

## **Theory**

A successful society will create social institutions that integrate and regulate individuals within their social world. To the extent this occurs, social dysfunction is reduced. Durkheim's initial conceptualization of religion as both integrative and regulative was hypothesized to reduce suicide rates, and other social manifestations of anomie (Durkheim, ([1897] 1915).

Integration and regulation are accomplished through the development of religiously constituted moral communities. Theoretical and empirical research provides three mechanisms by which this occurs. First, individuals form and join moral communities stemming from the social need for interaction, ritual practice, and the attribution of meaning to religious symbols (Durkheim, ([1912] 1995): 419). This creates social communities among those who share those common practices and assumptions.

Second, individuals acquire "social capital" through religious through selection of, and participation in, group involvement that offers them a place in a religiously regulative and supportive environment (Coleman 1988).

Finally, religiously constituted moral communities are self-regulating and self-sustaining (Ellison and George 1994; Regnerus 2003). The more engaged individuals are with others in their religious schools, churches, or church-based civic organizations, the higher their level of social interaction, and the greater the degree to which group norms generate compliance and well-being among group members (Ellison 1994; Welch, Tittle, and Petee 1991).

These types of moral communities have been shown to exert a positive effect on individual behavior in at least two ways. As indicated above, normative consensus in

moral communities reduces the likelihood of individual members engaging in deviant behavior such as underage drinking, illegal drug use, or non-marital sexual activity (Brown, Parks, Zimmerman, & Phillips 2001; Cochran and Beeghley 1991; Cochran, Chamlin, Beeghley, and Fenwick 2004; Ford and Kadushin 2002; Jeynes 2001; Nelson & Rooney 1982). However, moral communities also generate and reinforce religious homogamy, which then strengthens marital and parent-child relationships, thereby also reducing tendencies toward deviant behavior (Ortega, Whitt, and Williams 1988; Pearce and Axinn 1998). Moreover, it is the precisely social dynamics of moral communities that exert a greater level of suppression of social deviance than simply individual expressions of religiosity or even strongly conservative religious beliefs.

This study is an attempt to clarify the impact of specific religious contexts in the suppression of deviant behavior. The Christian universities in this study not only physically exist, they exhibit the characteristics of moral communities listed above. They provide students with opportunities for academic and social interaction within a religiously constituted social organization. Religious beliefs that constitute the denominations with which they are affiliated are clearly stated. Ritual, through corporate worship and prayer meeting opportunities are well known and well attended. Norms of Christian morality are reinforced through contextual religious homogamy, socialization, surveillance, and threat of punishment.

Therefore we hypothesize: The social context of the three Christian universities will produce lower rates of social deviance than will specific measures of religiosity or Christian Fundamentalism.