identity which is given to the individual according to the social group in which he/she belongs; such as: age, gender, religion and ethnicity. Individuals have little choice over this identity, in other words, one cannot define his/ her own social identity; but his/her social group does it instead.

William James explained the social identity by stating that we can come to know ourselves by our interactions with others.

In other words, Social identity is anything that allows others to identify an individual in a relevant way by the statuses, codes, and attributes that they share with other members of the groups to which they belong or would like to belong. These groups correspond to the different social categories in which individuals may rank according to their: gender, age,
occupation, status in the family, geographical location, nationality, ethnicity, even their favorite occupations, hobbies or sports they practice and membership in a political party, etc. The characteristics of social identity are not always determined by the individual, but most often prescribed by society as a means of recognition, of identification from the outside.

The attribution of identity characteristics to an individual is also a means of classifying and ordering members of a population on the basis of overriding criteria. The same individual may be perceived as having multiple social identities depending on the particular domain that is being considered. Social identity can be positive or negative depending on the group's position in the social group scale.

Developed by the Polish psychologist Henri Tajfel in the 1970s, “The theory of social identity” highlights the psychological processes involved in social change.

In his theory, Tajfel integrates three fundamental processes: social categorization; self-evaluation through social identity; and the inter-group social comparison.

First, Social Categorization which has the same concept of categorizing objects. In order to understand people, and identify them, just like objects; they have to be categorized. From this categorization, several social categories have emerged. According to the race: Whites, Blacks, Chinese, etc; to the religion: Christians, Muslims, Jews, etc; to the nationality: Americans, British, French, etc; to the occupation: Students, lawyers, teachers, etc; and many other categories.

When assigning people to a certain category, this tells more details about those people. The same thing happens to ourselves; and that, by identifying the categories we belong to. Considering the norms of the previous groups, multiple behaviors are generated and are related to those groups. Thus, an individual might belong to multiple social groups.
In the second stage, Social Identification which is a concept resulting from that of the “collective representation”\(^3\), introduced in 1898 by the sociologist Emile Durkheim in his article *Individual representations and collective representations*. His analysis was repeated in 1961 by the social psychologist and historian of science Serge Moscovici who developed “Social representation theory”\(^4\).

Social identifications are complex phenomena which are very present in social life. They are made up of different elements that have long been apprehended separately: attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values, ideologies, etc. The identification of a social group of an object is based on a set of information, opinions, beliefs, ideological interpretations, etc. relating to this object. In particular, it enables the social group to understand and explain reality, to define its social identity, to orient its action according to the context and to justify its choices or attitudes.

The final stage is Social Comparison. “The theory of social comparison”\(^5\) is a theory in psychology, originally developed by Leon Festinger in 1954. It states that, when concrete evidence is not available, the individual may feel the need to compare himself to others in order to assess the consequences of his behavior. After selecting the people he will use as a reference, he will look for the attributes he feels best to adopt.

More generally, social comparison theory expresses the fact that in order to feel good and achieve optimal performance, an individual feels the need to evaluate his or her opinions, beliefs, values, skills, emotions in order to better understand himself: “Social comparison consists of two different basic processes of comparison with a reference group through which a person can acquire information about his or her own beliefs, aptitudes and emotions: a reflected appreciation and a comparative assessment”\(^6\).
**Personal Identity**

In social psychology, personal identity refers to a psychological process of self-representation which results in the feeling of existing in continuity, as a singular being and being recognized as such by others. It is a set of characteristics that an individual considers as his or her own and to which he or she places a socio-emotional value.

To simplify it, personal identity indicates the recognition that an individual is different from others. It is a unique combination of personal traits and the specific attributes that make each individual different from others. In other words, personal identity is what makes the individual himself and different from others (Dechamps, 1999:151).

Personal identity includes elements related to social roles and belonging to groups, as well as older elements, such as the values of socialization and personal history, which make both its difference and uniqueness. Individual identity is a dynamic system of values, representations of the world, feelings developed by past experiences, and future plans related to oneself.

Considering the continuity of the person, some psychologists evoke an "ontological pole" also called axiological, which represents constancy (ideas and attitudes) in contrast to the "pragmatic pole", whose function is the adaptation to the different situations faced by the individual. Thus, continuity is an essential part of personal identity.

The continuity represents “personal identity” as the organized whole of feelings, representations, experiences and plans for the future relating to oneself. We also find this idea with G. Vinsonneau, who defines identity as "... the set of mechanisms by which individuals (or groups) project meaning on their being, linking their past, their present and their future, the pictures of their real actions, those of the actions recommended to them and those by which they would like to be characterized" (Vinsonneau, 1997:129).
According to Vinsonneau, identity is realized through the mediation of dialectical processes (facts of the integration of opposites) where the similarities are articulated with the differences, to connect the past, the present and the future: what each individual is “factual identity”, what he would like to be “claimed identity”, and what he is required to be “assigned” or “prescribed identity”. Such training is strongly anchored in concrete reality; it responds in particular to the dynamics of social conflicts, which is why the identity of individuals is sometimes analyzed in terms of "identity-belonging" (179)

**Collective Identity**

Collective identity is the way others define themselves, and are defined by others on the basis of their social membership: occupation, age, gender, religion, ethnicity, territory, family...etc. Collective identity is introspective, submissive and projective; from which we make a unified community.

First, collective identity is introspective. This dimension corresponds to the question: “Who are we?” It is a matter of naming oneself collectively, from within a group, from a community of destiny or condition, rather than being defined from the outside. Any group fighting for its recognition must first and foremost learn to name itself; that is to say, to choose its name itself and to get detached from the identity assigned to it. In social pedagogy, it is said that we develop this collective identity through language, creation, speaking and expression in groups. We develop it by a shared experience, or a collective memory; i.e., through everyday life.

Second, collective identity is submissive. That is to say, we get to know each other by considering the way we are treated by others; it is by discovering common oppressions that we have a chance to discover who we are collectively. The consciousness of a collective
condition precedes any self-understanding. In social pedagogy, it is the "empowerment" \(^\text{10}\), in other words, the development of the conscience. It goes through history, listening to what people are experiencing, and considering our shackles.

Third, collective identity is projective. It is towards what people tend to create a link between them, which obliges them to cooperate, to work together to go further and to overcome obstacles that an individual cannot overcome alone. In social pedagogy, this aspect of collective identity is ensured by activity, work, both the desire and the energy to transform the environment into a more alive and more habitable one. It is through work and production that they succeed \(^\text{11}\).

**Multiple/Shared Identity**

When an individual has a multiple or shared identity, he has lots of different parts to his personality: The way the individual talks to different people, his accent, age, gender and slang. He might also have different beliefs and values, for people have different cultural backgrounds depending on their origins and their family traditions. A shared identity covers three aspects: local identity, national identity and global identity.

First, we have local identity. Identity is called "local" by reference to an appropriate space, identified by its inhabitants. Local identity can be defined by geography, history, culture, economy or the emotional and intimate relationship between the individual and space. Thus, from local identity comes “Regionalism”. Regionalism is the sense of belonging and identification to a regional area. This feeling has nothing to do with nature, but it is a political construction. The goal is to recognize this identity as being particular, different from that of the nation and smaller entities’. It should be noted that this particular identity is largely subjective, and is based on the projection of individual existence into a collective history and into traditions.
Second, there is national identity. National identity is the feeling that a person feels as part of a nation. This feeling is unique to each person. However, in sociology, it is an interiorization of identity markers, resulting from the permanent visibility of the "common points" of the nation which can take the form of symbols. This visibility is usually organized voluntarily by the state to impregnate individuals from their childhood. The concept of national identity also refers to the set of "common characteristics" between people who recognize themselves as belonging to the same nation. National identity is a social, cultural and spatial condition. National identity is a concept close to “Nationality” which is the official right to belong to a certain country (race, religion and traditions.)

Third, there is global identity. Global or international identity is when the person feels that he fits internationally; in other words, the individual feels at ease outside his home country; for example, when the individual has a passport or a visa to travel internationally. On the one hand, individuals belong global to the government of their home country; on the other hand, with the creation of the European Union (E.U.) the European individual whose country is part of the union can visit any country with no need for a visa. Thus, the European citizen member of the E.U. feels welcomed and wanted in other E.U. countries.

3. **What is Personality**

Personality is the combination of emotional characteristics, attitudes and behaviors of an individual. It is the sum of a whole course determined by the ideas of the previous centuries, and even today it is difficult to find a solid definition to this concept. There are at least two different approaches to personality: theory of types and theory of traits. For some decades, ethology has shown the existence of personality in some animals (birds and mammals in particular). Personality, and by individual behaviors, it affects the role of the
individual and sometimes the whole group and therefore their prospects for survival and ultimately evolution.

Personality is the set of behaviors that constitute the individuality of a person. It takes into account what qualifies the individual: permanence and continuity of actions and reactions, originality and specificity of his way of being. It is the relatively stable core of the individual, a kind of complex and evolving synthesis of innate data (genes) and elements available in the environment. Judith Rich Harris states that, according to the studies, 50% of the personality comes from genetics (innate behavior), 10% from the environment shared with the parents (acquired behavior) including the parents themselves, and 40% of indefinite factors
df.

Knowledge of the personality is often an important issue that gathers values and norms by appearing in codes, especially in an organization that allows predicting the behavior of the person in ordinary situations; for example, professional situations. It is also the goal of self-knowledge.

4. Identity vs. Personality

Identity does not come from the outside, but from the inside. It is a construction of the understanding, the result of self-consciousness, a representation of oneself by oneself. Qualities are not to be confused with identity. “I am certainly shy about someone”, but “I am not shy with everyone”. So, am I a reserved person or not? And even if I am with everyone, would I necessarily be with anyone? How often do people feel different according to the presence of others? Continually, in contact with the real, they do not feel to be the same. And yet, if they have this feeling of difference about themselves, it can only be in relation to a stable point. They must be themselves to tell when changing depending on situations, moods, and even people who accompany them. This stability also makes them think that they are themselves and not others.
Thus, to be conscious of oneself is to ensure continuity, duration, in a world that is only movement. Here, the identity fits between what is not and the future. Self-awareness is, knowing how to be, fixed, even if the movement impresses us. It is the whole contradiction of identity, this inner fixity subject to the perpetual change of the world. Everything is becoming, including oneself, but people have this capacity to immobilize their being mentally; without this, any project would be impossible to be achieved. Therefore, it takes a starting point to take action, and therefore to live, as the American philosopher John Voris states in his website:

The difference between identity and personality is as great as stating: “I have a dog” versus “I am a dog”. Therefore, personality is something “to have” or possess and not something “to be”… Simply knowing how you express your identity through your personality can open up a whole world of possibilities for your growth or advancement in both your personal or business life.13

II. The American Identity & The Identity Formation

1. The American Identity

The United States is the land of immigrants: it is a welcoming country open to all, a melting pot where ethnicities, religions and different cultures mingle. This nation was not built without clashes or violence, for America is also the country of exclusion, racism and xenophobia. Germans, Irish, Chinese, Jews, Hispanics were each judged apart before being assimilated.

It is this paradox of a country both socially fragmented and endowed with an astonishing capacity for integration, which is the subject of discussion of various debates. The
ongoing debates are set between supporters of assimilation and supporters of cultural pluralism. That was the source of “the crisis of American Identity”.

The crisis of American identity is inscribed in the very origin of the American nation. It expresses the tension, the ambiguity, the indefinite character of a nation sometimes described as assimilationist and unitary, sometimes as pluralistic and multicultural. This crisis is the chance of America: It is never fatal because the most "separatists" do not express a territorial claim, but it is sustainable because of persistent inequalities between ethnic groups; although, they are imperfectly corrected by preferential treatment policies. In his own words, Shayne Looper explains the situation,

America is lost. She doesn’t know where she is or in which direction she should be moving. There are people on the left, shouting to her to come their way and people on the right, doing the same. Worse than not knowing where she is, America no longer knows who she is. When I was growing up, America knew herself. She was strong, courageous and just. She was a winner. Everything America did was better than anything anyone else did.¹⁴

America is known to be a very democratic country where all rights of people are preserved. Being Republican or Democrat, is being American. Americans are dreamers and achievers; they believe that to achieve the best in their life they have to work the harder they can. Americans also believe in ceasing the opportunity and daring to dream. As it is defined in The Oxford Guide to British and American Culture, “The American Dream” is “The belief of Americans that their country offers opportunities for a good and successful life. For minorities and people coming from abroad to live in America, the dream also includes freedom and equal rights” (10)¹⁵.
“On 4 July 1776 the Declaration of Independence was signed. This document written by Thomas Jefferson stated the reasons why America should be independent from Britain and the right of all citizens to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (C20). The previous three principles represent the motto of every American alive. They are profoundly rooted in the hearts of all Americans, and have eagerly helped in establishing a true democracy in America and elsewhere in the world.

The three principles stand for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. First, Americans have the right to live. All Americans are created equally and have the right to live wherever, and how ever they want that to be. Second, they have the right to liberty. In other words, the right to live free; to choose the religion, the social orientation and the political party they want to be part of. Third, we have the pursuit of happiness which is clearly defined by the psychologist Alex Pattakos,

The concept of happiness has evolved significantly since 1776 when this phrase was first introduced. Now we often relate the thought of happiness with living “the good life,” a concept that has been hijacked by advertisers and portrayed as a life in which we seek pleasure, relaxation, and, of course, material goods. Our post-modern society has told us that we can achieve happiness through consumption. Society has made us think that: if only…but only I had a bigger house, a better car, more money, and a better job, I would be fulfilled.16

2. The Identity Formation

It is clear that the identity of the individual is built in relation to others: “who am I” also depends on “how I react” to people around, whom I meet. These people may look like us or we may want to look like them. Or on the contrary, you can feel very different or want to
stand out. So, how do people form their identity, and how do they get to be who they are, that is known by the concept of “Identity Formation” or “Identity Development” which is defined as,

…the complex process by which people come to develop a sense and understanding of themselves within the context of cultural demands and social norms. Identity development has been seen historically as a primary developmental task of adolescence—the transition from dependency in childhood to increasing responsibility for one’s own needs, interests, drives, aspirations, and desires in adulthood. This transition involves a cognitive reorganization in how youth think about themselves in relation to others as they gain physical, social, and psychological maturity.17

Many psychologists have come up with different theories about the concept of Identity Formation. Two theories are highlighted in regards to this topic: Erik Erikson's 1963 “Theory of Psychosocial Development” and James Marcia's 1973 “Identity Status Theory”

To begin with, and with Erik Erikson's 1963 “Theory of Psychosocial Development”. The stages of Erik Erikson's psychosocial development revolve around eight stages of healthy human psychological development from infancy to old age. At each stage, the person is confronted with, and can master, new challenges. Each stage is built on the bases built during the previous stages. Challenges that are not well or not identified are likely to re-emerge as problems in the future.

The first five stages revolve around the first 20 years of the individual’s life while the last three stages concern adult life. This study is concerned with the fifth stage named “Fidelity, Identity vs. Role Confusion”. It expands from the age of 12 to the age of 20. The
adolescent seeks to acquire a coherent sense of his identity, especially his sexual identity, and the role he wants to play in society. “The adolescent mind is essentially a mind or moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult” (Erikson, 1963:245).

This is not the “Teen Crisis”, which is rather a cultural phenomenon: It is first and foremost an important period of existential questioning, especially concerning the “Who am I?” “What do I want?”. The psychosocial challenge is then the acquisition of a personal, sexual, and professional identity, so that the adolescent can establish his schema of values. The virtue to be acquired here is therefore “Fidelity”, because it is when the adolescent remains faithful to his or her chosen models that he will not tend towards the confusion of the role he undertakes to play. “Fidelity involves being able to commit one's self to others on the basis of accepting others, even when there may be ideological differences” (McLeod, 2013).

Secondly, there is “Identity Status Theory”. Psychologist James E. Marcia's research in 1973 has led him to identify four types of identity status that differ according to the presence or absence of crisis and commitment which are the two important elements to the formation of identity.

Marcia uses the word “engagement” to describe personal investment in a professional activity or belief system. As for the term “crisis”, it refers to a period of questioning and conscious decision making that the child will make. The word “crisis” derives from the Greek word *Krisis* which means “decision”. In Chinese, it is composed of two ideograms, one of which means danger and the other an opportunity for change. Any crisis, in fact, represents a moment for the decision, a time to choose. This time to choose corresponds to the stage where the young adolescent will make his first major decisions.
The four types of identity status that Marcia distinguishes are: Identity Diffusion, Foreclosure, Moratorium, and Identity Achievement.

The first type is “Identity Diffusion” or engagement without the crisis. “The foreclosure status is when a commitment is made without exploring alternatives. Often these commitments are based on parental ideas and beliefs that are accepted without question”\(^{20}\). The young individual does not spend time exploring different alternatives and commits to his parental ideas and beliefs.

The second type is “Foreclosure” or no commitment, no crisis. The young person does not seriously consider the different possibilities open to him and prefers to avoid committing himself. So, young people with identity diffusion “do not experience much anxiety because there is little in which they are invested. As they begin to care more...they move to the moratorium status, or they become so disturbed that they are diagnosed schizophrenic” (Marcia, 1973:352)\(^{21}\).

The third type is “Moratorium” or the crisis without commitment for the moment. The young person thinks about the different possibilities and seems to be in the process of becoming involved. He wonders a lot about his future and is concerned about the situation. This period is often characterized by a range of emotions ranging from enthusiasm to anxiety. As Marcia asserts: “moratoriums...report experiencing more anxiety than do students in any other status...The world for them is not, currently, a highly predictable place; they are vitally engaged in a struggle to make it so”(352).

The last type is “Identity Achievement” or the crisis that leads to commitment. After the crisis Marcia considers: “a likely progression would be from diffusion through moratorium to identity achievement” (341). Here, the young individual makes commitments that follow a period of questioning through which he has explored various alternatives.
Thus, James Marcia's 1973 “Identity Status Theory” and Erik Erikson's 1963 “Theory of Psychosocial Development” represent the two most influential theories concerned with Identity Formation of adolescents. They are the basis of this research as well as many previous works done.

III. The Question of Identity in the Contemporary American Literature.

The literature of the United States of America this young, vast and mixed country represents ruptures and contrasts. Originally influenced by the English language and Europe, it is distinguished by a hybrid language, both written and spoken, giving a large place to dialects. The imaginative draws from the source of the journey and is based on the mythical conquest of the West. The border disappeared in the late nineteenth century, but the inspiration remained.

The literature also questions the identity of an ethnic America. Afro-American writers denounce striking inequalities, Indians evoke their traditions and sufferings caused by whites, Jews try to find a balance between their values and the American way of life ...etc. And so, many writers have questioned the values of their country: the Lost Generation doubt, the Beat Generation is illustrated in the political, economic and social challenges; others denounce the American democracy and imperialism.

First, we do not know when “Contemporary Literature” began. As history shows, there is no specific date of when did the era of “Contemporary Literature” really begin. Some argue that its setting began with World War II, but others state that it was until after World War II that it really took place and expands to the present.
Second, “Contemporary literature” is the result of different events. Its period is marked by an abundance of events spanning from World War II to the New Millennium. The literature illustrated the “Media saturated culture”; in other words, people observe life as media present it. Media culture interprets values; the people insist that values are not permanent but only “local” or “historical”. The era is also marked by Social protest. Appearing after World War II, the literature was all about prosperity and people asking for their rights.

Third, people began a new century and a new millennium. With the beginning of a new century, the writing style has become a new one: The lines of reality are blurred; there is a mix of fantasy and nonfiction, no trace of heroes in fact, the emergence of the Anti-heroes. The literature is now concerned with the individual in isolation, focusing on his needs. It portrays the harsh reality and the degradation of society. The writing is well structured, it is more character driven, and i.e. the characters are well defined, realistic and highly developed.

The Modernist writers have changed their style of writing. They have freed themselves from the traditional style of uniformity and have created their own styles. But, they are concerned with similar themes inspired from the decline of society and its values. Some of them have concentrated on the psychology of the people, like Virginia Woolf who exploited psychology and used "stream of consciousness". The term was coined by William James in 1890 in his *The Principles of Psychology* to depict the different feelings and thoughts in the mind, but has been then re-used both differently and simultaneously in the contemporary works.

Identity has been a major theme in literature. From William Shakespeare’s words in *Hamlet* in the 17th C “to be, or not to be, that is the question” to the current contemporary works, writers have always wanted to prove one’s identity by exploiting the characters in their
works. Many novelists of the contemporary period evoke the theme of identity differently, but they all have one aim which is to denounce and prove the individual identity. America is a melting pot where each writer wants to prove his true identity.

In the nineteenth century, for instance, a new literary movement has seen light known as “Regionalism” or “local color”. In this style of writing, the setting of the story is very important; for it portraits the identity of the writer. The work is written in the dialect of the writer’s hometown and it involves the region’s traditions and customs. Such literary works have preserved American regional identities and have made Americans more proud to show their identity to others. For instance, Kate Chopin wrote The Story of an Hour (1896), Mark Twain’s The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) and many other writers have emerged and wrote to preserve their identity.

Nowadays, writers have exploited the theme of Identity and explored it even more. Contemporary writers are concerned with new situations and problems, those problems affect the individual in every way. Writers of young adult novels are concerned by the loss of identity of the young people. They try to speak up for the adolescents and what they are going through, by portraying in their novels the problems that those adolescents face every single day in their life. Those writers use certain characters in their novels and make them go through problems that every young adult goes through in his life so that he manages to build an identity of his own.

Those writers teach youngsters that they are responsible for the decisions they make; and that, they are the only ones who can decide how their future would be like. Many authors are known as “Bestselling Authors” thanks to the remarkable novels they have written; from which, R. J. Palacio’s Wonder. Published in 2012, Wonder explores the life of a young boy born with facial differences, alone; he suffers due to the struggle of his surroundings’
compassion and acceptance, until he figures how to stand out for himself and commits to his identity. And, the novel which this dissertation is based on: *Paper Towns* by John Green. Published in 2008, the novel explores the life of Margo Roth Spiegelman, this mysterious girl who is lost to find her identity and runs away searching for herself.

The theme of Identity has been there all along. It is the Identity formation that is the subject of this thesis; particularly, how does the process of Identity Formation affect the life of adolescents. For that, the study is based on two main theories: James Marcia's 1973 “Identity Status Theory” and Erik Erikson's 1963 “Theory of Psychosocial Development”. The latter theories were clearly developed in the chapter, so that it sets a steady step forward to this research.
Endnotes


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CHAPTER TWO: Reflecting Identity Formation in John Green’s *Paper Towns*

*Paper Towns* is a bestselling author’s work, published in 2008; it brilliantly crafts a funny and moving coming of age journey about true friendship and true love. Based on two theories mentioned in the first chapter, the second one analyzes in depth the novel *Paper Towns* with relevance to the theme of Identity and precisely the Identity Formation of the Characters in the story. The analysis is divided into three sub-chapters: the first sub-chapter talks about the author of the book “John Green”, his deeds and experiences, the second section deals with the main character of the story “Margo Roth Spiegelman” and her mysterious disappearance searching for her identity while the last one sheds light on the identity formation of “Quentin Jacobsen”, the other main character of the story, who embarks on a journey to find Margo, but is in fact trying to form an identity of his own.

I. Green, his Works & Experiences

Born on August 24, 1977 in Indianapolis, Indiana, John Green is an American writer, author of books for young adults. Green grew up in Orlando, Florida before going to school at Indian Springs School, a private boarding school outside Birmingham, Alabama. His first book, *Looking for Alaska* was released in 2005; the novel was largely inspired by his experience at the Indian Springs School.¹

He graduated from Kenyon University in 2000 with a double degree both in English and Religious Studies. He became then, a chaplain for six months in a hospital for incurable children. Realizing that this life does not suit him; he chooses to move towards literary criticism and radio. “Green’s books have been published in more than 55 languages over 24 million copies are in print”².
John Green lived for several years in Chicago, where he worked for the literary critic journal “Booklist”, as an assistant editor while he was writing *Looking for Alaska*. During that period, he went through hundreds of books, especially fiction ones and books about Islam. He also reviewed books for literary criticism of “the New York Times” and wrote for “All Things Considered”, a program from National Public Radio and “WBEZ”, Chicago's public radio station. Green lived in New York for two years while his wife was finishing her postgraduate studies (Famous Authors Website).

John Green and his brother Hank led a video blog project called “Brotherhood 2.0.” The original project lasted from January 1st to December 31st, 2007, with the idea that the two brothers would stop all written communication for a year, and only communicate through video blogs, made available to the public by YouTube (where they are now known as "Vlogbrothers", the video blogger brothers) and on their website: Brotherhood 2.0

His first novel, *Looking for Alaska* was published in 2005 for which he received “the Michael L. Printz Award”, and is ranked among the top 10 best books of the American Library Association. His second novel, *An Abundance of Katherines* (2006), received “the Michael L. Printz Award” in 2007 and is a finalist for “the Los Angeles Times Book Prize”. His film adaptation is under discussion. He then collaborates with Maureen Johnson and Lauren Myracle for the book *Let it snow* in 2008. On November 27th, 2009, he was placed 10th on the New York Times bestseller list in the category of children's books (John Green Books Website).

John Green’s third novel *Paper Towns* was published on October 16th, 2008. It was immediately ranked # 5 on the New York Times bestseller in the category of children’s books, and in 2009 it received “the Edgar Award” for the best novel for teenagers and in 2010
“the Corine Literature Prize”. The film rights were bought by “Mandate Picture”, the author was engaged to write the script, but the project was finally abandoned. However, they came back to the idea; and then, “Fox 2000 and Temple Hill released Paper Towns in the summer of 2015, starring Nat Wolff, Cara Delevingne, Justice Smith, Austin Abrams, Halston Sage, and Jaz Sinclair. In the second half of 2015, John signed a first look production deal with Fox 2000” (John Green Books Website).

He collaborated with his friend David Levithan on the book Will Grayson, Will Grayson which was published on April 6th, 2010. The novel received several awards, including a “Stonewall Book Award” and an “Odyssey Award”. In August 2009, Green confirmed that he was writing a new book The Sequel with a release scheduled for 2011. During a show on “BlogTV”, he announced that he dropped the idea.

His fifth novel, The Fault in Our Stars, was officially announced on June 28th, 2011, with a release date set for January 12th, 2012. It lasted long the 2nd best bestseller in the New York Times, in the category of young adults’ novels. In one of his videos on YouTube, John explains that several parts of The Sequel had been reworked in The Fault in Our Stars. The novel won «Le Prix jeunesse des libraires du Québec 2014 ». It was adapted in a film in 2014 starring Shailene Woodley and Ansel Elgort. And lately, His book Turtles All the Way Down was published in October 2017 (Famous Authors Website).

II. “You are going to the paper towns. And you are never coming back”: The Long Gone Margo

In Paper Towns, Margo Roth Spiegelman is one of the two protagonists of the story. Margo’s character is well developed through the story. She is mentioned in every situation, and all the events of the story evolve around her. After discovering that her boyfriend was cheating on her, eighteen-year-old Margo Roth Spiegelman drags Quentin, the
second protagonist of the story, along for a night of revenge. The next day, Margo disappears. She leaves a few clues as a goodbye to Quentin, and drives away. And, the big question asked is: why did she disappear mysteriously? Why would a teenage girl run away from home?

Identity Formation is a very serious process that every adolescent goes through in order to form an Identity of his own. According to Erik Erikson’s 1963 and his theory of “Psychosocial Development”, the psychosocial development of the individual goes through eight stages of development from infancy to old age. This study is concerned with the fifth stage: “Fidelity, Identity vs. Role Confusion”. During this stage of the adolescent’s life, the adolescent feels so lost because the physical, cognitive, and social changes allow him to develop and build an identity for a lifetime which will be a basis for him in his adulthood.

During Erikson's stage of identity versus role confusion, the description of adolescents’ self expansion reaches their personality traits. Consider Margo’s personality in the novel: she is a very brave girl since she was young; “She took another step. She was close enough now to reach out and touch his foot” (Green, 2008: 5). When Margo saw the dead man while she was only nine years old, she did not fear a thing at that very young age, yet she thought about investigating the death. Her sense of investigation and absence of fear truly portraits how brave she really is.

Margo has also a sense of exploration and curiosity to know everything that is going on around her, “‘I did an investigation,” she said quite seriously” (7). Margo told Quentin that she made an investigation about the death of the man; she was determined to know the reason behind his death. Quentin was a bit of a coward. Unlike Margo, Quentin feared the unknown and committing risky things. When solving Margo’s problems that night while taking revenge on her friends and running away, Quentin felt something that he never felt before,
“"My heart is really pounding," [Quentin] said.

"That's how you know you're having fun," Margo said” (44).

That proves that Margo likes the Adrenaline running through her veins.

Also, in the personality traits; Margo is always unpredictable in her actions; she always does something that impresses and gets attention. In investigating the death of the man, she lied to the lady, Juan Alvarez; she said she wanted to borrow a cup of sugar for her mom so that she enters the house, and she did enter the house.

“I think I maybe know why,” she finally said.

“Why?”

“Maybe all the strings inside him broke,” she said (8).

Margo is so different that she often uses very strange uncommon words, words that she only can understand as, strings, paper town, paper girl, black face paint, paper boy and many other words of her own 6.

Margo is described as a very intelligent girl. And still with the personality traits of Erikson’s, she is always curious about things and always tends to investigate situations. She pre planned all the supplies necessary for the revenge. She thought about every detail in the process of revenge and how she would do that while having fun and not being caught.

“Here he comes,” Margo whispered, and I didn’t know what she meant until, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a shirtless Jason Worthington wiggling out of the basement window. He took off sprinting across the lawn, naked but for his boxer shorts, and as he
approached I jumped up and took a picture of him, completing Part Three … before running off into the night. (*Paper Towns* 40)

According to Erikson’s Theory of 1963, and towards the middle of adolescence, the individual recognizes himself as a being in the making. At this point, the teenager is involved in an important process of questioning. To positively resolve this crisis, the adolescent must be able to define himself: to be good in his identity, to assume what he is, to know where he is going in life and to recognize the patterns and relationships that are important to him. For this, he needs encouragement but also a certain margin of maneuver to do different tests helping him to feed his identity.

In *Paper Towns*, Margo feels dissatisfaction from her parents, her friends, in fact, her whole town: “I've lived here for eighteen years and I have never once in my life come across anyone who cares about anything that matters” (58).

Adolescents who are too protected or too free will tend to have a longer confusion about their identity and their personal, professional, sexual, emotional and / or social roles. As Quentin talks deeper with Margo, she starts to question the things she does. Margo is confused about her acts and how they turn out to be in the end: “Doing stuff never feels as good as you hope it will feel” (77).

Erikson explains that during the fifth stage, commitments to relationships with others will be absent or superficial and relations too brief. That explains why Margo thinks of herself as a “Paper Girl” and of her town a “Paper Town” and explains,

It’s a paper town. I mean look at it, Q: look at all those cul-de-sacs, those streets that turn in on themselves, all the houses that were built to fall apart. All those paper people living in their paper houses, burning the future to stay warm. All the paper kids drinking beer some bum
bought for them at the paper convenience store. Everyone demented with the mania of owning things. All the things paper-thin and paper-frail. And all the people, too. (57-58)

Margo is so different than usual teenagers, one of the examples that prove that fact is that, she has affections towards the words in the middle of the sentence. It may seem very strange for a reader to find a quote as “Yeah. I'm a big believer in random capitalization. The rules of capitalization are so unfair to words in the middle”(32), in the novel he reads. Yet, that says a lot about her identity, it explains that she wants to be different, she wants to prove her true identity and let the people see her for her true self. And so, omit the shallow impression people make about her without truly knowing her.

That’s always seemed so ridiculous to me, that people would want to be around someone because they’re pretty. It’s like picking your breakfast cereals based on color instead of taste. It’s the next exit, by the way.

But I’m not pretty, not close up, anyway. Generally, the closer people get to me the less hot they find me. (37-38)

In the previous passage, Margo blames people who judge others by their looks instead of who they truly are, and so she does not have a clue about who she is. So when people get close to her, things look uglier to them.

Margo has always been a mysterious girl, since she was young: Quentin recounts them and mentions that she once ran away to learn how to play guitar in Mississippi, and another time she spend three days traveling with the circus, while another time she met with the Mallionaires backstage after their concert in St. Louis. Margo back then even got into that concert by lying to the bouncer and telling him that she was the bassist’s girlfriend (14-15).
Margo does not fear a thing, she is always so bold and does things that other teenagers are not capable of doing, and which do not even cross their minds. She was so addicted to mystery and the rush of adrenaline, and that was proved by Quentin after their revenge night out and the way she felt about it, and so Quentin states,

Margo always loved mysteries. And everything that came afterward, I could never stop thinking that maybe she loved mysteries so much that she became one. (8)

After being hurt, when her boyfriend cheated on her with her best friend, Margo decided to leave town for good. Usually Margo leaves to get attention from her parents and her friends at least that is what they think: “She’s not dead. She’s a drama queen. Wants attention” (153), that is what Quentin’s friend, Ben, said after that Margo disappeared.

Margo always ends up coming back home. But, this time Margo is determined to leave for good, so she took her things and left with no turning back. She is fearless.

Margo is a risk taker; she left everything behind and went to “Agloe”, New York which was a “Paper Town” only marked on the map. She sets in her mind to begin a new life, in a new town. She thinks that it is the perfect place for her, to start over with no fake friends around, and no cheating boyfriend.

Following the theory of “psychosocial development”, there are various reasons for a confused teenager: parents who encourage the over-dependence of their teenager; are too harsh with their teenager, with an inconsistent or absent discipline; parents who reject their child; parents with changing parenting techniques; parents who push their child towards an autonomy that is too premature.
In Margo’s case, her parents have pushed her towards an autonomy that is premature. Being the eldest daughter of her parents, she always felt responsible for herself and her little sister. Plus, she was not living as she wishes. Her parents are not encouraging her to be her true self; however, they want her to be a typical teenager following their beliefs and living a boring basic life as she explained to Quentin,

College: getting in or not getting in. Trouble: getting in or not getting in. School: getting A’s or getting D’s. Career: having or not having. House: big or small, owning or renting. Money: having or not having. It’s all so boring. (33)

She pushed Quentin out of his comfort zone, by making him live his life to the fullest, enjoy every moment that passes by. She advises him to cease every opportunity to accomplish things, but more importantly have fun while he still can. And she goes:

“Here’s a tip: you’re cute when you’re confident. And less when you’re not” (57).

She also encourages him of doing things for the first time while he is still in high school saying:

…and in your last moments, when you’re choking on your own bile in the nursing home, you’ll say to yourself: ‘Well, I wasted my whole goddamned life, but at least I broke into SeaWorld with Margo Roth Spiegelman my senior year of high school. At least I carpe’d that one diem’. (70)

Quentin being Margo’s oldest friend and neighbor at the same time, and whose bed rooms are across the window; sees a clue hanging on the window of Margo’s bed room. Quentin felt curious about that clue and wanted to get up there and see it closely, so he asked
her little sister’s permission to get to Margo’s bed room. So, he went on a road trip with his friends looking for Margo.

Following all the clues she had left him, Quentin finally arrives to “Algoe” where he finds Margo buying some groceries from the shop. She felt so surprised when she saw him. Quentin approaches to see her and she says,

“And then you surprise me,” she says. “You had been a paper boy to me all these years ... But that night you turned out to be real. And it ends up being so odd and fun and magical that I go back to my room in the morning and I just miss you. I want to come over and hang out and talk, but I’ve already decided to leave, so I have to leave. And then at the last second, I have this idea to will you the Osprey. To leave it for you so that it can help you make even further progress in the field of not-being-such-a-scaredy-cat. (292)

Margo felt so confused, and needed to get away so that she can build an identity of her own away from all those “Paper People” so when Quentin found her, he was so curious and asked her about the reason behind choosing her “Algoe” of all the places . and so, Margo replied justifying:

“A paper town for a paper girl,” she says. “I read about Algoe in this book of ‘amazing facts’ when I was ten or eleven. And I never stopped thinking about it...whenever I went up to the top of the SunTrust Building ... I looked down and thought about how I was made of paper. I was the flimsy-foldable person, not everyone else...People love the idea of a paper girl. They always have. And the worst thing is that I loved it, too. I cultivated it, you know?”. (293)
During the period of “Fidelity, Identity vs. Role Confusion”, adolescents explore all the possibilities they have; so that, they will have to form their own identity which will be based on the result of their explorations. If they fail to build an identity in society they will become role confused. “Role confusion” is when the individual is not sure about himself and his place in society\(^7\).

Thus, Margo reached the phase of “Role Confusion” and failed to find her identity within the society, that is why she ran away searching for her identity, and leaving behind the image of “paper girl” she always felt about herself:

> Because it’s kind of great, being an idea that everybody likes. But I could never be the idea to myself, not all the way. And Agloe is a place where a paper creation became real. A dot on the map became a real place, more real than the people who created the dot could ever have imagined. I thought maybe the paper cutout of a girl could start becoming real here also. And it seemed like a way to tell that paper girl who cared about popularity and clothes and everything else: ‘You are going to the paper towns. And you are never coming back’. (294)

To sum it up, it seems that Margo’s decision to leave her hometown was not a shot in the void. She really needed to escape the whole town, and leave everything behind in order to form her own identity. She was ready to sacrifice everything so that she would shape the identity she wanted and that proves Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development.

III. Quentin Jacobsen’s journey to form his Identity

Quentin Jacobsen is the other protagonist of the story. Green chose him to be the narrator of the story. Quentin’s character is also well developed through the story. His thoughts and feelings are mentioned in every situation, and he is present in all the events of
the story. Quentin Jacobsen has spent a lifetime loving the magnificent Margo Roth Spiegelman from afar, until one night when she climbs back into his life. She then, asks him for a night of revenge. When their night ends, Quentin was the happiest person alive. Unfortunately, the day after Margo has disappeared. When Quentin finds out that Margo left clues for him, he embarks on a road trip with his friends (Ben, Radar, Radar’s girlfriend and Margo’s best friend Lacey) following the love of his life.

Quentin is also a teenager just like Margo, and so he is going through the process of Identity Formation. “James Marcia (1991) hypothesized that identity development involves two steps. First, the adolescent must break away from childhood beliefs to explore alternatives for identity in a particular area. Second, the adolescent makes a commitment as to their individual identity in that area. Marcia identified four "Identity Statuses" to describe the process of identity development” (Clarke & Justice).

“The first identity status, identity diffusion, describes youth who have neither explored nor committed to any particular identity”.

For the first stage, it is linked to teenagers who still did not think about their future and what they want in their lives. “Identity Diffusion” is only the training stage for teenagers to try and think about their life’s goals. At this stage, the teenager only considers his parents and the people around him. He still has no responsibility over himself and so he may be about to follow his parents or may be wants to form an identity of his own, so different than his parents’ and the people around him.

The second stage is named “Foreclosure”. It is the status in which the adolescent seems willing to commit to some relevant roles, values, or goals for the future. Adolescents in this stage have not experienced an identity crisis. They tend to conform to the expectations of
others regarding their future (e. g. allowing a parent to determine a career direction) As such; these individuals have not explored a range of options (David L)⁹.

The thing is that most teenagers get stuck in this stage, because it feels safer for most of them to commit to their parents’ expectations and beliefs. It feels easier for them to follow somehow their role models in this life. That is the case for Quentin who is living a boring steady life just as his parents expects him to: “It was May fifth, but it didn’t have to be. My days had a pleasant identicalness about them. I had always liked that: I liked routine. I liked being bored. I didn’t want to, but I did” (Paper Towns 23-24).

Quentin is so naïve and innocent, he takes everything for granted. From the top of SunTrust building, Quentin and Margo can see the whole city of Orlando and at that moment Quentin goes: “It’s beautiful”, but “Margo scoffed. “Really? You seriously think so?” (57). Margo was constantly mocking Quentin for the things he said. He was a “Paper Boy” to her just like she was a “Paper Girl” to herself and to the people of Orlando.

Unlike Margo, Quentin was not fearless and did not dare to risk himself doing things whenever he feels like it. That night out with Margo, she suggested breaking into “SeaWorld”, but Quentin did not agree with her and told her she was not doing it,

“So we’re going to SeaWorld,” she told me. “Part Eleven.”

“What, are we going to Free Willy or something?” “No,” she said.

“We’re just going to go to SeaWorld, that’s all. It’s the only theme park I haven’t broken into yet.”

“We can’t break into SeaWorld,” I said, and then I pulled over into an empty furniture store parking lot and turned off the car.

“We’re in a bit of a time crunch,” she told me, and then reached over to start the car again.
I pushed her hand away. “We can’t break into SeaWorld,” I repeated.

(67-68)

However, just like Margo, Quentin was intelligent and had a sense of curiosity and exploration: “As Mom pulled up to school, I saw Margo’s usual spot empty in the senior parking lot” (86).

And then, Quentin reached the third stage of identity development according to Marcia’s theory. “Moratorium” status is characterized by the active exploration of alternatives. This may be reflected in attending different churches, changing college majors, or trying out different social roles. Such exploration will be followed by identity achievement. (Clarke & Justice) Quentin missed the feeling of going out and having fun while doing things he had always wanted to do but never could. He constantly thought about Margo and their revenge night out and how fun it was trying new things and feeling fearless and risk taker so that he said:

“I couldn’t help but hope that Margo Roth Spiegelman would return to my window and drag my tired ass through one more night I’d never forget” (93).

Reaching the third stage, and after embarking on a road trip with his friends to find Margo; Quentin wanted to try something new, something risky once in his life. The road trip was just an excuse for him to go out there, away from his parents and the whole town of Orlando, trying to explore and form his own identity. And so, he goes: “I wanted Margo’s disappearance to change me; but it hadn’t, not really” (155).

Margo always left clues behind her, so whenever Quentin goes on this road trip, he looked for clues that she might have let for him but occasionally gets disappointed that he could not find any, but he has now this sense of exploration that he had not before that night out, so it is all thanks to Margo and her risk taking: “I looked for evidence she had been there:
footprints or something written in the dirt or some memento. But I seemed to be the first person to walk on these unnamed dirt streets in years” (155). Quentin is exploring new empty streets, that is really bold and risk taking.

Quentin is somehow reaching the last stage of the theory; he is enjoying more and more this feeling of exploring and trying to find more clues to reach Margo, so he states: “And in becoming comfortable, I found it easier to explore. I knew there was more to find, and now, I felt ready to find it” (168).

And he exclaims: “WOOHOO ROAD TRIP!” (243).

Quentin finally reached the last stage of “Identity achievement”. He finally was ready to form an identity of his own. Reaching this stage means that he was ready to set goals for his life and a basis for his adulthood (Whitbourne, 1987)10. So, Quentin finally realized the reason why Margo left so mysteriously and he said:

And all at once I knew how Margo Roth Spiegelman felt when she wasn’t being Margo Roth Spiegelman: she felt empty. She felt the unsalable wall surrounding her. I thought of her asleep on the carpet with only that jagged silver of sky above her. Maybe Margo felt comfortable there because Margo the person lived like that all the time: in an abandoned room with blocked-out windows, the only light pouring in through holes in the roof. Yes. The fundamental mistake I had always made—and that she had, in fairness, always led me to make—was this: Margo was not a miracle. She was not an adventure. She was not a fine and precious thing. She was a girl. (199)
Quentin finally realized that Margo has an identity of her own, that nobody has made for her. Margo was the only one responsible for her acts and deeds. And so, he needed desperately to form an identity of his own. When they were searching for Margo, Quentin said: “To find Margo Roth Spiegelman, you must become Margo Roth Spiegelman” (226).

In the previous quote, Quentin is sure that Margo is one hell of a girl. He suggests thinking the way she does in order to find her, so he realizes that she is so different than him and his friends and that pushes him to think of forming an identity of his own different than his parents’ and all his friends, an identity where he decides what to do with his life.

When Quentin finally finds Margo, she still mocks him about his personality, and how she always thought that he was just a “Paper Boy”. So she says:

And anyway, I didn’t think there was anybody else to be friends with. I thought everyone was either scared, like you, or oblivious, like Lacey.

And th—” “I’m not scared as you think,” I say. Which is true. I only realize it’s true after saying it. But still. (291)

For his part; Quentin’s friend “Radar” was quite of help. Radar was that calm wise friend whom you always go to for advice. Unlike “Ben” who was childish and selfish. He always thought of himself and how doing such thing would benefit him. Radar gave the best advice to his friends on this road trip, he was watching over them like a mother would watch her child.

Radar advised his friends that each one should be his true self, and tries to do what he is best at saying: “Yeah; well, I wasn’t complimenting you. Just saying: stop thinking Ben should be you, and he needs to stop thinking you should be him, and y’all just chill the hell out” (195).
Identity Formation is a serious process in every individual’s life. Adolescence is a very confusing age that sometimes it turns out to a “Crisis”, or a “Depression” that can cause lifetime of damage in the individual life if not dealt with it the proper way. Margo Roth Spiegelman and Quentin Jacobsen were two teenagers about to graduate high school; they were both in a transitional phase towards adulthood which was scary for them, and so they had no identity of their own. The journey in *Paper Towns* was of great help to set them on the right track of their path towards adulthood, and helped each of them to form his own identity.
Endnotes:

1 “John Green” (USA: Famous Authors Website, 2012), famousauthors.org

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4 Eva G. Clarke & Elaine M. Justice, "Identity Development-Aspects of Identity" (USA: Net Industries and its Licensors, 2018), social.jrank.org


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7 Saul McLeod, "Erik Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development" (USA: Simply Psychology, 2013), simplypsychology.org

8 Angela Oswalt, “James Marcia and Self-Identity” (USA: Mental Help, 2010), mentalhelp.net

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Conclusion:

John Green is one of the bestselling authors of “Young Adult” genre. He always writes about teenagers and the problems they are constantly facing. He has chosen to write about themes that the majority of the other authors neglected, but still are of a high importance to the readers and especially to young readers. John Green was for sure criticized for the work he has done, he is a bestselling author after all. However, many readers find it very interesting that he has created a character like Margo that can push boys to transform themselves into men, without neglecting the growing pains that keep teenagers up at night, as not having a prom date, losing your first love or even the constant friends’ fights.

The principle aim of this study is to expose the process of “Identity Formation”, while stressing to what extent it does affect the life of a teenager. The study is based on Paper Towns written by John Green, the novel mentions the lives of two teenagers about to graduate high school who are totally lost in knowing their true selves. Margo runs away from home, and Quentin goes on a road trip trying to find her and bringing her home. The most important risen questions in this study revolve around Margo’s disappearance, like why did Margo disappear mysteriously? Why would a teenage girl constantly run away from home? Why is Margo so different than her friends? How is Quentin portrayed in reference to Margo?

After analyzing the characters of Margo and Quentin and based on the two mentioned theories of “Identity Formation”, the two characters are so different from each other: While Margo is brave, fearless and risk taking, so that she constantly runs away from home when she was young, except this time she was so hurt and unsatisfied with everything; her parents, friends, and the whole town. Relating everything to “paper”, as she thinks it is a different
synonym to “fake”, she goes and starts naming everything around her: paper girl, paper boy, paper town even the people of Orlando. The day after that, Margo is gone.

Margo refers to herself as a “paper girl”; explaining that she has always been a fake version of herself around the people of Orlando. She says that people always make an image which is so different than her actual one. She was not feeling at ease in her home town, she wanted to leave her life the way she wanted it to be; away from all those fake people. She also needed to get away, to form an identity of her own, for she is beginning her early adulthood.

As for Quentin, the naïve good boy, he is the best son that parents could ever have. In the beginning of the novel Quentin is just a normal teenage boy living a boring life as he says, but after that revenge night out with Margo, Quentin becomes a different teenager. It feels like Margo has awakened that sense of risk taking and having fun within him, and then left the town. Margo intentionally left a series of clues for Quentin so that he would go out there and tries to find her. Margo has pushed Quentin out of his comfort zone and has made him become a man. Indeed, Quentin has really evolved through the story, and has done things so that he will not regret not doing afterwards. Going away has also helped Quentin to try and figure out his true self and what kind of person he really wants to become in the future.
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**Dissertations**