This article aims to examine determinants of social integration in the community among college students. Two-wave panel data from an undergraduate student sample (N = 310) was used to explore the effects of multiple sets of variables (personal, interpersonal, and situational) on social integration in the community. Structural equation analysis showed that personal (self-esteem and perceived stress) and situational (undesirable life events) variables made significant contributions to changes to social integration in the community. Implications of these and other findings are discussed. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

The expansion of social networks beyond relationships with family and peers is of great importance for the young person to access information and resources and to develop the social competencies required for participation in an adult society (Cotterell, 1996). This expansion of networks will also partly define the settings in which the young person interacts and develops his/her career and social identity (Fischer, 1982). As Youniss (1994) has suggested, the accumulated history of belonging to social systems and relationships will play an important role in the construction of the young person’s social identity. Additionally, Hirsch (1981), from a life-span viewpoint, believes that in order to achieve a repertoire of satisfactory social identities in adulthood, the young person's social network needs significant adjustments and expansion so as to accommodate new roles and to provide social identities more appropriate to the new developmental stage.

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During this period, strategies can be adopted for the development of autonomy that include reliance on sources of support, information, and role formation other than family and peers (see also Barrera & Li, 1996). This point also has been underlined by Cochran (1990), for whom during transition into adulthood, non-kin adults provide models for the future, challenging the young person to accept increased responsibility for self, significant others, and the community, and providing information about where to obtain services, training, and paid work. Given the importance of the adult non-kin as a bridge to different social fields, Cotterell has stressed the importance of paying attention to the process by which a social network is widening through the cultivation of new ties (Cotterell, 1994). For this author, the cultivation of these new ties may be achieved through community participation, in which the young person may interact with persons other than family and peers (Cotterell, 1996).

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT FOR THE YOUNG PERSON

Community ties offer a variety of settings and environments that can bring to the young person new information and exposure to a varied set of roles, subcultures, and thereby alternative sources of influence and support not likely to be available to them in their own social circles (Bö, 1990). In this sense, community involvement could serve as a bridge for different resources and opportunities that might be beneficial to the young person. The diversity of roles that can bring greater integration and participation in the community provides, in terms of Coser (1975), “a seabed of individual autonomy,” and the extent to which it brings exposure to a varied set of roles and access to new sources of support is important for identity formation and independence. The community, promoting access to different and new information and resources, is a valuable part of the social world of the young person. These community-related sources of information and support need to be recognized as potential socialization factors for young people who are still in an exploratory stage of career development. It also can contribute to an increase in social capital (Putnam, 2000), thus making a significant contribution to status attainment beyond personal resources. It is likely that young people with greater integration and participation in the community can extend their social network in more relevant ways to their career development than young people who are more isolated from the wider community. Knowledge about careers often is gained informally through community ties. Participation in community activities and organizations provide ties that constitute social resources that may provide opportunities to realize interests and gather relevant information for career development.

Participation in community activities and organizations may play an important role as an informational channel and can be viewed in terms of social resources available to the young person (whose role has been largely overlooked). For Cotterell (1996), the value of participation in voluntary organizations lies in the opportunity they provide for structured social interaction and, through this, for young people to gain a sense of connectedness and belongingness.

Research also has pointed out the benefits of college students’ engaging in community service activities (Jacoby et al., 1996; McKinney, 2002). As McKinney noted in her review, this research has focused on the development of college students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hackett, 1997; Yates & Youniss, 1996), as well as the organizational structures in higher education that enrich college students’ experiences while
performing community service (Altman, 1996; Zlotkowski, 1996). However, although the importance of the expansion of social ties beyond the primary network of family and peers and the benefits of greater participation in community activities and voluntary organizations for the successful transition to adulthood has been emphasized by a number of scholars, the factors that may promote and determine levels of integration and participation is an area of research clearly in need of more study.

DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Traditionally, research has paid attention to the protective functions and positive effects of social relationships on both physical and psychological well-being (e.g., House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Keicolt-Glaser, 1996). However, a more limited research effort has been directed toward examining the factors that determine the development of these relationships. As House et al. (1988) have pointed out in their influential review, almost no attention has been paid to social integration, networks, or supports as dependent variables. Determinants of social relationships research has focused traditionally on correlates of the provision, reception, and perception of social support from personal networks and intimate relationships, but rarely has examined ties to other groups and the larger community through which support also is available. Variables determining the development, structure, and functioning of social relationships are multiple and need to be analyzed at different levels—including personal, interpersonal, and situational (e.g., Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990; Haines, Hurlbert, & Beggs, 1996; Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990; Vaux, 1990).

Personal Determinants

Personal characteristics have been linked, both theoretically and empirically, to the development and functioning of social relationships. For example, empirical associations have been found between social relationship characteristics and variables such as personality, self-esteem, or distress (e.g., Eckenrode, 1983; Newcomb, 1990; Sarason et al., 1991; see also Pierce, Lakey, Sarason, & Sarason, 1997, for a review). In this sense, psychological distress may be associated with lower levels of community integration and participation, indicating that distressed people may feel inhibited in initiating or maintaining social contacts with others at the outermost layers of social relationships—relationships with neighbors, participation in social groups in the community, etc. (Newcomb & Keeffe, 1997). Other individual factors related to the personal agency, such as personal interests and motivation, also have been related to young people’s involvement in social action activities and voluntary groups and associations (Bynner, Joshi, & Tsatsas, 2000; Eden & Roker, 2002; Roker, Player, & Coleman, 1998).

Interpersonal Determinants

Research on the impact of college students’ close relationships on their interests in community involvement suggests that the quality of their attachment to parents and close personal friends is an important influence on their interest and motivation to get involved in community activities (see McKinney, 2002, for a revision). However, evidence of this link is not completely clear. Studies have found a positive relationship
between some characteristics such as high cohesiveness among family members or warm relationships with at least one parent (e.g., Clary & Miller, 1986; Rosenhan, 1970) and engagement in community service. Others have found that students who had some community service experience showed more secure attachments to close personal friends, but the attachment data with respect to parents revealed that the community service students were more likely to have either very high or very low attachment relationships with their parents (e.g., McKinney, 2002). In addition, research indicates that there is no specific relationship between a young person’s motivation to get involved in community activities and the involvement of family and/or friends in these activities (Eden & Roker, 2002; Roker et al., 1998).

**Situational Determinants**

Undesirable life events have been considered to be an important situational factor that may mobilize or deteriorate support resources (Schulz & Tomkins, 1990), and some studies suggest these kinds of events also may have a negative influence on social integration and participation in the community (Kaniasty & Norris, 1995). The role of life events on young people’s social adjustment also has been emphasized as a relevant factor on the route to adulthood (Bynner et al., 2000; Thomson, 2002).

**MEASURING SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE COMMUNITY**

The individual’s linkage to the social environment can be represented in three different layers of social relationships: the community, the social network, and the intimate and confiding relationships. The outer and most general layer consists of relationships with the larger community and reflects participation and involvement in the larger social structure. For Lin, Ye, and Ensel (1999), “the outer layer, the community, reflects the broad range in which individuals are engaged with others. In this layer, participation and involvement are reflected in involvement with community and voluntary organizations” (p. 345). Beyond the fact that social integration concerns itself with people’s involvement with institutions, voluntary associations, and the informal social life of their communities (Wellman, 1981), community involvement also offers a sense of belongingness to the larger social structure and indicates the extent to which the individual identifies with the outer and most general layer of social relationships (Lin, 1986). In this study, to tap both aspects of social integration in the community (actual participation and sense of connectedness), we used both a measure of community participation (e.g., participation in associations), as well as a measure of perception of voluntary organizations—social clubs, sport associations, etc.—as potential resources for emotional, guidance, or instrumental needs. This approach of measuring social integration allows combining objective measures of social integration (e.g., participation) with the functional aspects of this participation as seen by participants themselves (Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Williams, 1989; see Lin, Dumin, & Woelfel, 1986; Myers, 1999, for a similar approach).

This article aims to explore three levels of determinants (personal, interpersonal, and situational) of social integration in the community from a prospective approach to understand better potential avenues for the integration of college students into adult society. We hypothesized that variables at the personal, interpersonal, and situational level would significantly predict levels of social integration in the community.
Because few studies have included personal, interpersonal, and situational determinants in the same research design, we do not make specific predictions regarding the role of each of these sets of variables on social integration in the community. Instead, we seek to explore the relative contributions of these variables in predicting social integration in the community.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

The participants were 310 undergraduates participating to fulfill course requirements in several subjects of their last year of university in the behavioral-science disciplines. The organization of university and social life of average university students in Spain is substantially different from those in the US in that they usually attend classes in universities close to their hometown. Thus, according to official statistics from the University of Valencia (where our participants were recruited), 85.66% of the students in the university are from the Valencian province, which means that a vast majority of students either live in the Valencia metropolitan area or commute every day to and from their hometowns. There is also a small percentage of students that rent flats in Valencia with other students and stay there during the week, but they usually go back to their hometowns every weekend and on holidays. These students live away from home for five days a week at the most during the term. Finally, an insignificant percentage move away from home and stay away from home for long periods of time. This percentage is also dependable on the kind of studies. In the case of behavioral-science disciplines (where our participants came from), they are available in almost any University in Spain, so the need to make a significant move is almost non-existent. Due to the characteristic of the organization and social life of students, they do not usually lose contact with their communities and neighborhoods because of their university years.

Two waves of data were collected at the beginning (T1, first wave) and at the end (T2, second wave) of the academic semester, respectively. For the first wave, 372 participants fully completed a set of different self-reports. Of these 372 students, 310 provided valid data in the same measures six months later. Sociodemographic variables were gender, age, and household income. Age was measured in years ($M = 21.83$, $SD = 1.9$) and females were over-represented (61%) due to the gender distribution in the behavioral-science disciplines. Household income was measured on a 6-point scale, from (1) less than 6,000 euros/year to (6) more than 30,000 euros/year ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 2.01$).

**Measures**

All variables are scored so that a high score represents higher levels of the construct. Correlations among observed variables are presented in Table 1.

**Personal Determinants.** Measures of self-esteem and perceived stress were used as indicators of personal determinants (see Amato & Booth, 2001; Newcomb, 1990, for a similar approach). Variables representing personal determinants were measured at Time 1.
Perceived stress. A global measure of the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Merlomestein, 1983) was used. The PSS is a 14-item scale that measures the degree to which respondents appraised situations as stressful in the last month (e.g., “In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?”). Items were scored on a 1- to 5-point scale from never to very often. Coefficient alpha for perceived stress scale was 0.83.

Self-esteem. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess global self-esteem. The scale is a 10-item Likert scale with items answered on a four-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”). Coefficient alpha for the self-esteem scale was 0.78.

Interpersonal Determinants. Perceived social support from interpersonal transactions within the network of close relationships was used as an indicator of interpersonal determinants. Variables representing interpersonal determinants were measured at Time 1.

Perceived social support. Participants completed the Relationship-specific social-support questionnaire (RSS) designed to assess the availability of three support provisions from specific relationships in the support network (Gracia & Herrero, 2004). The RSS consists of a list of six items representing three support provisions (emotional, guidance, and instrumental support) for a list up to 12 significant others. Responses are rated on a 5-point scale from (1) never to (5) very often. Coefficient alpha for the scale was 0.90.

Situational Determinants. Undesirable life events experienced by participants was chosen as a measure of situational constraints in this study. Variables representing situational determinants were measured at Time 1.

Undesirable life events. A total of number of 33 undesirable life events selected from a 118 life-events list used by Lin, Dean, and Ensel (1986) in the Albany Health Survey was used. This list of 33 events comprised only those events perceived as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-esteem T1</td>
<td>25.55</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Stress T1</td>
<td>38.00</td>
<td>7.56</td>
<td>–334**</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Emotional support T1</td>
<td>49.30</td>
<td>21.56</td>
<td>.148***</td>
<td>–0.50</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Guidance support T1</td>
<td>46.16</td>
<td>20.79</td>
<td>.163**</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.939***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Instrumental support T1</td>
<td>54.01</td>
<td>24.28</td>
<td>.164**</td>
<td>–0.001</td>
<td>.952***</td>
<td>.935***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Undesirable life events T1</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>–120*</td>
<td>.188**</td>
<td>–0.19</td>
<td>–0.31</td>
<td>–0.04</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Voluntary organizations T2</td>
<td>–0.00</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.255***</td>
<td>–0.154</td>
<td>–.025</td>
<td>–0.02</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Community Participation T2</td>
<td>–0.00</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>.292***</td>
<td>–225***</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.091</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>.492***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Genderb</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>–0.022</td>
<td>.357***</td>
<td>.184**</td>
<td>.214***</td>
<td>.122*</td>
<td>–0.16</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>–0.073</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Income c T1</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.078</td>
<td>–257***</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>–0.05</td>
<td>–0.073</td>
<td>.059</td>
<td>–0.057</td>
<td>–196***</td>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistics are for change scores.
*1 = male; 2 = female.
*1 = less than 6000 euros/year; 6 = more than 32,000 euros/year.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.
undesirable by at least 80% of the respondents in Lin et al.’s (1986) study. Events were referred to the last six months. Internal consistency analysis for the event lists was not appropriate (Cohen, 1988).

*Social Integration in the Community.* Based on a 10-item questionnaire of social integration in the community (Gracia, Garcia, & Musitu, 1995), two dimensions were assessed as potential resources for emotional, informational, or instrumental needs: community participation and voluntary organizations.

*Community participation.* The Community Participation Scale is a 6-item scale that measures the degree in which respondents are involved in social activities in the community (e.g., “I collaborate with organizations and associations in my community”). Coefficient alpha was 0.82. Community participation was measured at both Time 1 and Time 2. Correlation between T1 and T2 measures was $r = 0.68$ ($p < 0.001$).

*Voluntary organizations.* The Voluntary Organizations Scale is a 4-item scale that measures the respondent’s perception of voluntary groups and organizations such as recreational and sports clubs and services, political or civic associations in the community, etc., as potential resources for emotional, informational, or instrumental needs (e.g., “I could share my problems in these organizations”). Coefficient alpha was 0.83. Support from voluntary organizations was measured at both Time 1 and Time 2. Correlation between T1 and T2 measures was $r = 0.45$ ($p < 0.001$).

In our initial analysis, an attempt was made to include measures of Community Participation and Voluntary Organizations at T1 in the model. However, their inclusion in the analysis resulted in biased parameter estimates and eliminated any effects of the determinants at T1 in predicting Community Participation and Voluntary Organizations at T2. Due to multicollinearity, as seen by variance inflation factors greater than 10, these results were probably misleading. The approach of measuring residualized change seemed to be more appropriate here (Diggle, Liang, & Zeger, 1994). The residualized change score in our study represents the variance in T2 Social Integration that cannot be predicted by T1 Social Integration, net of other variables assessed at T1. The latter avoids the problem of T1 and T2 variables being highly correlated, thus distorting the effects of the other variables on Social Integration.

**RESULTS**

A structural equation model was estimated using Bentler’s (1995) EQS structural equation program. Personal, Interpersonal, Situational determinants, as well as Social Integration in the Community, were introduced in the model as latent variables. For testing the single contribution of each determinant to Social Integration in the Community, personal, interpersonal, and situational determinants had unidirectional paths to Social Integration in the Community while they were correlated among themselves (see Figure 1). Additionally, gender and household income were introduced in the model as covariates. To do so, paths from gender and household income to any observed variable in the model were estimated freely. Gender and household income were allowed to freely covariate. Paths from determinants to Social Integration in the Community can be interpreted as the effects of determinants on community integration once the effect of gender and household income are taken into account.

Due to the departure from multivariate normality (Mardia’s normalized estimate for multivariate Kurtosis = 5.34), the scaled Satorra-Bentler $\chi^2$ was used. This estimator is robust, from small to severe departures from multinormality, and was used in
Figure 1. Determinants of Social Integration in the Community among college students. Complete covariate-adjusted standardized model. Numbers in small circles represent the error variance. Covariates not shown. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < .001.
the calculation of fit indexes and parameters statistical significance. This model fit the data well: scaled S-B $\chi^2$ (14, $N = 310$) = 27.63, $p = 0.016$, CFI = 0.99, Robust CFI = 0.99, GFI = 0.98, AGFI = 0.93, RMSEA = 0.056 (90% confidence interval 0.024, 0.087). Due both to the timing of the variables and our interest in examining the single contribution of each determinant to Social Integration in the Community, neither alternative nor equivalent models were found to be of interest for the present research (MacCallum, Wegener, Uchino, & Fabrigar, 1993). No further modifications were made to increment fit. Results for this model are shown in Table 2 (unstandardized estimates) and Figure 1 (standardized estimates).

As can be seen in the second column of Table 2, the relationships of each indicator to its latent variable were all significant ($p < 0.001$). In the third and fourth columns, we show the relationship of the covariates to the observed variables. According

Table 2. Unstandardized Maximum Likelihood Parameter Estimates, Standard Errors, and Probability Associated$^a$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter Estimates</th>
<th>Factor Loadings</th>
<th>Effect of Gender</th>
<th>Effect of Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal determinants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived stress (T1)</td>
<td>1$^b$</td>
<td>4.808***</td>
<td>−1.120***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.792)</td>
<td>(0.309)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-esteem (T1)</td>
<td>0.446***</td>
<td>−0.041</td>
<td>0.191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.086)</td>
<td>(0.334)</td>
<td>(0.128)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpersonal determinants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support (T1)</td>
<td>1$^b$</td>
<td>8.279***</td>
<td>0.821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.421)</td>
<td>(1.025)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidance support (T1)</td>
<td>0.962***</td>
<td>8.791***</td>
<td>0.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.210)</td>
<td>(0.985)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental support (T1)</td>
<td>1.130***</td>
<td>7.242**</td>
<td>0.091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.025)</td>
<td>(2.721)</td>
<td>(1.169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situational determinants</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undesirable life events (T1)</td>
<td>1$^b$</td>
<td>−0.151</td>
<td>0.113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.196)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social integration in the community</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community participation (T2)</td>
<td>0.477***</td>
<td>0.433</td>
<td>0.193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.090)</td>
<td>(0.147)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary organizations (T2)</td>
<td>1$^b$</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.557)</td>
<td>(0.223)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relations Among Latent Variables</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
<th>Situational</th>
<th>Social Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Determinants</td>
<td>Determinants</td>
<td>Determinants</td>
<td>in the Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal determinants</td>
<td>−</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.653***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.158)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal determinants</td>
<td>17.094**</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>−0.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5.997)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational determinants</td>
<td>−1.970**</td>
<td>1.452</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>0.458*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.648)</td>
<td>(2.221)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.205)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$Robust standard errors are listed parenthetically.

$^b$Fixed to 1.00 during estimation.

$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. 
to their standardized estimates (not shown in Table 2), females tended to experience higher levels of stress ($\beta = 0.32, p < 0.001$), as well as higher levels of emotional ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.001$), guidance ($\beta = 0.21, p < 0.001$), and instrumental support ($\beta = 0.15, p < 0.01$). Household income was negatively related to perceived stress ($\beta = -0.17, p < 0.001$). Neither gender nor household income were significantly related to Social Integration in the Community.

Given the greater relational orientation of females (see Table 2), we further analyzed if interpersonal determinants had a prominent role in influencing social integration for females relative to males. To do this, we conducted multigroup analyses for males and females. Two models were tested. In the unrestricted model, all of the parameter estimates (factor loadings and correlation among latent variables) were freely estimated across gender. In the restricted model, we constrained each of the factor loadings, as well as the structural paths and covariances to be invariant across gender. If the chi-square of the restricted model were significantly larger than the chi-square of the unrestricted model, the assumption of invariance would not be tenable. These two models showed statistical equivalence ($\Delta \chi^2(8) = 8.34, p = 0.401$), indicating that the direct effect of interpersonal determinants on Social Integration was non-significant for both males and females.

At the bottom of Table 2 we show the relationship among latent variables. Looking first at the relationship among determinants, the only non-significant relationship was found for the situational–interpersonal variables. On the other hand, higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of perceived stress (personal determinants) were related to higher levels of perceived support (interpersonal determinants) ($p < 0.01$). Additionally, these personal determinants were negatively related to levels of undesirable life events (situational determinants) ($p < 0.01$). In the last column of this part of Table 2, we show the contribution of each determinant to Social Integration in the Community over time. Again, personal and situational determinants showed a statistically significant relationship, whereas interpersonal determinants showed no effect. Higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of stress (personal determinants) were linked to higher levels of Social Integration in the Community ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, undesirable life events were positively related to Social Integration in the Community ($p < 0.05$).

**DISCUSSION**

Participation in community activities and support exchange in voluntary organizations involves social trading and social exchange that can help to extend the young person’s social network, can increase their sources of information and support, and can play an important role in the development of their autonomy, careers, and social identity. For Cotterell (1996), it represented a key source of interaction for the developing person and could stimulate young people to think about their future from an adult perspective.

Results from our data set showed that personal determinants (higher levels of self-esteem and lower levels of perceived stress) were positively related to levels of Social Integration in the Community over time. In line with Newcomb and Keefe’s research (1997), our results seem to confirm that young people with low self-esteem and high levels of perceived stress may feel inhibited from initiating or maintaining social contacts and activities in community organizations. In turn, these results suggest that promoting the personal adjustment (in terms of increasing positive self-regard and cognitive management of perceived stress) during this critical period may be an
adequate path to increase community participation and facilitate access to community sources of support.

While our results indicate a strong relationship between personal adjustment and Social Integration in the Community over time, no significant relationship has been found between interpersonal determinants and Social Integration in the Community. Our findings suggest that the presence of a supportive network of close ties among college students is not associated with Social Integration in the Community over time. These findings are in the same vein as those reported by Chipuer (2001), who did not find a significant relationship among parents and/or peers attachment (a measure akin to strong tie support) and a measure of neighborhood loneliness (e.g., “I am lonely in my neighborhood”) in 9- to 13-year-old children. Similarly, Lin (1986) did not find a significant relationship between a measure of community participation and a measure of strong tie support in adult population. Additionally, he found to be negative both the relationship of community support and the frequency of interactions with neighbors with strong tie support (note that although non-significant, we found a negative relationship between interpersonal determinants and social integration in the community). This indicates a possible separation of social worlds during this period. In Wellman’s view (1981, 1992), strong ties linked network members to persons of similar backgrounds who move in the same social circles as they do, but the more ramified weak ties linked them to other, dissimilar, social circles. Relationships within the network of weak ties probably belong to social circles different from the network of close and intimate relationships, and they are likely to provide information and resources not redundant with the information and resources available in the network of strong ties. Although both networks can be used, they are probably used for different purposes and are not necessarily related.

With respect to situational determinants, we found a positive influence of situational determinants on Social Integration in the Community, suggesting that during this developmental period, undesirable life events may mobilize the young person to seek new social ties and support resources in the community. Widening the social network and gaining access to wider community resources may play an important role on the young person’s resilience. As Gottlieb and Sylvestre noted (1994), there is something about participation in voluntary organizations that places young people at an adaptive advantage. In this sense, Garmezy’s review (1983) mentions that among the protective factors that distinguished stress-resistant young people from those adversely affected by stress is the presence of external sources of support. Examples of these external sources of support included participation in and commitment to activities that enable them to physically separate from the family and gain recognition, stability, a sense of achievement, and participation in a supportive social agency. This observation further testifies to the desirability of promoting stable relationships within the community, increasing integration and participation.

Another possible, yet complementary, explanation is that the resources available in the close support network cannot respond to particular demands. These resources may be located elsewhere, that is, in social circles beyond the close network of strong ties. Wellman’s work (1981) provides theoretical support for this viewpoint. For this author, “while there is some evidence that stronger ties (however measured) provide more support, weaker ties often provide more diverse support because they access a greater number and variety of social circles . . . weak ties can be unique channels to new, diverse sources of information, often proving more useful than strong ties . . .
with their links to other social circles, such weak ties can also introduce an individual into these circles as social situations change” (p. 186).

Resources accessed through individuals who are not part of a central social network tend to expand access to novel resources unavailable through close relationships. As Darling, Hamilton, and Niego (1994) suggested, the nature of these relationships also may facilitate the young person to explore areas that are different from aspects of the self expressed in other contexts and to maintain access to instrumental resources in the absence of a strong emotional bond and without reliance on good interpersonal skills.

Overall, although our research should be considered of an exploratory nature, it has illustrated the importance of taking into account simultaneously in the same research design variables working at different levels to better understand determinants of social integration in the community among college students. Such an approach stresses the interconnectedness between different levels of variables and offers a richer understanding of the influences on Social Integration in the Community among young college students who participated in this study. Further research will need to explore other potentially relevant variables involved in such a critical ecological transition, such as different levels of education, early access to the labor market, or the influence of different ethnical or cultural backgrounds.

REFERENCES


