

Searching Alone

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“Andover is hard.”

“Andover is amazing.”

“Andover is where you will find yourself.”

I can attest to the validity of the first two: Andover is indeed hard and I have found it to be truly amazing. The third, however, gives me pause. Yes, I have come closer to finding myself—whatever that means—in the last two years of high school, but this process has been much truer and literal to the phrase than I initially anticipated. All growth I have experienced has occurred in large part as a result of the development of what I see as a necessary relationship with myself amid the hustle and bustle of daily boarding school life.

Living alone presents unique challenges; above all, maintaining order and establishing a routine is essential. There is a steep learning curve to striking this balance. When I went to boarding school, for example, I needed to learn how to structure my free time, arrange my living space, and do my own laundry.

Structuring my free time proved to be the most difficult part of my transition to life away from home. As I began to discover more about how I learn, when I work fastest, and where I can focus, I unlocked a treasure trove of personal information. The more time I spent truly focusing on what ways to most effectively pursue productivity, the better I became at knowing what I should be doing.

I have come to appreciate time alone more than I ever thought I would before having the freedom to dictate its allotment. I have found thinking about my priorities, my position in relation to my peers and friends, and my thoughts contributes to a calmer demeanor and overall cleaner conscience.

While it may seem obvious, the relationship you develop with yourself is the most important relationship to establish and learn to adapt and grow with—no matter how close you are with your friends or more intimate partners, the time you spend with them is a fraction of that which you spend alone.

This is not meant to advocate for introvertism; in fact, quite the opposite. Based on my observations—these are entirely my own perceptions and have no deeper psychological backing—the interpersonal relationships that work best are the ones in which people have a firm understanding of what their own needs are. It is not only possible, but it is essential, to be outgoing and still have a strong relationship with yourself.

And yet a question remains: how exactly does Andover, or boarding school in general, tie back to this idea? It is at this institution, populated with “youth from every quarter,” where -- by forming stronger relationships with my peers than I ever have before -- I have begun to “find myself.”

Other people are the conduit personal discovery; this process is only accelerated when living surrounded by the same group of peers who constantly push you to be your better self, your best self. Many of my study habits, for example, are heavily influenced by the people I associate myself with. One of my closest friends deleted his social media accounts last year; I have since moved to do the same with many of mine. This greatly impacts what I do when I wake up, go to sleep, and during practically every moment when there are free seconds to fill.

At Andover, I appreciate moments when I can spend time alone. I have come to savor the meals I eat with just my food and me; this is not lonely, it is how I cope with the many moving parts of life at this school. I would never have discovered my affinity for intermittent solitude had it not been for Andover, and now firmly believe that there are many opportunities to “find yourself” in this world, but few necessitate as immediate a reaction as a place like this school.