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Destructive Behavior Among Adolescents: The Role Of Social Integration In The Academic Institution

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationships between the social environment of the academic institution and the self-destructive behavior of the students within it. My approach combines elements of strain and social control theories to expand the concept of social integration and its importance in influencing adolescent deviant behavior; I include theories of identity, efficacy and locus of control, and self-concept in my theoretical model. My primary focus is on the importance of social integration in anchoring the individual into the social environment, providing him/her with pro-social sources for identity, efficacy, and social support. For students, the social environment of the school serves as a stage for public performance and construction of the adolescent identity.

Regression analyses of data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 reveal that students who participate in any extracurricular activity during their sophomore year are less likely to commit light delinquency, are less likely to get into fights at school, less likely to use marijuana and cocaine at school, and are more likely to experience feelings of empowerment and personal control during their senior year. Even after we consider differences in race, gender, SES, school characteristics and location, academic performance, student employment, student church attendance, parental involvement in school, and student involvement in the community, delinquent behavior during the senior year is greater for students who did not participate in *any* extracurricular activity during their sophomore year. Furthermore, these relationships *are even stronger* among students who also experienced feelings of powerlessness and negative self-concept during their sophomore years. Over the course of their high school career, these students stand to gain the most from participation in the school environment. Social integration in the school anchors students in a structured, ordered existence; the social support, norms, routine, and identity enhancement that accompany social integration provide buffers against sources of strain *and* outlets through which to cope with the stressful environment of the school.