

Teenagers who feel like they don't fit in less likely to attend college, sociologist finds

April 5 2011

(PhysOrg.com) -- High school students who feel they do not fit in are less likely to attend college -- particularly girls who are gay or obese -- according to new research from The University of Texas at Austin.

"Because social experiences in high school have such demonstrable effects on academic progress and attending college, the social concerns of teenagers are educational concerns for school," says sociologist Robert Crosnoe.

Crosnoe has completed one of the most comprehensive studies of the long-term effects on teenagers who say they don't fit in. He used national statistics from 132 high schools and spent more than a year inside a high school in Texas with 2,200 students, observing and interviewing teenagers. His findings will be published in his new book "Fitting In, Standing Out" (Cambridge University Press, April 11).

"Kids who have social problems — often because they are overweight or gay are at greater risk of missing out on going to college simply because of the social problems they have and how it affects them emotionally," says Crosnoe, a Sociology Department professor and Population Research Center affiliate. "Not because of anything to do with intelligence or academic progress."

Girls were 57 percent and boys 68 percent less likely than peers of the same race, social class and academic background to attend college if they had feelings of not fitting in, according to the study. Particularly at

risk were girls who are obese, who are 78 percent less likely to attend college than non-obese [girls](#), and those who are gay, who are 50 percent less likely to attend.

Crosnoe found feelings of not fitting in led to increased depression, marijuana use and truancy over time. Those coping strategies interrupt the education process — the classes teenagers take, the grades they make — which, in turn, affect their ability to go to college.

"[Teenagers](#) cope with the discomforts of not fitting in, including being bullied, in ways that are protective in the short term, but disastrous in the long term," says Crosnoe.

His research, funded by the National Institutes of Health and William T. Grant Foundation, has resulted in recommendations for how parents, teachers and policymakers can ensure that the social side of [high school](#) supports, rather than undermines, academics. It comes at a time when state lawmakers and federal policymakers are tackling bullying — often a cause of teenage social problems — as a national crisis.

Provided by University of Texas at Austin

Citation: Teenagers who feel like they don't fit in less likely to attend college, sociologist finds (2011, April 5) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-04-teenagers-dont-college-sociologist.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--