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Identity Status, Separation, and Parent-adolescent Relationships among Boarding and Day School Students

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ABSTRACT

The role of social environment in identity formation and separation has often been overlooked. In order to address this gap in the existing literature, we compared two groups of adolescent high school students aged between 17 and 18 years: those who lived at home and those who lived in a boarding school. We compared the two groups on identity achievement, psychological separation, and their perceptions of their relationships with parents. The findings revealed that boarding school students reported higher levels of foreclosure and emotional and attitudinal independence than did day school students. They also reported lower levels of parental control than did day school students. The findings reveal that the sense of volition that results from physical distance from parents is related to psychological freedom while preserving emotional closeness. These findings have practical implications for parents, teachers, and therapists because they reveal the means by which both identity development and healthy parent-adolescent relationships can be fostered. Implications of these finding for therapeutic boarding schools are discussed.

KEYWORDS

Boarding schools; identity formation; separation; parental presence; parent-adolescent relationship

Introduction

Boarding schools are a source of education for a higher percentage of Israeli youth than youth from any other country; at least 10% of 13–18-year old adolescents live in and receive education from boarding schools (Agmon, Zlotnick, & Finkelstein, 2015). There has been an increase in the number of boarding school students around the world. Recently, there has been a renewed interest in the effects that students' residential settings have on their personal development and their relationship with their parents. Some scholars have agreed that a critical requisite for cross-national comparisons, as well as for within-country analyses, will be a clearer delineation of the multiple forms that group residential placement takes in different contexts (Whittaker et al., 2016). Other scholars have underscored the need to improve and expand the residential options that are available to students (Grupper & Zeira, 2016).

In the present study, we compared students from schools that have similar environments except for the fact that one is a boarding school and one is a non-boarding school. Both types of schools are religious modern-orthodox state-supervised high schools. They promote loyalty to the Jewish tradition and Zionism, general knowledge, and involvement in modern society (Huri & Zeira, 2017). Most of the characteristics of this type of schools are in common with that of the elite boarding schools. According to the definition that has been provided by Gaztambide-Fernández (2009), elite boarding schools have the following features: (a) typologically elite in terms of their classification as “a private school,” (b) scholastically elite in terms of both the expansive and sophisticated curricula that they offer and their particular pedagogical approaches, and (c) demographically elite in terms of the populations that attend these schools. Comparisons of religious and secular boarding schools in Israel have delineated minor school-related and student-related differences (Romi, 1997).

The objective of the present study was to compare the separation and identity statuses of adolescents who reside in boarding schools and their peers who attend day school. We also sought to examine the differences in the relationships that day school students and boarding school students share with their parents, and to identify possible causes for the emergent differences. The present study entailed a comparison of two groups of twelfth-grade (ages 17–18) students, who attended religious modern-orthodox state-supervised high schools: a group of adolescent high school students who lived at home and a group of adolescents who attended boarding schools. We compared these two groups on separation and their identity statuses.

Identity Formation

Erikson (1968) proposed that *identity formation* is a dynamic developmental process that occurs throughout the developmental lifespan and that it is an outcome of the interaction between a person and his or her context. Specifically, it is an interaction between a person’s intrapsychic subjective characteristics and the inner characteristics of the significant other in his or her immediate social environment. Further, he described the developmental process as a series of identity crises that arises as one strives to achieve a balance between the developed self and one’s complicated and changing reality (Erikson, 1993). As adolescents grow up, they become more aware of their skills, abilities, and unique preferences. The formation of identity that occurs during adolescence involves a process of creating a balance between the self and others in the adolescent’s environment (Kroger, 2004). Parents are a part of the social context in which adolescents grow up, and parents are significant others whose feedback is an essential component of the identity formation process (Koepke & Denissen, 2012). Identity achievement is an

expression of psychological vitality, and failure to achieve a sense of identity can lead to identity diffusion and a sense of confusion and detachment (Erikson, 1993).

Various models such as Marcia's (1966) *identity status* theory have been developed based on Erikson's theoretical propositions. Marcia identified two processes that define the development that occurs during identity formation: exploration and commitment. *Exploration* refers to the degree to which an adolescent considers, examines, and investigates potential commitment to identity domains such as occupation and lifestyle. On the other hand, *commitment* refers to the degree to which adolescents choose and feel committed to important identity-related decisions. Based on the degree of exploration and commitment that an adolescent has engaged in, Marcia (1966) identified the following four identity statuses:

- (1) Identity diffusion: Adolescents who belong to this status have not yet completed his or her exploration; therefore, they are not committed to a certain developmental task.
- (2) Identity foreclosure: Adolescents who belong to this status have committed to a certain developmental task and a set of values and ideals albeit without substantial exploration. In most cases, the identity-related decisions are reflections of parental value systems or those of significant others in an adolescent's environment.
- (3) Identity moratorium: Adolescents who belong to this status are currently engaged in investigation. However, they have not made a significant commitment. Instead, they are engaged in exploration and experimentation.
- (4) Identity achievement: Adolescents who belong to this status have completed substantial exploration and subsequently made commitments. Adolescents who have achieved this status are aware of their abilities and have determined the course of their lives. They enjoy a sense of consecutiveness and continuity. They make conscious decisions to commit to and be responsible for their decisions.

Marcia contended that identity formation is a consecutive and directed developmental process that begins with identity diffusion and ends with identity achievement. He viewed identity achievement as a state of mental health that is characterized by flexibility and adaptability (Marcia, 1989). In accordance with Marcia's model, the identity status paradigm has been conceptualized as an intrapsychic process. Conversely, the role that social contexts play in identity formation has not received adequate research attention. Although Marcia's model has inspired a number of other models, it remains useful in its own right (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013). In recent years, studies have begun to consider the association

between environmental attributes and identity status (Beyers & Goossens, 2008). Accordingly, in the present study, we examined the association between identity status and the social context of an adolescent.

Separation in Adolescence

Separation and individuation are terms that were coined by Margaret Mahler to describe intrapsychic processes that occur during the first three years of a child's life (Mahler, 1968; Mahler & Furer, 1963). It refers to the process of unraveling the symbolic connection that an infant share with his or her mother; this is a connection that begins at birth. When infants separate from their unified image, they learn that they and their mothers are two different individuals and that the mother is an independent entity. As this process continues, an infant internalizes his or her mother's selfness. This process of internalization helps infants physically separate themselves from their mothers because they can feel their mothers' presence even when they are separated.

Blos (1967) has claimed that the process of separation occurs in adolescence as well. During this developmental stage, separation involves detachment from an internalized and childish image of the parents as omnipotent figures of authority. Adolescents' abilities to self-regulate improve, and they are able to take up greater responsibility for their actions and participate in mature relationships with others (Smollar & Youniss, 1989). Adolescents' separation is related to the changes that their parents undergo. Some psychoanalytic theorists have claimed that parent-adolescent conflict is essential to the emergence of separation and that the turbulence of adolescence may create the proper distance and ground that is required for separation and individuation (Smetana, 2011). However, others have claimed that conflict is not a necessary antecedent; instead, parental understanding of their children's developmental needs may be sufficient to facilitate separation (Beyers & Goossens, 2008; Kroger, 2004).

Parent-adolescent Relationship

The relationships that children share with their parents during their adolescent years can be depicted as a quadratic U-shaped pattern. In early adolescence (ages 10–11), the relationship is hierarchic in nature. Children perceive their parents to be both powerful and supportive, and they report a great deal of openness, closeness, and inclusion with regard to the roles that their parents play in their daily lives (Mayseless, 2001). During mid-adolescence (ages 12–15), the situation becomes more complex and they experience frequent conflicts, arguments, a sense of distance, and lower levels of parental support (Flum, 1995; Meeus, Iedema,

Maassen, & Engels, 2005). Children need their parental presence to a lesser degree and they develop an enhanced sense of autonomy. Researchers have suggested that this increase in autonomy accounts for the temporarily low levels of perceived relational closeness and the high levels of conflict. During late adolescence (ages 16–19), the perception that their parents are powerful attenuates. Additionally, the level of conflict that parents and adolescents engage in also decreases. During these years, boys' perception of parental support tends to be low. On the other hand, girls perceive their paternal support to be low but consider their maternal support to be high (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; Keijsers & Poulin, 2013).

Parental presence refers to parents' physical and psychological presence in their children's lives. It is manifested in their attitudes and patterns of vigilant care, supervision, and monitoring (Omer, Steinmetz, Carthy, & Schlippe, 2013). There are changes in parental presence across the developmental years. During the early years, a great deal of parental presence is needed. Indeed, parents of newborns must be prepared, alert, and fully responsive to their infant's needs (Bowlby, 1988). High levels of parental presence are also required during childhood; however, as children grow up, they spend less time with their parents. There is a lower level of physical presence, and parents seek other ways to maintain their presence in their children's lives (Keijsers & Poulin, 2013). However, when parental presence is overprotective, invasive, or involves psychological control, adolescents can become resistant. In turn, resistance can lead to conflicts, mistrust, and emotional withdrawal from each other (Kerr, Stattin, & Burk, 2010; Racz & McMahon, 2011). This can damage an adolescent's self-image, sense of autonomy, and self-efficacy (Shimshoni et al., 2015).

Changes in the level of parents' physical presence is accompanied by transformations in parent-adolescent relationships. Adolescents who live at home and attend day school experience a substantially higher level of parents' physical presence than adolescents who attend a boarding school. Therefore, these two groups experience different levels of parents' physical presence. Accordingly, in the present study, we compared parent-adolescent relationships between these two groups. This parameter served as a mediating variable. Specifically, we examined whether adolescent perceptions of their relationships with their parents mediate the effect of the type of school that they attended (i.e., boarding vs. day school) on identity status, separation, and individuation.

Multiple studies have examined gender differences in adolescents' developmental processes and parent-adolescent relationships (Meeus, 2016, and references therein). Even though there are inconsistent findings regarding the exact nature of these variances, gender differences are important to consider. We will therefore examine, without a priori hypotheses, gender differences in

identity status, separation, and parent-adolescent relationships for boarding school and day school students.

Research Hypotheses

The following four research hypotheses were formulated:

- (1) Boarding school students and day school students will differ significantly in their identity statuses and psychological separation. Specifically, boarding school students will be more likely to be “identity achievers” (i.e., in the final status of identity formation) than day school students. Accordingly, boarding school students will demonstrate a higher level of psychological separation than day school students. The argument is that during adolescence, physical distance from parents can facilitate identity formation and psychological separation.
- (2) Adolescents who perceive their relationships with their parents as enabling will demonstrate significantly higher levels of identity development and psychological separation.
- (3) There will be a significant association between the type of school that students attend and their perceived relationships with their parents. Twelfth-grade boarding school students, as a result of the physical distance from parents, will be more likely to report that their perceived relationships with their parents facilitate autonomy and entail lower levels of supervision/control than day school students.
- (4) Adolescents’ perceived relationships with their parents will mediate the relationship between the type of schools that they attend and the developmental parameters (identity status and separation). Boarding school students, as a result of perceived enabling relationships with their parents, will demonstrate higher levels of identity development and psychological separation.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 219 twelfth-grade students who belonged to two-parent families. Of these, 113 (49 girls and 64 boys) high school students attended day school, and 106 (53 girls and 53 boys) students attended boarding school. The study was conducted across Jewish modern-Orthodox religious schools for boys or girls (i.e., not coeducational) in Israel; all these schools were supervised by the Ministry of Education. Modern Orthodox

Jews constitute 10% of the Jewish Israeli society, into which they are actively integrated. Their values adhere to the Halakha and Jewish traditions as well as Zionism (Huri & Zeira, 2017). The boarding school for boys is called *yeshiva* (plural: *yeshivot*), whereas the boarding school for girls is called *ulpana* (plural: *ulpanot*). The Jewish studies that are offered by *yeshivot* and *ulpanot* are longer in duration and more advanced than those that are provided by high schools. Therefore, boarding school students are generally considered to be more religious than their high school peers. In recent decades, many high schools have begun to extend the number of hours that are allotted for Jewish studies and provide accelerated studies. The high schools that participated in the present study provided such accelerated studies; hence, currently, they are considered to be equal to boarding school with regard to religiosity. The research sample was recruited from eight schools (three day schools and five boarding schools). To reduce within-participant variance, we chose educational institutions that enroll students from similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, specifically students who are the “demographic elite” in terms of socioeconomic status (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009).

With regard to the students who attended boarding schools, we selected those who had attended the school for three years or more. The daily lives of boarding school students varied in accordance with the age groups to which they belonged. Students typically spent three weekends per month at home and one weekend in school. Parents’ physical presence that they experienced was relatively lower than what was experienced by adolescents who lived at home and attended day school. We conducted a preliminary study and found that the decision to attend a day school or boarding school was a reflection of the preferences of the students and their families. Specifically, it was based on family traditions, social preferences, geographic location, and the advice of the elementary school counselor.

Assessments

We used three self-report questionnaires to assess the two dependent variables (i.e., ego identity status and psychological separation) and the mediating variable (i.e., perceived parent-adolescent relationships). The participants completed all the three questionnaires, which are described in the following sections:

Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (OMEIS; Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989)

This questionnaire was used to measure ego identity status and the degree to which individuals have achieved a sense of identity by ascertaining the presence or absence of exploration and commitment. This 64-item questionnaire consists

of four factors that represent the four identity statuses (i.e., diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement). The statements are to be rated on a 6-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

The validity and reliability of this questionnaire was reestablished by Berzonsky and Adams (1999). In the present study, the reliability coefficients of this scale ranged from 0.67 to 0.81. The validity of this assessment was established in a study in which the four identity statuses that have been identified by Marcia were associated with the five identity self-functions that have been articulated by Erikson (Adams et al., 1989). The composite score can be calculated by averaging the scores of the items that belong to each of the four identity statuses.

Psychological Separation Inventory (PSI; Hoffman, 1984)

This 138-item questionnaire was used to assess psychological separation. Half of the statements measure maternal separation, whereas the other half of the statements assesses paternal separation. The assessment consists of four factors that constitute the separation process: *functional independence*, which refers to the ability to manage various realms of life without parental help; *attitudinal independence*, which refers to the adolescent's self-perception that they are different from their parents and that they possess their own unique system of beliefs, values, and attitudes; *emotional independence*, which refers to a relative lack of a strong need for approval, closeness, identification, and emotional support in one's relationship with parents; *conflictual independence*, which refers to freedom from extreme feelings of guilt, anxiety, mistrust, responsibility, procrastination, and anger toward one's parents. Responses to the items are to be rated on a 5-point scale that ranges from 1 ("Not at all true of me") to 5 ("Very true of me").

Hoffman (1984) examined the internal consistency of this assessment and reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients that ranged from 0.88 to 0.92. The validity of the assessment was established by means of the associations that emerged between the level of psychological separation and adjustment. In the present study, the reliability coefficients of the assessment ranged from 0.80 to 0.89. Participants' scores on this questionnaire were calculated by subtracting a participant's total ratings in each scale from the maximum amount for the scale (i.e., the product of the number of items in each scale by 5, the highest value for each item). Higher scores are indicative of higher levels of separation from parents. Scores were calculated separately for separation from the father and the mother.

Relationship with Father and Mother Questionnaire (RFMQ; Mayseless, Wiseman, & Hai, 1998)

Half of the items in this 126-item questionnaire assess perceived paternal relationships whereas the other half assesses perceived maternal relationships.

The questionnaire consists of seven factors: *closeness* (“She tends to hug me sometimes”), *communication* (“He always listens to my ideas and opinions”), *mutuality* (“Recently, I feel that she is more a friend than a parent”), *open confrontation* (“He becomes angry over little things that I do”), *rejection and coolness* (“She does not know what I need or what I want”), *autonomy* (“He lets me do all the things that others of my age do”), and *supervision/control* (“She is very strict with me”). Responses to the items are to be rated on a 6-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (“Not at all true”) to 6 (“Very true”). The internal consistency coefficient of the subscales ranged from 0.80 to 0.92 in a past study and from 0.69 to 0.90 in the present study. A team of experts conducted item analysis and evaluation (Mayseless, 2001). Composite subscale scores were calculated by averaging the individual item scores of each subscale; thus, seven scores were computed for each participant.

Procedure

The authorization to conduct the research study was obtained from the Ministry of Education. Three day schools and five boarding schools, which consisted of students who had similar cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, were identified. The principal of each school was requested to approve the participation of their students in the present research study. The questionnaires were distributed to the entire class during class hours. Only students who were willing to participate responded to the assessment. To minimize the effect of fatigue, the three questionnaires were randomly ordered. A total of 17 questionnaires (approximately 7%) were excluded because they were not completed in accordance with the test instructions.

Results

Hypothesis 1

The first research hypothesis postulated that identity status and the level of psychological separation will be lower among day school students than among boarding school students. A mixed ANOVA was conducted to examine group differences in identity statuses. The type of school that students attended served as the between-subjects independent variable whereas the identity statuses (i.e., diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement) served as the within-subjects dependent variable. As shown in Table 1, a statistically significant interaction emerged between identity status and the type of school that students attended. Post-hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction revealed that the mean score for the foreclosure status was significantly higher for boarding school students than for day school students. No significant difference was found in other identity statuses.

Table 1. Differences in identity statuses between boarding school and day school students.

Identity Status	Boarding schools		Day schools		Group comparisons
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i> ^a
Achievement	3.72	0.06	3.81	0.06	<i>p</i> = .26
Moratorium	3.43	0.05	3.46	0.05	<i>p</i> = .71
Foreclosure	3.08	0.06	2.87	0.06	<i>p</i> = .04
Diffusion	2.22	0.05	2.15	0.05	<i>p</i> = .35

^aThe *p*-values that resulted from post-hoc analyses were subjected to Bonferroni corrections. Interaction effect: $F(3,645) = 2.82$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$.

Two two-way MANOVA were conducted to examine group difference in separation from parents (i.e., one analysis for each parent). The independent variables were the type of school that the students attended and gender, and the four dependent variables were the four subscales of the separation questionnaire.

As shown in Table 2, the results of MANOVA revealed that the type of school that the students attended had a significant effect on separation from the father. The results revealed a significant difference between genders on separation from their fathers. Post-hoc analysis revealed that, for boys, conflictual independence from mothers as well as from fathers was significantly higher for boarding school students compared to day students ($F_{1,215} = 5.85$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .026$, and $F_{1,215} = 5.01$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .023$ in relation to mothers and fathers, respectively); for girls, no significant differences by school type were found.

A separate analysis, the results of which are presented in Table 3, revealed a significant effect for attitudinal independence. This type of separation was higher among day school students than among boarding school students.

Table 2. The results of MANOVA for differences in parental separation between boarding school and day school students.

Variable	Effect	Group Comparisons
Separation from father	Type of school	$F_{4,212} = 2.71$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$
	Gender	$F_{4,212} = 4.09$, $p = .00$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$
	Type of school \times Gender	$F_{4,212} = 2.26$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$
Separation from mother	Type of school	$F_{4,212} = 1.66$, $p = .16$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$
	Gender	$F_{4,212} = 2.50$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$
	Type of school \times Gender	$F_{4,212} = 2.87$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$

Table 3. Differences in paternal separation between boarding school and day school students.

Variable	Boarding schools		Day schools		Group comparison
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>
Attitudinal independence from father	15.10	0.89	17.77	0.87	$F_{1,215} = 4.60$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$
Emotional independence from father	38.03	0.97	40.49	0.95	$F_{1,215} = 3.28$, $p = .07$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$

Hypothesis 2

The second research hypothesis predicted that there will be an association between perceived parent-adolescent relationships, separation from parents, and identity status. To test this hypothesis, we computed Pearson's correlations between the scores that are yielded by the seven subscales of the RFMQ, the four scales of the OMEIS, and the four scales of the PSI. Correlations were calculated using the data that were obtained from both boys and girls. The correlations that pertain to parent-adolescent relationships are presented in Table 4.

Many associations emerged between perceived parental relationships, separation from parents, and identity status. In Table 4, we have presented only the associations that closeness and parental supervision/control shared with separation from parents and identity status, because we found that these two factors distinguished between the two types of schools that the students attended, as is presented below.

The major results of the correlational analyses are presented in the following points:

- The scores of many subscales that measure developmental-related variables were related to emotional closeness to parents.
- Attitudinal independence was positively related to supervision/control.
- Conflictual independence was negatively related to supervision/control.

Hypothesis 3

The third research hypothesis predicted that twelfth-grade boarding school students will perceive their relationship with their parents as more facilitative of autonomy and less supervisory/controlling than day school students. To

Table 4. Pearson's correlations between parent-adolescent perceived relationships, identity status, and paternal separation.

Variable	Relationships with fathers		Relationships with mothers	
	Closeness	Supervision/Control	Closeness	Supervision/Control
Identity achievement	0.04	0.13*	0.05	0.18**
Moratorium	-0.12	0.08	-0.18**	0.12
Identity diffusion	-0.20**	0.14*	-0.16*	0.06
Foreclosure	0.28***	-0.11	0.19**	-0.08
Functional independence	-0.50***	0.08	-0.49***	0.08
Emotional independence	-0.46***	0.08	-0.43***	0.10
Conflictual independence	0.48***	-0.40***	0.42***	-0.51***
Attitudinal independence	-0.44***	0.24***	-0.42***	0.33***

Only perceived relationships factors that were associated with the two types of schools that the students attended are presented.

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$.

examine this hypothesis, we conducted two two-way MANOVA (i.e., one analysis per parent). The type of school that the students attended (i.e., boarding and day schools) and gender were the independent variables, and the seven subscales of the RFMQ were the dependent variables (Mayseless et al., 1998). A significant effect of type of school was revealed on adolescents' perceived relationships with their mothers ($F_{7,209} = 3.52, p = .00, \eta^2 = 0.11$) but not on their perceived relationships with their fathers.

However, as is shown in Table 5, boarding school students reported a significantly lower sense of parental supervision/control by both parents.

The type of school that the students attended and gender had significant interaction effects on adolescents' relationships with their parents ($F_{7,209} = 3.69, p = .00, \eta^2 = 0.11$ and $F_{7,209} = 3.27, p = .00, \eta^2 = 0.10$ in relation to fathers and mothers, respectively). Independent analysis revealed a significant interaction effect between the two independent variables on closeness ($F_{1,215} = 5.51, p = .02, \eta^2 = 0.02$). Post-hoc analysis with Bonferroni correction revealed that boarding school boys reported insignificantly ($p = .06$) higher closeness to their fathers than did day school boys. For girls, no significant differences by school type were found with regard to closeness.

No statistically significant effect of type of school was found for the other subscales of the RFMQ.

Hypothesis 4

The fourth research hypothesis predicted that perceived relationships with parents will mediate the relationships between the type of school that students attended, separation from parents, and identity status.

We conducted bootstrapping to test the mediation hypothesis by using a macro that has been created by Preacher and Hayes (2004). Bootstrapping involves the repeated selection of samples of a given size from the research sample in a manner that is consistent with how samples were drawn from the original population. For each sample, the size of the indirect effect is calculated so that a confidence interval can be calculated for the effect size. When a value of 0 does not feature within a specified confidence interval (which is typically 95%), the indirect effect is considered to be statistically significant (Hayes, 2009). The models that were statistically significant are presented in

Table 5. Differences in perceived relationships with parents (autonomy and control) between day school and boarding school students.

Variable	Boarding school		Day school		Group comparison
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>F</i>
Supervision/Control by mother	2.25	0.07	2.57	0.07	$F_{1,215} = 10.08, p = .00, \eta^2 = 0.04$
Supervision/Control by father	2.18	0.07	2.50	0.07	$F_{1,215} = 10.10, p = .00, \eta^2 = 0.04$

Table 6. The statistically significant mediation models. The predictor variable was the type of school that the students attended.

Predicted variable	Mediator	Indirect effect	95% CI LL	95% CI UL
Models for both boys and girls				
Conflictual independence from father	Paternal control	-2.15	-3.64	-0.66
Attitudinal independence from father	Paternal control	0.86	0.17	1.82
Conflictual independence from mother	Maternal control	-3.20	-5.73	-1.13
Attitudinal independence from mother	Maternal control	1.38	0.51	2.34
Models for boys				
Functional independence from father	Emotional closeness to father	1.88	0.07	3.75
Attitudinal independence from father	Emotional closeness to father	1.39	0.01	3.19

Table 6. Across all the models, the predictor variable was the type of school that the students attended.

As shown in Table 6, perceived parental supervision/control mediated the association between the type of school that the students attended, and conflictual and attitudinal independence for both boys and girls. Further, among boys, perceived closeness to the father mediated the association between the type of school that the students attended, functional independence, and attitudinal independence from the father.

Discussion

The present study examined the association between the type of school that adolescents attended, separation from parents, identity status, and adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their parents. The findings showed that day school students reported a higher sense of parental control and higher levels of attitudinal separation from parents. Conversely, boarding school students reported a lower sense of parental control and a higher level of conflictual independence from both parents. Although they had not yet developed an independent position vis-à-vis their parents or significant others, they reported that they were free to make important life decisions without feeling guilty about their choices. Many of these adolescents were foreclosed, whereby they were committed to the value systems of their parents or significant others.

There is no consensus among researchers about the role that emotional autonomy plays in adolescent development. Is autonomy a part of the developmental process? In other words, is autonomy a component of the process by which adolescents separate from their parents and eventually develop their own sense of identity? Alternatively, is emotional autonomy a compensatory personality attribute that develops in response to unstable family relationships?

Some findings suggest that higher levels of autonomy are accompanied by lower levels of closeness and higher levels of conflict between adolescents and their parents (Collins & Laursen, 2004). However, other studies have shown that adolescents' level of emotional autonomy does not change during early adolescence. This supports the notion that the emergence of autonomy is not a developmental process. In addition, Parra, Oliva, and Sánchez-Queija (2015) found a negative association between autonomy, family cohesiveness, and life satisfaction. They concluded that emotional autonomy develops in response to incohesive family situations and that it is related to dissatisfaction with one's life. However, in the present study, we found that boys who attended boarding schools reported same levels of autonomy and closeness to their fathers as boys who attended day schools. It is possible that the lower levels of perceived parental control and supervision that result from residing in a boarding school foster a sense of emotional autonomy while also preserving close relationships.

This result is consistent with past findings that the maintenance of a sense of volition during this period of transformation is critical for successful separation (Van Petegem, Vansteenkiste, & Beyers, 2013). Conversely, the perceived parental control and supervision that results from residing at home can lead to an emotional distance between adolescents and their parents during this developmental stage. These findings concur with those of Martin, Papworth, Ginns, and Liem's (2014) study in which the relationships that boarding school and day school students shared with their parents were compared. They reported that boarding school students shared better relationships with their parents than day school students. They attributed these findings to the different contents of parent-child relationships. Since the parents of boarding school students are free from the task of monitoring their children's homework, they may be free to nurture the relationships that they share with their children. On the other hand, for parents of day school students, the burden of monitoring their children's homework may adversely influence the relationships that they share with their children.

In the present study, adolescent perceptions of the relationships that they share with their parents mediated the association between the type of schools that they attended, separation from parents, and identity status. Hence, differences in parent-adolescent relationships may explain the different developmental paths that were observed for the two groups of adolescents.

The first path has been described in the psychoanalytical literature (Blos, 1967; Erikson, 1968). Specifically, adolescence is a developmental period during which adolescents must emotionally distance themselves from their parents. This is the means by which adolescents achieve separation, free themselves of internalized parental figures, and achieve individuation and identity formation. Thus, the factors that are central to this path are conflict, rebellion, and emotional distance, which enhance the level of separation (Blos, 1967; De Goede et al., 2009). This is the most common path that is observed among high school students who live at home. Living at home entails high levels of parental control and provides opportunities for conflict between adolescent and parents. A second path, pertaining to the experiences of boarding school students, became apparent during the course of the present study. Specifically, these adolescents experience lower levels of parental control and conflict, thereby resulting in a sense of volition; this may be more important to boys than girls. Indeed, researchers have claimed that girls mature and define their identity through connectedness, whereas boys mature and define their identity through separation and autonomy (Josselson, 1996). These adolescents are characterized by a high level of conformism, and they accept commitment without exploration. This is evident from the fact that a higher number of adolescents were foreclosed.

This developmental trajectory has also been described in the literature (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006; Steinberg, 2001). These researchers have suggested that the process of “redefining” the power relations that exist between adolescents and their parents can occur alongside the maintenance of emotional closeness to one’s parents. Moreover, researchers have noted that autonomy and the establishment of positive interpersonal bonds, especially parental bonds, promote optimum development (Parra et al., 2015).

Since the late 1990s, an increasing number of studies have shown that adolescents who belong to the closure status (which has attributes that are similar to the foreclosure status) report high levels of psychological wellbeing. These reports have led researchers to conclude that this status is the final outcome of identity formation because the levels of psychological wellbeing that have been reported by these adolescents are identical to those of adolescents who belong to the identity achievement status (Meeus, Iedema, Helsen, & Vollebergh, 1999).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of the present study suggest that the physical distance between parents and adolescents who attend boarding school lowers interpersonal conflict. The absence of conflict contributes to the preservation of closeness and the development of psychological autonomy. These in turn allow adolescents to choose to be committed to the worldviews of their

parents, teachers, or significant others with a sense of freedom and psychological wellbeing.

Implications of the Present Findings

The present findings have practical implications for teachers, educational consultants, and family therapists who help adolescents and their families during the transition into high school and their decision to attend a boarding school. The results suggest that living in a residential school, which entails lower levels of parents' physical presence in adolescents' lives, is related to lower levels of parental control. Nevertheless, it is unrelated to lower levels of emotional closeness between adolescents and their parents. Adolescents who attended boarding schools were more likely to adopt the worldviews of their parents or other significant adults in their surroundings than their peers who lived at home. Our findings coincide with those from other works that found that residential schools contribute positively to adolescents' perceptions of their relationships with their parents. Whittaker and colleagues, who authored "The consensus statement of the international work group on therapeutic residential care," stated that strengthening the connections between the adolescent in care and his or her extended family should be one of the founding shared values of therapeutic residential care (2016). The present finding is specific to educational boarding schools. If similar findings emerge for adolescents who attend therapeutic boarding schools, the time that they spend in therapeutic schools can be used as an opportunity to facilitate the growth and establishment of a personal identity while also reducing parent-child conflicts, fulfilling this shared value and helping adolescents accept the messages of other significant adults.

These findings have substantial implications for parents. During adolescence, the perceived parental supervision/control that results from the mere physical presence of a parent has implications for the identity development and separation of an adolescent. Physical distance can help one refrain from engaging in parent-child conflicts and consequently facilitate the integration of parental messages into one's identity, thereby transferring the traditions of one generation to the next.

Limitations of the Present Study

Two groups of adolescents were compared in the present study. However, nuanced within-group differences were not examined. For example, the choice to attend a boarding school or day school may reflect differences in the family or individual characteristics of the adolescents, and these in turn may also influence their identity status. The present sample was

homogeneous with regard to the participants' religious and cultural features, family structure, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This homogeneity may have accounted for some of the findings of the present study, and thereby limit the generalizability of the study results. The present study was conducted using a sample of adolescents who were of the same age. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions about developmental trends. Indeed, the differences in the identity statuses of boarding school and day school students may be attributable to group differences that existed prior to their enrollment in their respective schools, or attenuated with the passage of time.

Suggestions for Future Research

The present study was conducted using a sample of culturally homogeneous adolescents. Accordingly, the schools were selected because their students belonged to similar socioeconomic statuses. An investigation of the same research questions that were addressed in the present study using different samples may augment the generalizability of the findings. In the present study, we examined students who attended educational rather than therapeutic boarding schools. Therefore, future research studies should test the validity of the present findings among students who attend therapeutic boarding schools. Finally, the present research study was conducted among twelfth-grade students who had already attended their respective schools for three years. To examine the relationships between primary place of residence, parent-adolescent relationships, separation from parents, and identity status, longitudinal studies must be conducted. Specifically, these variables should be examined at the time of enrollment in a boarding school and several years after graduation (e.g., during emerging adulthood).

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Declaration of interest

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