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# A Qualitative Look at Relationships and Social Support Within Criminogenic Environments

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## ABSTRACT

### A QUALITATIVE LOOK AT RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL SUPPORT WITHIN CRIMINOGENIC ENVIRONMENTS

By

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August 2018

Committee Chair: Dr. Volkan Topalli

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Social Support is both a risk or protective factor when determining a person's likelihood of committing criminal acts. Traditionally viewed, it is beneficial in people's lives. However, depending on whether the source or provider of support is a criminal or a non-offender it can have either a positive or negative impact on the recipient's life. This study attempted to ascertain the effect of an additional related concept – the “message” or content of support – when measuring crime outcomes related to social support. Since people in criminogenic environments are subject to competing cultural demands that sometimes overlap (see e.g., Anderson, 1999), it has been postulated that even adherents to mainstream value systems in these environments might present a criminogenic message, while criminals might present a non-criminogenic message. In addition, such environments may engender specific forms of social support not employed in other environments. To determine the extent to which the content of messaging matters apart from the source, I engaged in semi-structured interviews with active offenders, asking them about their perceptions of social support from conforming and non-conforming others and what messages they believed were conveyed. They were also asked about their

own intent regarding the messaging and the social support they provided to others. Based on these interviews, it was determined that the message presented could be different than the corresponding identity of the provider of social support, and that these could result in differential effects on attitudes toward offending. In the future, the social support message and the identity of the social support provider should be viewed as separate concepts and measured and analyzed apart to determine their individual effects on future offending and desistance.

A Qualitative Look at Relationships and Social Support Within Criminogenic  
Environments

By

Mindy O'Hara Bernhardt

A Dissertation Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree  
of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the  
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies  
of  
Georgia State University

Georgia State University

2018



## ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Committee. It has been approved and accepted by all members of that committee, and it has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Criminal Justice and Criminology in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies of Georgia State University.

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August, 2018

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## Chapter I: Introduction

There are many risk and protective factors attributed to the engagement in and desistance from criminal activity. These may be a consequence of one's personality, including such factors as self-control (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990) or coping skills (Agnew, 1992). They can also be attributed to the nature of relationships in one's life, such as exposure to certain parenting practices (Arthur, Hawkins, Pollard, Catalano, & Baglioni, 2002), association with delinquent or conventional peers (Haynie & Osgood, 2005), or quality of intimate partner bonds (Laub & Sampson, 1993, 2003; Simons, Stewart, Gordon, Conger, & Elder, 2002). They can additionally arise from one's interactions with institutions, such as school (Thornberry, Lizette, Krohn, Smith, & Porter, 2003) or employment (Baron & Hartnagel, 1997). Interestingly, many of the above factors can be both risk and protective factors for engagement in criminal behavior, depending on the way they vary and interact with other factors within an individual's life (see e.g., Arthur et al., 2002). The factors listed are by no means exclusive to one another or exhaustive,<sup>1</sup> and are often more nuanced than presented here.

Social support is stereotypically associated with emotional encouragement and financial help, and researchers most often view it as a protective factor for criminality. However, this basic definition fails to account for where such support comes from and assumes that it can only encourage prosocial behaviors and dissuade antisocial ones. In fact, social support is a highly complex concept with many dimensions and potential

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<sup>1</sup> For a more complete list for see Agnew, 2005; Arthur et al., 2002; or Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992.

levels of study (Cullen, 1994; Colvin, Cullen, & Vander Ven, 2002) and may thereby encourage or discourage offending (Colvin et al., 2002).

### **Current Study**

To better understand the multifaceted effects of social support on offenders' decisions to participate in or avoid crime, it is important to speak to them (see, Feeney, 1986) about their perceptions of social support and their relationship with others. In the current study, I interviewed 26 active offenders from Atlanta, Georgia to explore how they viewed their relationships with others and how they perceived and responded to different forms of social support. Across the past few decades and in numerous research projects, offenders from disadvantaged, urban neighborhoods have participated in interview-based research about their lifestyles, crimes, and relationships (see e.g., Copes, 2003; Copes & Hochstetler, 2003; Jacobs, Topalli, & Wright, 2000; Miller, 2001, 2008; Shover, 1996; Topalli, 2005; Topalli, Wright, & Fornango, 2002; Wright & Decker, 1994).

In the present study, these types of interviews helped determine how offenders view their relationships and the ways in which said relationships generally encourage or discourage criminality, and they provided a greater understanding of social support in criminogenic environments. More specifically, new types of social support specific to criminals were discovered, and it was determined that the source of social support (i.e., criminal or conforming) could provide messaging that contained content incongruent with their own value system.

## **Social Support**

At the most basic level, social support provides something (tangible or intangible) to a person that often helps them succeed or cope (Lin, 1986). It need not come only from another person, such as a family member, but institutions, such as governments, can also provide it (Cullen, 1994). The United States, as a whole, is less institutionally supportive than other Western nations (Cao, Zhao, Ren, & Zhao, 2010; Currie, 1989). Within the U.S., some communities (e.g. inner-cities) have even less institutional support available to residents (DeFronzo, 1983; Pratt & Cullen, 2005). For these reasons, and to simplify the exploration of concepts, the focus of this study was on interpersonal social support, particularly among offenders operating in disadvantaged communities.

Traditionally defined, researchers have shown interpersonal social support to reduce criminality (Alexander, 1973; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Pinquart, 2017; Wills & Cleary, 1996; Wright & Cullen, 2001). However, the opposite effect accrues when it is delivered erratically (Colvin et al., 2002; Kurtz, Linnemann, & Green, 2014) or from criminals (Ardelt & Day, 2002; Brezina & Azimi, 2018). In addition to direct effects of social support, there are also a variety of indirect effects related to crime (Farrington, Ohlin, & Wilson, 2012; Scarpa & Haden, 2006; Simons, Wu, Conger, & Lorenz, 1994), as well as gendered effects. For instance, women are more likely to give emotional support than men (Ray, 2016; Wellman & Wortley, 1999), and are also less likely to recidivate when receiving emotional and/or instrumental support (Taylor, 2015a).

Colvin et al. (2002) state that it is not only the type of person who provides the social support but also the message behind the support that matters. However, most

previous studies assume the valence of the messaging behind social support (i.e., whether it encourages or discourages positive behavior) is correlated with the role or identity of the person providing the support. Martinez & Abrams (2013) alluded to the notion that this orientation may be inaccurate by showing a duality in both peer and family relationship outcomes. It is possible that assuming the message and identity match ignores those cases where mainstream individuals may encourage negative behavior (as when a mother puts pressure on their offspring to help her pay her bills, pushing them purposefully or inadvertently- to break the law to do so) or where other offenders may encourage mainstream behavior (as when a drug dealer discourages his children from entering a criminal life). The current study addresses this gap in our understanding of how social support affects the behavior of offenders.

An individual's social networks (who they associate with) changes over time (Kossinets & Watts, 2006; Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner, & Neyer, 2012), and this affects what types of social support they receive (Shaw, Krause, Liang, & Bennett, 2007). While this is often the result of adding or subtracting relationships over time, it is also important to recognize that the nature of relationships change throughout the life course (Holt, Mattanah, & Long, 2018; Rutter, 1987; Tsai, Telzer, & Fuligni, 2013). However, much of the research focusing on adults has evaluated how new relationships or the loss of existing ones affects social support and crime (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Kazemian, 2007). Aside from changes in relationships over time, it is also important to examine the developmental context wherein these relationships develop. This is important because it is likely that the expectations and perceptions of social support in different contexts would lead to different outcomes.

## **Criminogenic Contexts and Culture**

Individuals in disadvantaged contexts have different lifestyles and value systems from people in middle-class society (Anderson, 1999; see also Wolfgang, Ferracuti, & Mannheim, 1967; Stewart & Simons, 2006). Within disadvantaged areas, law-breaking and law-abiding citizens also differ in their lifestyles (see Anderson, 1999; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994). Beyond general lifestyle differences, the relationship structures differ from those in the mainstream as well. Individuals in these areas are more likely to have multiple partners, be unwed, be a single parent, and have shallow relationships with others (Anderson, 1999; Carlson & Furstenberg, 2006; Cherlin, 2010; Froyum Roise, 2004; Lichter, Sassler, & Turner, 2016; Raley & Sweeney, 2007). There is also a higher crime rate within poor, urban areas than other parts of the country (Chamlin & Cochran, 1997; Pratt & Cullen, 2005). Taken together, if lifestyles and relationship structures are different, then it is likely that social support would manifest differently in these areas with potentially profound and unexpected effects on criminality.

According to Anderson (1999), there are two competing value systems – street and decent – within inner-cities. Adherents to decent values attempt to emulate mainstream values by following the law, valuing legal work, and monitoring and raising children to appreciate and participate in the education system. The street value system, which lionizes violence, individuality, and a rejection of mainstream social mores, is dominant in disadvantaged public contexts and so even decent individuals need to learn how to respond to and navigate within them. Thus, the transmission of “the code of the street” understanding is not only from street people to other street people, but from decent people to their own family members. This transmission of social values and tactics

for survival is itself a form of social support, within the context of “the streets” and “the code” and has the potential to create numerous unintended and counterintuitive outcomes. When a decent parent teaches their children to avoid starting fights but to never back down from a challenge, this may have the effect of reifying tough behavior that would be counter-productive later in life when that child seeks to find success in the mainstream world. In this way, social support from a decent person, designed to promote survival on the streets, may do so in the short-term but at the cost of encouraging street behavior in the long term.

It is very difficult to predict how social support would indirectly affect the type of value system a person would adopt since a variety of factors can affect orientation identification, including relationships (Piquero et al., 2012), family orientation (Moule, Burt, Stewart, & Simons, 2015), racial socialization (Burt, Simons, & Gibbons, 2012), and gang membership (Matsuda, Melde, Taylor, Freng, & Esbensen, 2013). Without incorporating these variables into the analytic structure, it is difficult to determine the counterintuitive effects of social support provided to offenders. One way to do this is to talk to actual offenders about the kinds of support they receive from significant others – family, friends, and intimate partners – in their lives.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Social Support Definitions

Various disciplines –including epidemiology, psychology, sociology, social work, and criminology – find utility in researching social support, with each identifying different outcomes for its presence or absence. Further, each discipline identifies different dimensions germane to the measurement of social support. Though the concept of social support dates back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Baldwin, 1910; Cannon, 1942; Main, 1946), it gained a resurgence in the 1970's when Cassel (1976) and Cobb (1976) reviewed the research and recognized a new use for an old concept. Cassel (1976) believed it would be better to strengthen social supports rather than reduce all potential stressors in an environment. He argued that social support helps a person adjust to stressors in one's environment when the most important people in their life provide information and help. Similarly, Cobb (1976), also believed that social support buffered stress, by serving as information that leads to a person feeling loved and cared for, esteemed, valued, and socially connected to a network of mutual obligation.

Subsequent researchers started to look more at the specific interpersonal relationships and acts involved in helping others, leading to the identification of specific types of social support. Gottlieb (1978) identified twenty-six different categories of informal helping behaviors that he grouped into four classes; emotionally sustaining behaviors, problem-solving behaviors, indirect personal influence, and environmental action. Levy (1979) found twenty-nine categories which he grouped into nine schemes; empathy, mutual affirmation, explanation, sharing, morale building, self-disclosure, positive reinforcement, personal goal setting, and catharsis.

The next decade saw a narrowing of the classes of social support behaviors and needs and a conceptual expansion focused on the characteristics of support. For instance, Cohen & McKay (1984) listed four types of social supports in their definition; esteem, belonging, information, and tangible, and House & Kahn (1985) had three; emotional, informational, and tangible. Lin (1986) defined social support as “the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners (p.18).” Vaux (1988) had a similar definition but added that formal institutions could provide social support as well. From this point, many more researchers in various disciplines continued to refine and expand the definition and types of social support to better match each area of study.<sup>1</sup>

Within criminology, Cullen (1994) used Lin’s (1986) definition and added Vaux’s (1988) formal sources when introducing social support as an important organizing concept for criminology. Interestingly, he did not provide a justification for using Lin’s definition, but presumably this was due to it being parsimonious and commonly used elsewhere. The addition of Vaux’s (1988) notions of formal social support allowed Cullen to include aspects of the criminal justice system to the study of social support. Due to its consistent use and subsequent prevalence in criminology, this definition and expansion was the conceptual base for the current research.

**General Types of Social Support.** According to Lin (1986), social support addresses two types of needs; *instrumental* and *expressive*.<sup>2</sup> Instrumental support may include material and financial aid, providing information and guidance, and facilitating

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood (2009); Cutrona, Suhr, & MacFarlane (1990); Streeter & Franklin, 1992; Berkman, 1984.

<sup>2</sup> As could be seen earlier, there are many ways to separate and categorize the types and sources, but in keeping with Lin’s (1986) definition, I use his formulations.

connections for a person's advancement in society (Colvin et al., 2002; Cullen, 1994; Lin, 1986). In this light, instrumental support "involves the use of the relationship as a means to a goal (Lin, 1986, p.20)." By contrast, expressive support "involves the use of the relationship as an end as well as a means (Lin, 1986, p.20)." Expressive support provides socialization and satisfies other emotional needs, such as the "the sharing and ventilation of emotions and the affirmation of one's and others' self-worth and dignity (Colvin et al., p.24)." Basically, a relationship with expressive support provides individuals with feelings of emotional support (e.g., love and companionship). Various individuals and institutions in a person's life can provide both instrumental and expressive support.

**Sources of Social Support.** While social support can have many sources, there are two basic levels; *institutional* and *interpersonal*. Institutional support comes from larger entities, such as one's community, or local or national government. These can include formal governmental entities such as schools and courts or more informal sources such as community groups and neighborhood institutions. Interpersonal support, as most often conceived, is a one-on-one experience with someone who is a trusted individual, such as a family member, friend, or spouse (Cullen, 1994).

**Interrelationship between Types and Sources of Social Support.** Putting the types and sources of social support together, there are four traditional combinations of social support that an individual can receive. First is *institutional instrumental* support. Some examples include government assistance, public education, and public works programs. Second is *institutional expressive* support, which can include rituals performed to provide a sense of community belonging or national pride such as reciting the pledge of allegiance in schools and pledging an organization like a fraternity or sorority. Third is

*interpersonal instrumental* support, which may include providing someone with a place to live, giving them money, or explaining or demonstrating how to perform a task that may help them achieve self-sufficiency. Fourth is *interpersonal expressive*, which provides individuals with emotional encouragement. Some examples include listening to problems, providing physical intimacy, and being a shoulder to cry on.

Social support has proved effective in reducing criminality through institutional (Alzheimer, 2008; Pratt & Godsey, 2003) and interpersonal forms (Wright & Cullen, 2001). However, compared to other Western nations, the United States is a less institutionally supportive society overall (Cao et al., 2010; Currie, 1989), and researchers have implicated this in the elevated crime rates within the nation (Brathwaite, 1989; Cullen, 1994; Currie, 1989; Pratt & Cullen, 2005; Pratt & Godsey, 2003). Poor, urban areas within the United States where institutional social support is particularly weak are at an even greater disadvantage and, expectedly, experience overall higher crime rates (Bogges, Powers, & Chamberlain, 2018; Chamlin & Cochran, 1997; Cullen, 1994; Currie, 1989; DeFronzo, 1983; Pratt & Cullen, 2005; Sullivan, 1989). Disadvantaged neighborhoods do not evidence consistent institutional social support and when individuals in these areas do receive assistance it is often insufficient (Foley, 2011), making it even more important for people who reside there to have strong interpersonal support to help deter their criminality. As such, I focused heavily on interpersonal social support when interviewing offenders for this project.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In addition, this choice was made for simplicity in conceptualization and collection of new social support concepts.

## **Outcomes of Interpersonal Social Support**

In general, social support (as traditionally defined) can have many positive effects on physical and mental health (Hakulinen et al., 2016; Taylor, 2007). For example, it has been shown to reduce depression and anxiety (Fleming, Baum, Gisriel, & Gatchel, 1982; Lin, Ye, & Ensel, 1999; Rueger, Malecki, Pyun, Aycock, & Coyle, 2016; Son, Lin, & George, 2008; Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997), lower the risk of death (Burr, Han, Lee, Tavares, & Mutchler, 2017; Seeman, 1996), increase self-esteem (Gardner & Cutrona, 2004; Li, Han, Wang, Sun, & Cheng, 2018), help with transitions in life (Cutrona & Russell, 1987), and buffer stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona, 1986a; Lin & Ensel, 1989; McInnis, McQuaid, Matheson, & Anisman, 2017; Thoits, 1995; Viswesvaran, Sanchez, & Fisher, 1999) even in a non-stressful life (Wethington & Kessler, 1986).

Researchers have also shown interpersonal social support to be effective at reducing deviance including substance abuse (Alexander, 1973; Andersen, 2018; Gardner & Cutrona, 2004; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Wills & Cleary, 1996; Wright & Cullen, 2001). However, it can also increase delinquency in some circumstances, as when it comes from deviant others or when delivered erratically (Ardelt & Day, 2002; Brezina & Azimi, 2018; Haynie, 2002; Kurtz et al., 2014). Whether social support is a protective or risk factor traditionally depends on its consistency, type, and origin (Colvin et al., 2002).

**Delivery Schedule and Crime Outcomes.** The type and source of social support are not the only dimensions that affect the likelihood of criminality. Another, briefly mentioned by Cullen (1994) and expanded on by Colvin et al. (2002) is the social support delivery schedule – the frequency, regularity, and reliability of expected social support

from others. This is on a continuum, ranging from perfectly consistent to erratic. When a person is experiencing consistent support, they believe (and are therefore confident) that they will continue to receive it from other people and institutions (Colvin et al., 2002) as needed. To the contrary, someone experiencing erratic social support feels that support is not predictable and they cannot depend on it (Colvin et al., 2002).

Consistent social support provides several beneficial effects. Its reliability potentially promotes a sense of trust and thereby serves to strengthen social bonds (Colvin et al., 2002; Wyse, Harding, & Morenoff, 2014), increase altruism (Chamlin & Cochran, 1997), enable delay of gratification, (Liu, Wang, & Liao, 2016), and reduce strain and anger while improving self-control (Baron, 2015; Beaver, Boutwell, & Barnes, 2014; Cullen, Wright, & Chamlin, 1999; Hochstetler, DeLisi, & Pratt, 2010; Listwan, Colvin, Hanley, & Flannery, 2010; Vazsonyi & Belliston, 2007<sup>1</sup>). Each of these factors on their own or in concert generally produce an overall greater likelihood for prosocial behavior and lower likelihood of criminal involvement (Baron, 2015; Colvin et al., 2002).

While consistent social support can promote conformity, erratic delivery is viewed as encouraging deviance (Colvin et al., 2002; Kurtz et al., 2014). It also may produce moderate levels of anger and lower levels of self-control, both of which are strongly related to violence, deviance, and law-breaking (see Agnew, 2005; Baron, 2015). In some limited cases, erratic social support may have a positive outcome in that a person may learn to manipulate potential social support sources creating a short-lived intense social bond based on self-interest (Colvin et al., 2002; Desmond, 2012), but this in and of

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<sup>1</sup> Although with mixed results (see Antonaccio et al., 2015; Brauer, Tittle, Antonaccio, & Islam, 2012; Simons, Simons, Chen, Brody, & Lin, 2007).

itself does not promote prosocial behavior with any lasting effect and may become a strategy for manipulation rather than help-seeking or self-improvement.

**Social Support Type and Crime Outcomes.** With regards to the type of social support, expressive support is generally more consistent in turning people away from criminal activity and inmate infractions than instrumental support (Cullen, 1994; Taylor, 2015b, 2016; Woo et al., 2016<sup>1</sup>), with an even larger effect for females (Taylor, 2015a). Consequently, many studies only test expressive social support (e.g., Ardel & Day, 2002; Baron, 2015; Beaver et al., 2014; Kurtz & Zavala, 2017; Meadows, 2007; Vazsonyi & Bellison, 2007). These studies have shown positive benefits such as reductions in drug and alcohol use (Andersen, 2018; Wyse et al., 2014), participation in organized crime (Baron, 2015), delinquency (Licitra-Kleckler & Waas, 1993; Meadows, 2007<sup>2</sup>), problematic drinking among police officers (Zavala & Kurtz, 2016), and risky choices among narcissists (Carre & Jones, 2016).

There is not a consensus regarding whether instrumental social support reduces or increases problematic behaviors. For instance, Taylor (2016) found no significant reductions in reoffending among previously incarcerated offenders, whereas Dong & Krohn (2017) find that familial instrumental support reduces offending in adolescence as well as adulthood. However, within the prison environment, Woo et al. (2016) showed both formal and informal instrumental support can increase infractions. Therefore, the specific effect of instrumental support on criminal outcomes may depend more on the origin and context of the social support (Cullen, 1994). The extent to which support leads

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<sup>1</sup> However, Dong & Krohn (2017) found that instrumental familial support was more effective than expressive familial support in adulthood for preventing recidivism.

<sup>2</sup> But only found for familial support, researchers found peer support can increase delinquency.

to reductions or increases in criminality largely depends on who is giving the support and what message they are communicating when providing it.

**Origin of Social Support and Crime Outcomes.** As traditionally researched, social support coming from conforming individuals typically prevents criminality whereas social support from offenders is criminogenic (Colvin et al., 2002; Cullen, 1994). Many types of relationships can produce these effects. Regarding parenting, interpersonal social support has proven effective in reducing delinquency when directed by conventional parents towards adolescents (Alexander, 1973; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Hoeve et al., 2009; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Wills & Cleary, 1996; Wright & Cullen, 2001). The perception of high conventional parental support, or how adolescents view the support, also reduces delinquency (Van Voorhis, Cullen, Mathers, & Garner, 1988; Kurtz & Zavala, 2017), even among adolescents with elevated levels of stress (Licitra-Kleckler & Waas, 1993<sup>1</sup>). While formal (e.g., criminal justice) interventions in adolescence often increase future offending (see Barrick, 2014), conventional familial social support can buffer these effects (Dong & Krohn, 2017).

Though there is not much research on the effects of parental support on the criminality of adult children, it would seem important to gain a better understanding of how parents of all socioeconomic levels provide support to their grown children (Fingerman et al., 2015). Based on previous interview-based data (see Topalli, 2006) even young adult offenders maintain strong relationships with their parents, especially their mothers, and they mostly continue to receive financial support from them (Lye, 1996; Siennick & Osgood, 2008). Thus, it is likely that only traditional forms of parental

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<sup>1</sup> However, perceived peer support received mixed results among adolescents with high levels of stress.

support would serve as a protective factor against entry into criminality and encourage desistance from crime for adult children.

One's parents do not exclusively provide social support, though family are generally more effective providers (Cutrona, 1986b). It is also likely to come from conventional others in a person's social network during childhood, adolescence, or adulthood (e.g. teachers, neighbors, and significant others) and this too has can reduce criminality (Agnew, 1992; Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010; Lin, Dumin, & Woefel, 1986; Sampson & Laub, 1993). The specific impacts of non-parental conventional social support are varied but include such outcomes as decreased rule violations among inmates (Jiang, Fisher-Giorlando, & Mo, 2005), and improved reentry from prison to society (Cochran, 2014; Hochstetler et al., 2010). Non-parental social support can aid in desistance from crime through the alteration and development of intimate relationships such as through marriage (Rayburn & Wright, 2017; Sampson & Laub, 1993) and cohabitation or "dating" (Abrams & Tam, 2018; Wyse et al., 2014). While much desistance research focuses on intimate partner relationships, it seems likely that a change in other types of relationships and their support would also promote change.

If the person offering social support is a criminal, then that support is likely to increase criminality (Baron, 2015; Brezina & Azimi, 2018; Colvin et al., 2002; Cullen, 1994; Harding et al., 2016). Social support coming from criminals can lead to an accumulation of criminal capital, such as resources and information necessary for success in criminal activities (Colvin et al., 2002; Wyse et al., 2014). The literature on delinquent peers most often focuses on support provided from intimately related criminals (i.e., offender peers). The commonly depicted process through which this exposure takes place

is as follows: First, low quality parenting and low levels of parental support encourages affiliation with deviant peers (Simons et al., 1994; Walters, 2018; Wills & Cleary, 1996), which allows for the importance of social support from peers to supplant that from non-parental sources. Second, if peers are deviant, their social support will have a significant criminogenic effect on engagement in delinquency (Agnew, 1991; Ardel & Day, 2002; Brezina & Azimi, 2018; Haynie, 2002; Ingram, Patchin, Huber, McCluskey, & Bynum, 2007; Kurtz et al., 2014; Short, 1957; Sutherland, 1947; Warr & Stafford, 1991<sup>1</sup>). Third, once an individual becomes embedded in a delinquent group that is supportive they are more likely to be resistant to change (Bender & Lösel, 1997), supporting cohesion and sustainability of the group (Brezina & Azimi, 2018; Warr, 1993). It is important to note that peers are not necessarily the only criminal source of social support; family or intimate partners can also have the same effect if they are criminal.

Besides the criminal or conforming behaviors of the social support provider, researchers have also analyzed gender in relation to social support. Men are more likely to reduce their offending when in relationships than women (Abrams & Tam, 2018; Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002). This could be due to the finding that women are more inclined to provide emotional support (Cutrona et al., 2007; Ray, 2016; Wellman & Wortley, 1990<sup>2</sup>) since this type of support is generally effective in reducing criminality (Cullen, 1994; Taylor, 2015b, 2016; Woo et al., 2016). Cullen (1994) argued that giving social support should reduce the likelihood of offending, and subsequent research has confirmed this notion (Plickert, Cote, & Wellman, 2007). Accepting that women give

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<sup>1</sup> Although one study showed older deviant siblings had a greater effect than deviant peers on inner-city youth (Ardelt & Day, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Women also respond more to social support (Chu et al., 2010).

more emotional support (Cutrona et al., 2007; Ray, 2016; Wellman & Wortley, 1990) this could at least partially explain why women tend to offend less than men.

Besides its direct benefits, interpersonal social support is especially critical to engendering conformity which is often a precondition for effective informal social control (Colvin et al., 2002; Cullen, 1994; Nissen, 2011), a key notion in Braithwaite's (1989) reintegrative shaming theory. For instance, parental control is more effective when paired with informal social support (Nielsen, 2017; Wright & Cullen, 2001), as evidenced by the literature on parenting styles, which indicates that the most effective style is both warm (support) and restrictive (control) (see e.g., Amato & Fowler, 2002). The correctional literature also supports the notion that control is more effective when accompanied by social support (Farrington et al., 2012; Hochstetler et al., 2010).

**Messaging of Social Support and Crime Outcomes.** Control can also be an extension of the message behind social support. Colvin et al. (2002) argued that the type of support provider, criminal or conforming, matters with regards to whether social support promotes or discourages criminality (attitude toward offending), and the message matters in determining how this support will be exhibited (criminal behavior). The messaging behind social support provides the definitions, encouragement, and procedural content for avoiding, engaging, persisting, or desisting from offending. Earlier studies on social support focus on the identity of the message provider assuming that criminogenic messaging could only come from offenders and conforming messages could only come from mainstream individuals (see Martinez & Abrams, 2013). But, there may be more to the message than outlined by Colvin et al. (2002). It is possible that people may be able

to give two opposing messages, thus it is important to examine the message behind the social support and not just the origin of the support.

This is a key issue addressed in the current study, wherein the term “message” indicates not only specific information relayed through instrumental social support (e.g., how to weigh and distribute drugs or informing where to buy a black-market gun), but also the underlying and/or intended outcome the provider wants to impart on the receiver of social support (e.g., to become a criminal or be a good provider). This message could be either implicit or explicit. For instance, someone could provide social support to others in hopes that the imparting of support passively drives the receiver of support toward either conforming or engaging in crime (providing financial support in the hopes that the message receiver will forgo offending to get money for bills), or they can overtly explain to the receiver what their intentions are behind the support. An example of an explicit message might be that a person says they will provide food and shelter to a parolee so that they will not have to commit crimes to survive, and break parole. But these are congruent identity/messaging examples (i.e., the message, be it implicit or explicit, from a conforming person is a conforming message and that of a criminal person will be to engage in offending).

This fails to account for when conformists implicitly or explicitly encourage offending or when non-conformists implicitly or explicitly encourage desistance from offending. It is possible in certain environments that a conforming person could be directly or indirectly promoting criminality and a criminal could be discouraging criminality. Thus, both a criminal and a conformist could be presenting a criminogenic and/or a non-criminogenic message.

## **Reconceptualizing Social Support**

When looking at social support, it is necessary to take the who, what, and how into consideration to determine the potential effect on crime. Originally people considered the “who” by level, institutional or interpersonal, the “source”, conforming or criminal, and the “how”, instrumental or expressive support, resulting in eight potential combinations of social support. Adding the new “what”, conforming or criminogenic messaging, leads to sixteen potential options for social support. But, since the focus is solely on interpersonal social support in this study, I address eight potential options (see Figure 1). The conformist can give instrumental and/or expressive social support with a criminogenic and/or non-criminogenic message. Also, the criminal can give instrumental and/or expressive social support with a criminogenic and/or non-criminogenic message. The recent literature generally has only looked at half of these options; conformist with a non-criminogenic message by either type, and criminal with a criminogenic message by either type (see Martinez & Abrams, 2013). The goal of the present study was to examine the other half of the options to determine if they exist in practice, and how they specifically function in different contexts.

To fully understand social support in this way, it is necessary to look at the properties of the relationship itself as well as the interactions within that relationship (Cohen et al., 2000; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Reis & Collins, 2000; Vaux, 1988). Thus, it is not enough to know whether an individual is receiving social support; it is equally important to determine the quality and context of the relationship within which it is provided. In addition, as relationship quality changes throughout the life course so too

should the social support provided in those relationships (Holt et al., 2018; Rutter, 1987; Shaw et al., 2007; Tsai et al., 2013). Therefore, while a relationship may have helped prevent criminality through social support for someone when they were a child, this does not mean that as an adult that same relationship could not be criminogenic. Taken together, this suggests that the origin of social support is insufficient to determine its impact on behavior because the context of the relationship also matters.

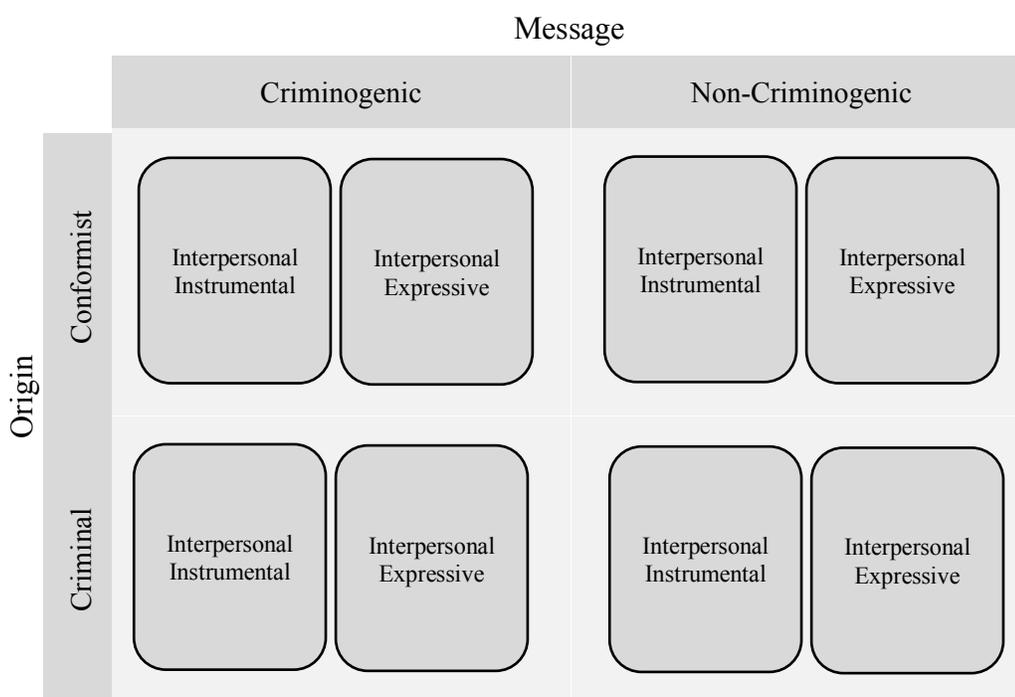


Figure 1: Reconceptualization of Social Support

### Social Support in Criminogenic Contexts

While not within criminological research, other disciplines view social support types and their outcomes as tailored to the environment within which recipients reside (see Cassel, 1976; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Haber, Cohen, Lucas, & Baltes, 2007).

Applying this to criminology means that when studying crime outcomes in a certain environment, it is necessary to determine which specific kinds of social support are prevalent and predominate in that environment. Thus, understanding the study environment and the relationships that form within that context is vital to understanding effects of social support on crime. The participants in this research are minorities who come from low-income, urban areas in the Southeast so the focus will be on this type of environment and the relationships and social support common within it.

Relationship types and expectations are not homogenous and a variety of factors may moderate them. For instance, individuals who are minorities, less educated, and have less income are less likely to marry (Cherlin, 2010; Newport & Wilke, 2013), more likely to cohabitate (Clarkberg, 1999; Lichter et al., 2014; Raley & Sweeney, 2007; Smock & Manning, 1997a), and more likely to have children outside of wedlock and with multiple partners (Carlson & Furstenberg, 2006; Cherlin, 2010; Meyer, Cancian, & Cook, 2005).

Individuals in poor, urban areas have different lifestyles from people in middle-class society (Anderson, 1999; Harding, 2007; LaPrairie, 1995; Miller, 1958). Some cultural differences stem from a lack of formal and community social support (Braithwaite, 1989; Chamlin & Cochran, 1997; Cullen, 1994; Pratt & Cullen, 2005), and a general distrust of greater society (Anderson, 1999). In addition, the offenders within disadvantaged areas engage in different lifestyle patterns and hold alternate cultural beliefs than do law-abiding citizens in those same areas (Anderson, 1999; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994). Under such conditions and within contexts which also carry with them significant deviations from mainstream culture along related socioeconomic indicators, typical mainstream or middle-class notions of what constitutes an

“appropriate” lifestyle are unlikely to hold (see Anderson, 1999). It would make sense that with a different socio-cultural context comes different relationship patterns and expectations. If the relationships are different, then logically, the social support provided within those relationships would also be different. In fact, researchers have confirmed this notion empirically (Goldman & Cornwell, 2018; Hartnett, Fingerman, & Birditt, 2018; Schafer & Vargas, 2016). For instance, low-income individuals receive less useful advice and practical help and more financial assistance (Schafer & Vargas, 2016). As these disadvantaged areas have higher crime rates than other parts of the country (Boggess et al., 2018; Chamlin & Cochran, 1997; Cullen, 1994; Pratt & Cullen, 2005), it is important to study the relationships specifically in these environments since there may be something inherently different in the way they function that encourages or discourages criminal behavior.

**Street Lifestyle: Respect, Race, and Gender.** Not only is Anderson’s (1999) code of the street important for understanding the overall values and lifestyles of people in the inner-city, it is useful in showing how relationships in these areas may differ from those in mainstream society. In addition, Anderson’s (1999) formulation provides a social structure within which it may be possible to conceptualize the differential effects of social support in areas where crime and oppositional cultures are pervasive.

The code of the street formulation states that there are two value systems at work within the inner-city, *decent* and *street* (Anderson, 1999). Decent individuals believe in and work towards middle-class values and goals, attempting to follow mainstream culture and conform to its precepts within the limitations of their day-to-day social environment. Even among decent families, an intact nuclear family is rare with most decent families

headed by a single mother (Anderson, 1999; further confirmed by research among urban populations, see e.g., Cherlin, 2010; Fossett & Kiecolt, 1993; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000; Newport & Wilke, 2013). Decent parents tend to be strict, employing corporal punishment and keeping a close eye on their children (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Anderson, 1999; McLoyd et al., 2000) for fear of “losing them to the streets”. This form of parenting differs from mainstream society, which tends to be warm and supportive without harsh punishment (Amato & Fowler, 2002), and is an indication of how these neighborhoods influence parents to have different relationships with their children compared to their mainstream counterparts to ensure that their children not succumb to the temptations of streetlife and find success outside of the neighborhood. In addition, because appearances are of paramount importance to youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods, parents in the inner-city tend to provide financial social support (Schafer & Vargas, 2016), such as buying expensive shoes and clothing, as a form of protection rather than simply need (Anderson, 1999). Thus, the reasons for and specifics of financial social support may vary from mainstream culture to inner-city culture.

Further, for most decent individuals “social relations can become practical matters of personal defense” (Anderson, 1999, p.42). In other words, personal relations with significant others provides existential and ontological security in a social context where violence and aggression offer significant social capital as well as real safety. This necessity of physical protection through social relationships can possibly be a form of social support unique to the inner-city. The unintended consequence of such support – regardless of whether decent or street individuals provide it – is that it is likely criminogenic because it discourages interaction with formal systems of social control

designed to thwart vigilantism and individual justice and ends up encouraging violence as an acceptable or required solution.

The “code” values respect above all other things, and when there is a violation of respect violence is necessary. Street individuals have a lack of consideration for others and develop superficial relationships (Anderson, 1999). Though having strong attachments to conventional others is likely to reduce criminal behavior (see e.g., Hirschi, 1969; Warr, 1993), the extent to which this effect accrues to “street people” is questionable. Generally, internalizing the code indicates that their relationships and associated social support are incompatible with mainstream values. Street individuals do not seek mainstream relationships with non-street people and are unlikely to develop strong bonds with such individuals in any case. Thus, the number and strength of such attachments are unlikely to influence behavior.

These patterns of influence seem consistent across a variety of different types of intimate relationships beyond those focused on peers. Street women tend to not monitor their children effectively (Anderson, 1999), differing from mainstream women who directly supervise their children (Amato & Fowler, 2002). Overall, individuals who adhere to the code of the street have a general distrust of others even among close allies (Anderson, 1999; Raudenbush, 2016; Ross, Mirowsky, & Pribesh, 2002). This lack of trust typically causes them to view social support as strictly transactional or something utilized for their own advantage (Anderson, 1999). Further, they are unlikely to accept the mores and values of traditional society from decent individuals whose lifestyles they may view as distasteful or incompatible with their own. Thus, it is likely that social

support and relationship bonds, even from decent individuals, would not have the same effects on street individuals as they do on those in mainstream society.

Because the code of the streets is a pervasive social system, and because ignoring the code can have dire consequences for both street and decent people, decent people do not have the luxury of ignoring its precepts. It is this limitation that separates them from those in mainstream society they wish to emulate. In certain situations, an individual may need to “code switch”, temporarily adopting a “street attitude” to properly respond to an affront or physical threat, in many cases using violence (Anderson, 1999). Because decent individuals know and utilize the code under such circumstances, this is likely to dilute or conflict with the mainstream message presented by decent significant others. Thus, it is highly likely that as a function of knowing both sets of codes (street and decent) even decent people would have relationships where they give/get social support not fully aligned with mainstream society.

According to Anderson (1999) transmission of the two value systems happens by being around and learning from others, thus situating his conceptualization of acculturation as based on social learning theory (Akers, 1977, 2017). Beyond that, neighborhood characteristics, family decent/street orientation, levels of previous discrimination, race, and education level also affect whether someone will identify as street or decent (Anderson, 1999; Moule et al., 2015; Piquero et al., 2012; Stewart & Simons, 2006, 2010). Since racial discrimination is a factor in many of these individuals' lives, parents have coped by providing racial socialization which may reduce the chances of belief in the code (Burt et al., 2012; Burt & Simons, 2013; McLoyd et al., 2000). This form of parental support is exclusive to minorities. Racial socialization is an additional

instrumental support to help avoid violent beliefs, and it is possible that not everyone is able to provide such support, which could lead to differential adherence to the code and tendencies to offend. Relationships are an important determinant of system identification (Anderson, 1999; Piquero et al., 2012). Peers play a significant role in socialization and protection on the street (particularly among youth who lack significant oversight and attention from parents and other family members) which influences adoption of the street code (Anderson, 1999), and this is demonstrated where individuals after joining a gang are more likely to adopt the code (Matsuda et al., 2013). Also, although Nowacki (2012) found that strong family attachments reduced the likelihood of adopting the street code he did not consider whether there may be differential effects of family attachment based on the orientation of family members toward the street code. Thus, it is possible that only attachment to decent parents reduces chances of adopting the street code, and further, that strong attachments to street family members would have the opposite effect.

When it comes to choosing an orientation, it is likely that social support is a determining factor. Social support fosters greater attachment to an individual and increases the perceived value of the relationship (Lawrence et al., 2008; Reis & Collins, 2000). If more people in a given orientation were providing more support than individuals of the other orientation, then it makes sense that the person would identify with the orientation that provides them with the most social support (Cullen, 1994). Since expressive social support is a better protective factor against criminality than instrumental support (Cullen, 1994; Colvin et al., 2002), it most likely would have influence in determining criminogenic orientation as well. Expressive support leads to feelings of companionship and provides socialization (Cullen, 1994), and this would foster

internalization of a value system through conditioning. Internalization of the code is malleable (Moule et al., 2015). Therefore, it is likely that changes in one's relationships and/or neighborhood situation could effectively change their orientation. In addition, feelings of hopelessness can increase the chances a person will identify with street values (Drummond, Bolland, & Harris, 2011), and it may be possible that social support could mitigate such feelings similar to how social support buffers the effects of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona, 1986a; Lin & Ensel, 1989; McInnis et al., 2017; Thoits, 1995; Viswesvaran et al., 1999). Since internalization of the code can change over time (Moule et al., 2015), it is necessary to see how an individual's relationships and social support evolve in relation to their street orientation.

The code of the street also defines rules for interacting with the opposite sex, which makes it likely that relationships will look different where a street orientation is the dominant value system. Within the code, sex is a major component of interactions with the opposite gender, and being committed is not a priority (Anderson, 1999), evident in the fact that people from the inner-city are less likely to get married (Cherlin, 2010; Newport & Wilke, 2013), more likely to cohabit (Cherlin, 2010; Lichter et al., 2014; Raley & Sweeney, 2007; Smock & Manning, 1997a), and have multiple sexual partners (Carlson & Furstenberg, 2006; Cherlin, 2010; Ford, Sohn, & Lepkowski, 2002; Ku et al., 1998; Meyer et al., 2005). Street individuals use sex to gain social status, and street females also use sex as a bargaining chip for attention from males (Anderson, 1999; Froyum Roise, 2004). In the inner-city, sexual prowess for boys or sex appeal for girls brings status. Even if a relationship moves into the next stage – going steady – the male must still save face in front of his peers by having other girls on the side, and girls often

know of this promiscuity but sometimes downplay or excuse it (Anderson, 1999; Froyum Roise, 2004). Consequently, the culture shaping relationships in the inner-city is not conducive to fostering strong commitment to women. In fact, “the economic noose restricting ghetto life encourages men and women alike to try to extract maximum personal benefit from sexual relationships (Anderson, 1999, p. 176).” Therefore, a decent woman would find it difficult to encourage a street man to “go straight” or become decent without otherwise strong incentives.

However, it may be possible that males code switch when in the company of a decent woman. Street males may employ code switching to endear themselves to a decent female as a means of gaining expressive support including sex (Anderson, 1999), thereby exposing them to the decent code and potentially mitigating their motivation to engage in offending. This is consistent with numerous findings that demonstrate the criminality-reducing effects of marriage and parenting (see, e.g., Dretzke et al., 2009; King, Massoglia, & MacMillan, 2007; Sampson, Laub, & Wimer, 2006; Wright & Cullen, 2001). Meanwhile, the opposite effect should accrue for those males attached to women who have a street orientation. A street female encourages their criminality through the content of social support messaging or even by engaging in crimes with them or supplying them with tips on potential victims (see, e.g., Topalli et al., 2002).

### **Current Study**

To address the gaps in our understanding of the nuanced ways in which social support affects offending, this study attempted to address several questions. First, do conformists ever present criminogenic messaging? Likewise, second, do criminals ever present a non-criminogenic message? Third, in what ways are instrumental and

expressive support perceived by those operating in disadvantaged environments? Fourth, what are the kinds of relationships found among offenders in the criminogenic areas of Atlanta, Georgia? Fifth, what are the specific kinds of instrumental and expressive social support present in the relationships that develop in disadvantaged contexts in Atlanta? Sixth, is there anything about these relationships in general that are criminogenic?

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

To answer the questions put forth in this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with active adult offenders from disadvantaged areas in Southwest Atlanta, Georgia, thereby, enabling an understanding of social support and relationships within criminogenic environments.

#### **Study Setting**

The recruitment area for the study was Atlanta, Georgia. Within city limits, Atlanta has a majority African-American population, and has a higher percentage of the population living below the poverty line than Georgia and National averages (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The crime rates in Atlanta are higher for both property and violent crimes (5,248.6 and 1,083.6 per 100,000 respectively) than the Georgia (3,004.5 and 397.6) and National averages (2,450.7 and 386.3), with the homicide rate being almost four and half times the national average (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2016). In addition, Georgia is one of the top three states for bulk currency seizures related to drug trafficking, and the metro Atlanta area serves as the largest hub in the Southeast for transportation and distribution of cocaine (Drug Enforcement Agency, 2017).

Recruiters focused on the west and southern neighborhoods of the city, known as zones 1, 3, and 4 among the Atlanta Police Department [APD]. According to the official crime reports (APD, 2017), most of the violent crimes occur within these three zones. Out of the six zones, the three represented here accounted for seventy-three percent of the crimes against persons (APD, 2017). Zone 1 is home to “the Bluff” which is an open-air drug market which has been Atlanta’s primary heroin market (U.S. Department of Justice, 2010). Recruiting in these zones ensured participants lived in highly criminogenic

neighborhoods and most likely would have different life experiences than those from a mainstream middle-class neighborhood.

### **Data Collection**

For purposes of identifying active offenders for participation it was necessary to utilize a field recruiter, a technique standard in ethnographic research conducted with active offender populations (see e.g., Jacobs et al., 2000; and Wright & Decker, 1997). The field recruiter is a former offender from south Atlanta. After prison, as part of a reintegration program, he began working with universities in Atlanta on community health projects focusing on HIV positive ex-prisoners. Due to his own previous experience and currently being involved in health projects, he has maintained ties to the criminal underworld. For these reasons and because he has engaged in this type of research on previous Atlanta-based studies (see e.g. Brezina & Topalli, 2012; Topalli, Brezina, & Bernhardt, 2013), he was a likely candidate for recruitment in this study.

Over a nine-month period, it was the recruiter's responsibility to identify and contact participants. Twenty-six active offenders were interviewed as a result, the number of participants was a factor of financial constraints and increasing difficulty in identifying offenders willing to participate. However, as the main concept of incongruent messaging had reached saturation, the decision to stop recruitment was justified. The recruitment area was neighborhoods within zones 1, 3, and 4. The recruiter is well acquainted with these neighborhoods and their inhabitants. He is originally from Jonesboro South, governmental assistance housing which is no longer in existence. When these housing units were torn down, the residents dispersed throughout the city mostly to the identified recruitment areas. Thus, the connections the recruiter had made while living in Jonesboro

South allowed him to now have knowledge of offenders in a variety of places in Atlanta. It was through these connections that he identified offenders for recruitment. He knew some of the participants personally (mostly those over thirty years of age) from living and offending with them in Jonesboro South. However, his instructions were to not only recruit people he knew well, so he identified additional participants by inquiring whether people he knew may know others who would be willing to participate (in the tradition of snowball sampling; Wright et al., 1992). In addition, sometimes participants would mention in interviews that they knew other offenders who may want to participate, and they were instructed to make the connection with my recruiter to set up the potential interview.

To ensure the recruiter identified appropriate participants, the inclusion criteria was explained thoroughly to him per IRB requirements. The approved minimum inclusion criteria were that an individual must: 1) be over the age 18, 2) derive a steady source of income and support through participation in criminal activities, and 3) not be currently incarcerated. Because much of the past literature on familial support studied juveniles, I included people over 18 to understand these same relationships at a later point in life. As I was interested in learning how social support affects criminal activity, I essentially sampled on the dependent variable. Offenders are more likely to have different relationships and lifestyles than those in mainstream society (Anderson, 1999; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994). Interviewing them increased the likelihood of identifying social support examples not widely studied (e.g., non-criminogenic support from criminals).

During incarceration, relationship quality and both expressive and instrumental social support positively and/or negatively changes (Fishman, 1988; Kemp, 1980). Presser (2004) suggests “that accounts are also tailored to particular social settings and events that occur in those settings (p.98).” Thus, when recounting relationships, the formulation of what they entail will vary depending on the setting, the current setting being more salient than those experienced in the past. Therefore, I did not recruit incarcerated individuals because their data may be skewed by changes within their relationships that occurred while imprisoned. This would be especially true if they were in a rehabilitation program that focused on family or other types of relationships since they would have a new perspective on past and current associations.

In addition to being trained in identifying participants, the recruiter also received instruction on ethical considerations, such as confidentiality and voluntary participation, and was provided a script detailing what should be said with regards to explaining the purposes of the study, what the potential participants are expected to do, and that they will receive fifty dollars as compensation for their time, which is standard in this type of research (Jacobs et al., 2000, 2004; Topalli, 2005; Topalli, et al., 2002; Wright & Decker, 1994; Wright & Decker, 1997). The recruiter would sometimes add more context or adapt language beyond what was included in the script to help potential participants understand and get them to participate.

Once identified and individuals agreed to participate, the recruiter arranged an interview. The interviews were semi-structured allowing for natural conversation and expansion of topics. They lasted between 30-60 minutes and covered topics related to life on the streets, urban crime, attitudes towards breaking the law, and their relationships

with others. The interviews took place in offices at Georgia State University. Participants most often took public transportation to the Department's offices, which are located in the busy downtown area of Atlanta and are served by buses and underground rail. In some cases, they were driven to the location by the recruiter or an associate. I met the participant in the lobby of the building, introduced myself, and escorted them to a private interview suite on an upper floor. Exchanges of money for participation or to pay the recruiter always occurred in private and were always in cash, per IRB directive. As setting can affect how participants respond (Presser, 2004), it is possible that this mainstream location could have influenced them to respond with more mainstream sentiments. As the main concept being identified dealt with criminal and mainstream messaging this had the potential to be problematic. However, the participants did relate many instances of criminogenic messaging during interviews so, while the setting may have had some influence I do not believe it was so great as to disaffirm the findings, and certainly any such effect would have been evenly distributed across participants, none of whom had attended college.

After completion of the interviews, I transcribed the recorded audio verbatim for coding and analysis. Although I developed a highly detailed interview protocol for this study, its format was inductive. Therefore, when confronted with inconsistent or vague answers, I probed deeper to help ensure validity. While it is possible participants lied or exaggerated certain recounting in these face-to-face interviews, it is no more likely than any other form of data collection. In fact, arguably, qualitative data are as or more accurate than traditional survey-based data (see Jacobs & Wright, 1999).

## **Ethical Considerations**

As with any research study, there were ethical issues considered. There were no anticipated risks to the participants beyond a small chance of mild distress from recounting unpleasant or embarrassing memories. However, others have conducted studies asking offenders to describe previous offending as well as previous victimization (see Jacobs et al., 2000; Topalli, 2005; and Topalli et al., 2002) and have never encountered an instance where a participant displayed any significant distress or discomfort. It was determined through the human subjects approval process that should any participant express distress, the research procedures were to be suspended and the participants asked if they wish to continue. In all cases, any participant who was uncomfortable with the utilization of their data could have requested the destruction of it at any time. None did.

To ensure confidentiality and protection of the data, storing and transferring all audio recordings included encryption and password protection. In addition, all interviews had a randomly generated identification number. At no time were participants asked for identifying information, such as their name. If they accidentally revealed any identifying information, the transcriptionist redacted that information from the data. This rarely happened. Once transcribed, the destruction of all audio files occurred.

To ensure voluntary participation and because offenders living in these neighborhoods of Atlanta have a distrust of formal institutions and were highly unlikely to comply, participants verbally confirmed their informed consent. Literacy was also a major issue. Since not all of them were able to read and respond to a written consent

form, I employed verbal consent to ensure the equal treatment of all participants recruited.

### **Coding and Analytic Strategy**

After completing transcriptions, I conducted attribute coding (pulling out the demographic characteristics) (Saldaña, 2015). One important caveat to this coding scheme was defining conforming and criminal individuals. If someone engaged in gambling or smoking marijuana and those were the only illegal acts they committed, then for the purposes of this study they were conformists. These vices are not problematic or deviant in the eyes of the participants, and when they were discussing someone as “straight” or “legit” (their perception of conforming) they did not always differentiate between those that have participated in these vices and those who have not. Since the interviews were based on perceptions of the participants and their neighborhood culture, how they determined who is conforming was more important than objective legal definitions, especially when these vices are legal in some states and not others (e.g. the consumption of marijuana).

After completing attribute coding, the main coding and analysis followed. The main two concepts coded for were the domains of relationships and social support. First, I coded for the types of relationships in their lives. For instance, who are the participants interacting with and how do they typologize these interactions? Included within the interviewee’s definition of these individuals was a determination of whether they were a criminal or conformist. Second, I coded for the different types of social support they discussed. For instance, what are they getting from (perceived) and providing to others and what kinds of words do they use to describe these benefits? To group these specific

examples, I divided them into the subgroups of instrumental and expressive social support. Third, I coded and analyzed for the different characteristics of each type of relationship. For instance, how do they describe the people with whom they interact, as well as the interactions themselves, and what are the similarities and differences among them? Fourth, I analyzed the messaging conveyed behind the social support as criminogenic or non-criminogenic. The last strategy was to interrelate the source of the social support, messaging, and specific types of social support. Coding and analyzing the data this way afforded a greater understanding of what relationships look like in criminogenic environments in conjunction with the simplistic and complex types of social support.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

### **Demographics**

The sample consisted of 26 African-American individuals whose ages ranged from 18-58 with a mean age of 35.6. All but two of the participants were male. About half of the participants either graduated high school or obtained a GED. Sixteen of the twenty-six participants have legitimate employment on top of having participated in criminal activities for money. While more than half (17) of the interviewees have children, only four are currently living with some of their children, and none are living with all of them. During data collection, it became possible to recruit a few dyads through snowball sampling. There was a total of four dyads with the following combinations: father/son, cousins, brother/sister, and girlfriend/boyfriend.

### **Relationships**

Recall that to understand social support and its effects in these neighborhoods, it was necessary to examine the interpersonal relationships that provide social support (Cohen et al., 2000; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Reis & Collins, 2000; Vaux, 1988) especially those of most importance (Cassel, 1976). In addition, different socio-cultural contexts create different relationship patterns and expectations (Cherlin 2010; Newport & Wilke, 2013; Hartnett et al., 2018). For these reasons, there was an analysis of the participants' most important relationships conducted with emphasis on whether the other party was criminal or conforming. Doing so allowed confirmation of the types of relationships the participants form and later helped determine the influence of the social support these relationships provided.

For the majority (23) of the participants, family were the most important people in their lives. A participant who currently does not consider family most important said he considered his mother most important before she died. Of the remaining two participants that did not identify family as most important, one said “no one” is important and the other said no one in their life was more important than another person. For the latter, if they are in his life, he considers them important. For most participants, female family members were the most important, especially mothers and grandmothers. In discussing why these women are important, they talked about them as “their loves”, “their hearts”, and who they needed to protect.

639: Oh man sweet lover. That’s my lover. Right to this day, I’m always checking on her and we just so in love. (Mom)

282: Because they’re, they’re they are the ladies that are left for me to look to, directly look out for. Like, my dad and my grandfather, you know, like, they just, like I said, like we raised. (Mom & Niece)

After female family members, the next relationship cited as most important was their children. Again, the sentiments towards their children were similar to those of the important females in their lives.

677: I just love them more. Like, my lil boy, he get up for school, and then he’ll be put on his clothes, he’ll be sleepy, put on your clothes, brush ya teeth, wash your face, put on deodorant and then, um, when his bus come, he’ll run there, and be like (laughs). He like, you’ll see him running down the hill, and I’m like man, I love that lil boy.

As evidenced above, when talking about the most important people in their lives, they could not fully describe the relationships but just “felt” the love to/from them.

Interestingly, while the familial dyads agreed on how close they were to each other, the father/son dyad did not follow suit. The son talked about being close to both his father and mother,

617 (Son): I always mess with him. I say, ‘ah nigga you a softie. You soft. You, you, you just soft.’ You know, I told him, ‘Nah pimp, I really love y’all.’ ... Yeah, my, our family is on the type of, there’s nothing in this world gonna stop me from saying ‘I love you’ or ‘if you need me, I’m there.’

Whereas the father, when talking about his kids, mostly talked about his daughter, and only talked about the interviewed son when prompted by the interviewer:

639 (Father): Well I always... you know I love her so much and I can see the little road she was going down. And she didn’t like me telling her this and that. Girl I been in these streets all my life. Don’t do that. (Daughter)

Compared to:

639: (When asked about son) He do good. He about like me. He kinda like a leader and he don’t let the little young cats tell him, come on let’s do this, you know, he make his own decisions.

While familial relationships are important to them, this did not dictate the amount of time spent with them since few participants mentioned spending the majority of their time with family.

Only three people mentioned at least one friend as being important to them, though the participants spent most of their time with their criminal friends and work

associates. While participants enjoyed their friends' company, they did not elevate friends to the level of family.

Five participants mentioned their intimate partner as important, and all of them were currently exclusive with that individual. An additional three participants were also in an exclusive relationship but did not mention their significant other as one of the most important people in their lives. With one exception, participants in these exclusive relationships are dating conforming individuals. The path to exclusivity was not always the same. For some, they had always been exclusive:

617: (When asked why he wanted to get married) Yeah, cause I ain't no big cheater like I don't have sex with different women and my mama and daddy been together for since they were 14-years-old in the same county.

INT: Yeah, that's awesome, and so you saw that relationship and you wanted something like that?

617: Yeah, cause I ain't like with other folks they just like, you know, they fuck different girls.

For others, the exclusivity was a more recent development or only occurred with the current partner. When asked about the change in relationships, participants gave different reasons ranging from time put in and owing the partner something...

121: Yeah, so we got, we got a lot of time. I just feel like I owe her something different, you know what I'm saying. She done been here with me through a lot My mama love it. My mama call me every day. Even when she ain't at home, me and my mama might talk about her. Every day like, you know what I'm saying. My mama is probably actually one of the reasons I started to curb myself from

other women. ... And she just done been with me through a lot shit. I got a whole child (with another woman), and she still with me.

...to it being too difficult:

452: Yeah, you know what I'm saying, it's too much. It's you got to keep up with lies, number one. You gotta keep up with lies, and they always gonna catch you in a lie. You know what I'm saying. So, then it's gonna be arguing. It's gonna be fighting, you know, and I don't know. Like I said, I just got older.

Their overall answers about exclusivity did not appear to be related to feelings of love, but some were related to trusting the partner would be there for them (anticipated social support).

The remaining participants were currently dating multiple people at a time. Some of the participants had a steady partner, and two were living with their main partner. The rest were dating multiple people without a main partner. There are two ways the participants dealt with multiple partners; either they were open about it and their partners knew or they snuck around with a "don't ask, don't tell" policy. When asked about their partners knowing, their responses ranged from claiming they were in control of the rules of the relationship...

841: Yeah, she'll trip out sometimes, but like, at the end of the day, she really can't say too much cause where I got her. I ain't trying to flex on y'all about it, but the way I got her, like, she goddamn, like, she ain't fittin to come at me like that, you feel what I'm saying? Like, she already know what's up.

...to ignoring the protests of their partners:

INT: Do the girls know about each other?

817: Um, no, they know they aren't the only one. They don't know each other.

INT: And they don't say anything to you about that?

817: Um, they do, I got some texts in my phone. Yeah.

The participants who were secretive about their multiple partners also described distrust of relationships. Some described a “don't ask, don't tell policy”:

790: You know, I don't know if you have another friend that comes by, you know, and that would piss me off. So, I would rather not find out about that. I would rather not find out about that. I would just rather just be in the cloud that I'm around.

Other participants had more of a double standard mentality:

951: Well, see, when I dated, when I date somebody they date me, but I'm dating somebody else, 'cause I have an issue trusting people. So, I don't know, I always got to have a backup plan...So, and I, the type of niggers that I mess with, I know that I ain't the only one they mess with... Like, anything that a nigger do, I probably done did it. Nobody treat, treat girls, niggers, I treat niggers how they treat girls. Like they some girls.

Participant 951's current partner had a similar sentiment about dating as she did:

364: I don't, I only stay with her, but goddamn, you feel me, you feel me? You know I just do what I do, you feel me.

INT: Does she know that you, you go out and mess with other girls?

364: Well, how she found me, I was talking to another girl, how she found me, but I told her, I ain't even fucking with shorty like that. So, yeah, you feel me?

Both approaches taken by the participants with multiple partners communicated a disregard for the other person's feelings and a sense of entitlement.

### **Expressive Social Support**

In addition to relationship types, it was important to analyze the two general types of social support, instrumental and expressive social support, separately since they could lead to different outcomes (Cullen, 1994). For example, expressive social support should generally produce more positive outcomes (Cullen, 1994; Taylor, 2015b, 2016; Woo et al., 2016) or different types of people provide it (Taylor, 2015a).

In discussing expressive social support with the participants, all but one of the participants stated they received some form of it, though many were reluctant to admit it directly.<sup>1</sup> As the interviews went on, many shared stories about when they received expressive support from others. Only twenty out of twenty-six participants mentioned giving expressive support to others. For the participants, most of the expressive support mentioned was coming from and/or directed toward their children or females in their lives.

The reluctance to talk about expressive support was somewhat problematic because it possibly limited the amount of social support types uncovered. It is also important to note that these are the participants' interpretations of support in their lives and they could have been downplaying their importance, not perceiving its value, or not recognizing when it was available or what it looks like.

**Kinds of Expressive Social Support.** It is important not only to look at whether the participants are receiving expressive social support but also at the specific forms of

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<sup>1</sup> The one outlier used to get emotional support from his mother who passed. Now, he perceived he has no one.

support that manifest in this environment. Research in other fields have shown that the kinds of social support needed differ depending on the environment (Cassel, 1976; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Haber et al., 2007), and thus it is necessary to observe the kinds of social support present in criminogenic environments for researchers to apply them more effectively.

The two most common forms of expressive support uncovered were general talking and spending time with a person the individual cares about, regardless of whether the provider was a criminal. Some participants even talked about the amount of support they provide: “Every, every day. Every phone call, I try to answer every phone call, but I, I love my kids. So, I’m every day (121).” With regards to spending time with loved ones, participant 853 said it best:

But just being there for them. Being there in front of their face, doing shit with them is more important for me. So, they can have memories with me. Like, I, I can have all the money in the world, but if I’m not spending it on them, or, or, or giving them my time, I’m not being there for them (about his children).

While many participants admitted spending significant time with friends, many also mentioned their friends specifically do not provide expressive support and so often friends did not fit in this categorization of expressive support.

Visiting or talking/writing to someone in prison is another variation of the above expressive support. The reason for the separation from the above type is that it specifically deals with criminals. Most offenders who mentioned this form of expressive support did so because it represented a criminogenic deficit in their lives,

314: You know what I'm saying, I do, cause I done been there and I know how it feel when you ain't got nobody puttin' no money on your books, or ain't got no money, nobody to talk to, you ain't got nobody to visit. So, guess what you do?

The same shit you was doing on the street. You start robbin' people in jail.

One participant mentioned prison support to describe a change in the relationship with his parents. "They'd write. Plenty of money. It seemed like, it seemed like, to me, I got more attention when I was in, you know what I'm saying? ...You know, visits and all that (880)." For the majority there was a deficit of support during incarceration, but for at least one it was a time when they could improve their relationships.

The previous types described specific behaviors categorized as emotional support, but some participants could not describe behaviors, just that they could "feel the love", and this was comforting to them. For instance, "Well, I mean, she's kind of like a mother figure to me since I was small. And, uh, it's never no with her. It's just sincere love. It's genuine love with her, and it's we're just real close (817)." Interestingly, participant 639 was able to describe a specific action from his mother, related to his criminality, and connected it to him feeling loved. To describe it he said, "It's showing a lot of love. When she just, 'man, why don't you just go get a job? Why don't you do this? Why don't you do that?' You know, it's love."

The last kind of expressive support subjectively fit within this category. One participant related a negative act – lying – as a form of emotional protection for a loved one.

489: It hurt me to my heart, but I'm like, no, I ain't doing that, you know what I'm saying? But I don't want her to keep worrying about me with what I'm doing... 'cause she got a lot of stuff going on anyway.

Depending on the recipient, there are two possible interpretations of this gesture, worrisome or comforting. It would be interesting to have the opposite side of this exchange to determine which interpretation she would perceive. In the absence of dyadic data (a direction for future research in this area) this was not a possibility. Therefore, there is no conclusion as to whether this was a true form of support.

### **Instrumental Social Support**

Compared to expressive support, instrumental social support was straight forward and more definable for interviewees. I analyzed this data in two ways. First, there was a consideration of all forms of instrumental social support together. Second, since research has shown that low-income individuals' financial social support differs from those of other incomes (Schafer & Vargas, 2016), the analysis involved separating financial social support from other forms of instrumental support.

When combined, all participants stated they provided some form of instrumental social support to another person, and almost all (25) stated they received some form of instrumental social support from criminal (20) and/or conforming (22) others.<sup>1</sup> After separation, a majority (21) claimed they provided financial social support to others (for many this is strictly cash), and the majority (23) still provided some other form of instrumental support. However, the pattern differs when analyzing the perception of receiving financial support versus other forms of instrumental support. The majority still

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<sup>1</sup> 17 participants received instrumental support from both criminal and conforming others.

received some other form of instrumental support (25), but only eleven participants admitted receiving financial support. Breaking it down by source, five participants received financial support from criminal others only, five received it from conforming others only, and one received it from both types.

Providing for one's family was a necessity. In fact, the only interviewees who admitted they did not provide financial social support to anyone were those without children. The rest of the participants were quick to explain, often unprompted, that they provide for their family, and sometimes used this as a justification for committing offenses, "I'm not content where I want to be in life right now, but my kids gotta eat. I gotta keep the lights on. It's, I gotta be a man (121)." However, the consistency or specifics with which they provided this support was often vague or expressed only when asked. For instance, "I send it to them when she's like, when she needs the money or I have the extra money to send (853)."

Recipients of financial support were mostly family members, including extended family and their children's mothers, but friends and girlfriends were also beneficiaries. This makes sense considering they are often giving back to people who gave to them or they feel it is a requirement to be a provider for their family.

**Kinds of Instrumental Social Support.** Again, it is not enough to determine whether offenders are receiving or giving instrumental social support. It is also important to determine the kinds of instrumental social support given and received since they can differ across environments (Cassel, 1976; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Haber et al., 2007), and it can help to illuminate the message the provider is trying to convey, i.e., whether the social support is directly promoting or discouraging crime.

Providing direct financial help is just one type of instrumental social support reported within this environment. Throughout the interviews offenders discussed many examples of traditional instrumental social support. Some of these included providing a place to stay, giving rides, providing material items such as diapers, clothing, and shoes, giving general advice, providing food, babysitting, providing house and yard work, advising on the consequences of behavior, helping with homework, and getting someone a job.

There were also examples of instrumental social support that might be more common or exclusive to these neighborhoods. Participants talked about how their family or friends showed them how to commit crimes, such as learning to cook crack or weigh coke, or to beat the system (not get caught by police). This was evident where participant 121 said, “She taught me how to beat the system a little bit, and I learned how to maneuver because God forbid, you know what I’m saying, my mama never caught a drug charge.” The sibling dyad reiterated this notion. They both explained that their mother taught them how to be involved in the streets:

951 (Sister): So, I’m like this from my mama. Like, she made me and my brother like how we is now. Like, the side that harden that we got, it come from her. Like, she didn’t coat nothing. She told us the street way.

269 (Brother): My mom taught me everything. Like, she, she raised us on a we all we got scale. So, everything I do, I try ta think about how I’m a take some home to my mama, my sister.

While other family members also gave them this kind of support, the pair mostly credited their mother with providing them advice on how to succeed in the streets.

Some forms of instrumental support helped interviewees secure release from prison, or escape an arrest or criminal charge, but it was not always criminal acquaintances or family members who provided this support. For instance, people lied in court or to the police on behalf of interviewees, or they would let them “lay low” at their house:

720: My first boyfriend, he went to prison for murder. I, my dumbass, even got up on the trial and lied, and act like he was with me during the armed robbery... Good thing they didn't lock me up. That's a good thing. They knew I was lying.

It was also common to see both criminal and conforming others bonding their family, friends, and employees out of jail, sometimes even putting up their home as collateral. For example, participant 944 when talking about his legitimate work situation said, “They've been holding me down. One of my supervisors bonded me out one time, you know, so they want me there...” Unlike other financial social support, this was a form the participants were willing to accept outright.

Another example of criminogenic instrumental social support is “having a friend's back” a common expectation among criminally involved friends and family members in disadvantaged neighborhoods (see Wilkinson, Beaty, & Lurry, 2009; Topalli et al., 2002; Jacobs & Wright, 1999). Unlike in other mainstream contexts, in their environment this phrase is often associated with a willingness to engage in violence and other forms of crime as shows of support. Examples of this include such comments as, “I went and got one of my homegirls to come back... and with my homegirl, we hid his car for like two

weeks...I bust out the window and everything (720<sup>1</sup>),” “I had a couple guys, my little goons, we run back down there and he was gone (639<sup>2</sup>),” and “So, I have been into like about seven or eight fights with my niece, just taking up for her (428).” The overall sentiment in these examples is that they feel they can rely on people or that others can rely on them to protect their status or respect in the neighborhood.

Participants also commented on having people provide them with drugs, to use or sell. One participant clearly states how this can occur with regards to drug use, “His mother now, was sitting at the table smoking crack on a can, and they tried to get me introduced to it because they knew I had that money...He brought it to me again with a glass shooter (790<sup>3</sup>).” It was also evident within the context of drug selling:

501: So, I was messing with this girl at the time, her husband was a police, and, um, he would steal the weed and she would steal it from him and give it to me. I didn't have to buy none, you know what I'm saying. So, I went from there, you know.

In addition to giving free drugs, an associate providing a place to sell drugs (trap house) was also a form of criminogenic instrumental social support seen:

269: So, lately I just been working the spot. I have a spot that always roll...It's a older head spot, he let me work out of ...

INT: You pay him a little money?

269: I don't got to, 'cause he just don't want to see me gettin' messed up for no reason.

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<sup>1</sup> This quote was in response to their partner cheating.

<sup>2</sup> This quote is in response someone victimizing them.

<sup>3</sup> He did not like it the first time. So, the friend brought him more with a different smoking apparatus.

While only one participant mentioned providing a place to sell drugs, many others mentioned receiving drugs from someone.

When individuals became addicted to drugs it engendered new forms of non-criminogenic instrumental social support to get them off drugs or for them to stay off. For instance, providing them with the knowledge and/or money to get into a rehabilitation program. Such as: “Mainly because my mom. She sent me to Ridgeview, and that was 14,700 a month...and then the halfway house was 568 dollars a week, and I went through all that (790).” After rehabilitation, drug addicts may not understand how to handle money and need advice or someone to control their money for them.

501: I get my money, but as far as telling, let me know how to spend it, cause I’m still learning how to save and spend money...My father, my girls, you know, and they tell me, you know, if I make a hundred dollars, I need to put 25 in the bank.

While there were only two rehabilitated drug addicts in the sample, both experienced each of the above forms of instrumental social support.

There were also situations where participants did not apply traditional (conforming) forms of social support as intended. This can be seen by participant 332, “I got these 150, you know what I’m saying? This 150 dollars my mama just gave me for a pair of shoes. Shit, I’m gonna go get some weed [to sell] and shit. I can get me two, three pairs of shoes.” Other situations involved a person giving instrumental social support to another with messaging that did not match the identity of the provider. On one hand, criminals did or said things that provides support for the conventional world. For instance, providing advice on how to succeed legitimately. Some examples given were teaching necessary skills for the workforce like when participant 428’s cousin said he

could show him how to fix phones or when participant 951's mother made connections to secure job for her and taught her how to apply for it. Non-criminogenic social support from criminals also came in the form of helping children with their homework so they could succeed in school.

248: She started, you know, trying to drive them away, but I help them with their homework this and that, and I know you can't help 'em with their homework and you have them sitting right there damn near to nighttime stuck on one page of homework, on kindergarten work or first grade work, that you can't help them with. Which I can come along and help them with, you know, anything they need to go on and get them outta there. So, I had them on the right track. So, she derailed that.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, this mixed social support can occur when conforming people do or say something that provides support for the criminal world, such as holding drugs and/or money:

282: My grandmother passed away, the person that I trusted with the, to hold all of my stuff and now it's with her sister.

It can also include lying to officials about the individual's behavior or whereabouts:

501: Whether you're right or wrong. Like my mother, she'd be in the courtroom, my child did not do that.

Overall, there are different kinds of instrumental social support that can originate from conforming or criminal sources. Although, the amount that each participant gives or receives is difficult to quantify and based on the perceptions of the participants. That said,

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<sup>1</sup> Talking about his children and their mother.

it is still possible to say that criminals are providing and receiving instrumental social support in an urban environment with both criminogenic and non-criminogenic messaging.

### **Social Support Message**

Traditionally when determining whether social support is a risk or protective factor for criminality two elements have received attention; whether someone receives social support and who they are receiving it from (Colvin et al., 2002). As previously mentioned, researchers generally assumed that receiving social support from criminals is criminogenic and from conformists is non-criminogenic (i.e., Brezina & Azimi, 2018; Cullen, 1994; Wright & Cullen, 2001); and the more consistent social support is received from these sources, the more likely the outcome (Colvin et al., 2002; Wyse et al., 2014). However, it is possible that people may give messages incongruent with their identity or provide mixed messaging. Therefore, it is important to examine the content of the message itself and not just the origin of support.

As seen above, criminals provided objectively conforming instrumental social support and conformist provided support that promoted criminality which supports the notion of opposing messaging. The following sections focus more on the actual intended messages of the criminals and the perceived messages provided by conforming individuals in their lives to determine the extent of opposing messages within this environment. A caveat; since only offenders were interviewees, criminogenic messages from conforming others must be implied from both their actions and words towards the participants as well as the perceptions they had of those exchanges. While this may not be

optimal to establish the identifying characteristics of messages, it is a good starting point for determining whether they exist in the first place.

**Messaging from Conforming Origins.** There were no pure criminogenic messages from conforming sources relayed by the participants, meaning that no participant had a conforming person in their lives that consistently presented a criminogenic message to them. However, many perceived people in their lives to have provided a changing or mixed message. In addition, the way conforming sources responded to the giving of instrumental social support by the participant often transmitted a criminogenic message to the offenders whether intended or not.

As expected, it is common for conforming others to try to discourage the participants from criminal activity. One way to do so is by mentioning outright they should stop:

489: In a way she was, but, um, it wasn't all the time, she was like, 'you don't need to be doing that'.

Conforming others communicated this message another way when they mentioned the interviewee should secure legitimate employment.

428: I get along with all my family except my uncles, 'cause they be wantin' me to like do what they want me to do as far as working and get outta this shit.

For some sources of support the messaging was consistent, but for others the nature and intent of messaging changed over time. In these cases, the conforming individual may start out discouraging criminality, but then move to a defeatist stance. This can be seen with participant 332's mother:

I did the best that I could when I raised you. You know what I'm saying? I mean, shit, I raised you to the T. I don't, you know what I'm saying, like it, ain't no, I can't pull you away from that when you already there.

A warning sometimes accompanied this stance, such as, "My mama be like, 'you better be careful, all those motherfuckers in front of your face like that ain't your friend boy' (853)." The message can also move from discouragement of the behavior to a less optimal but protective message: If there's nothing I can say to make you stop, and you are going to do it, then do it as well and as safely as you can, "Nah, even my grandma told me, if I'm gonna do it, be the best at it (364)."

Sometimes the differing messages do not change across time but mix together within a short time span, thereby leading to confusion regarding the intent or nature of the conveyed message, "You need to stop doing what you're doing, you know. God doesn't like ugly, but he will keep you protected and an edge of protection around you until you come to your own realization (790)."

Even if the non-criminogenic statement is clear, the message can become muddled and perceived differently by the recipient. This can happen when the conforming person responds to receiving money or items that are known to be associated with criminal acts. The two most common responses to criminal instrumental support offerings are taking it anyway or being skeptical about it and refusing. In this sample, refusal did not occur very often, but it might look like:

501: I came home one time with 1,500 dollars in a bag and showed my grandmother out of the box. She said, 'Honey, you can take that money up out of here. You need to put it back.' It went with me. So, I had to switch it up. I had to

go outside, use a bathroom, put a bag with paper in it, 'cause they don't want it, didn't want it.

Most of the time, the offender finds a way to give it to them anyway, but they must lie or disguise the source of the money to make it acceptable.

When the conforming person accepts the money or items anyway, they sometimes include a non-criminogenic message:

452: My mom, that was always her thing. You know, she said, you know, get a job, you know, work or whatever, you know, even though when I come in and give her money when she need it, she didn't have a problem with that. She'd still preach to me.

The receiving of criminal financial support from conforming individuals can send one of two messages. Either the person does not care about offending or they are so desperate for help, their need trumps proscriptions against illegal or unethical origins of support. The provider of the support, in this case the participants, often determined which message was more likely the intention. For instance, "She in the environment too so it don't matter, you know what I'm saying? Like, as long as we taking care of her shit, she straight (841)."

Even the clearest non-criminogenic messaging may not matter because the participants may choose to rebut or ignore it. They may refute the message by saying things like:

817: She is really totally against it, but I guess she understand my lifestyle. It's been my lifestyle since, you know, young, and now I have kind of put myself in the situation to where it is hard to make ends meet.

When ignoring the message, they may have accompanying explanations or behaviors like, “No, they’ll tell you not to do it, but either way it goes it’s your choice (944).” Some of the participants have agreed with the message, but many did not fully change their lives to be crime free. Instead, they may have adjusted their criminal behavior by slowing down,<sup>1</sup> often with a response such as:

314: She put pressure on me as far as, you know, like, you gotta think. You gotta think about things you doin ‘cause you can get people around you, you feel me, and that’s when it really was like, yeah, let me throw this shit in the bag and shake it up...I don’t want to see any of that, you know what I’m saying? Yeah, okay. Like I say, yeah, buying my son this, buyin’ him that, but what about them long days that I was sitting in the trap?

There were a few participants who agreed with the message and stopped entirely, but it was often years after ignoring and rebutting the same message.

**Messaging from Criminal Origins.** Unlike conforming origins, as the participants can speak for themselves concerning the intent, the messaging was straight forward with criminal origins. All but four participants communicated some form of non-criminogenic messaging. More than half (15) explained a mixed message, meaning they talked about both criminogenic and non-criminogenic options being somewhat acceptable but with a preference for one. When discussing messaging, most participants did so in relation to their children. Some also discussed the message with reference to nieces and nephews, friends, and siblings, but they were generally individuals who were younger than them. Included amongst the responses were some non-criminogenic messages

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<sup>1</sup> Slowing down in this context is either changing the types of crime they commit or by committing crimes less frequently.

provided from criminal others, such as talking amongst friends about getting out, older criminals in the neighborhood encouraging younger ones to get a job or promoting education, and other offenders trying to find ways to pull them out of the criminal lifestyle.

Most participants stated they did not want their younger loved ones to be like them and “in the life.” Participant 853 stated this message best:

They don't understand the concept of really selling drugs, cause the point, you don't want your fucking children and your family doing that shit. You know the consequences behind it. So, you know, if you love your fucking little man or you love your daughter, you're not gonna want them to do the shit you're doing.

Many of these messages are followed up by *a posteriori* justifications like: “I mean, I push, I push more education. You feel what I'm saying? I don't, don't talk about their level, because when you go entertaining it, that's when they go to entertaining it. (332).”

Others provided more than messaging by pairing it with helping them with their homework or instrumental rewards for good grades. Some of them even used their self as an example of what not to do:

121: Y'all seen what I put mama through, you know what I'm saying? I go make 'em cry...If I'm gonna come down here and tell y'all. I drive a whole 30 minutes just to go be a motivational speaker, you know what I'm saying? If I gotta come and tell y'all, y'all doing wrong, then y'all doing wrong.

Still others have slowed down to reiterate the message, for reasons indicated by participant 452:

I just needed to show them another way, because they kept seeing me like going to jail for different things, you know what I'm saying, and with guns and stuff and all that right now. And I just needed to show them something different.

Overall, it was rare amongst the participants to find someone who would present a fully criminogenic message.

Similar to messaging of conforming others, across time or concurrently, the participants' messaging became mixed. The shift often happens when they find out their family is already involved or hypothetically involved in the criminal lifestyle. Mirroring their own reasons for ignoring their family's messages, the majority who supplied a mixed message indicated it was a personal choice. This was indicated by participant 944, "Yeah, I want them to school, you know, but I want them to have their own choices and decision too. To see what they really want." A few of these same participants and others also added, "I'm saying, you know, if they do it, I'm, I'm, I'll coach 'em to do it the right way (944)." There were a few one-off responses from some of the other participants that included things like, "I'll put a gun in their hand for protection", and "I'd let them know why not to do it" (indicating the consequences). Overall, it seems that the participants tried to present a non-criminogenic message to their loved ones, but like their own conforming family they understood when loved ones selected criminogenic choices out of necessity and did the best to protect them as they lived in that life.

### **Lack of Social Support**

Discovered through analysis, many (19) of the participants mentioned a specific lack of social support, presented here to illustrate how lacking conforming social support can lead to criminality (Wright & Cesar, 2013). Recall earlier that a lack of support is

common during incarceration, which makes reentry a difficult challenge for individuals. Beyond that, the interviews demonstrated that the lack of social support extends to day-to-day life on the streets as well. For many interviewees, this deficit was due to their ironic refusal to accept social support from others, evidenced by statements like: “Don’t depend on nobody, depend on God (409).” For most participants, the lack of social support occurred early in their lives, during childhood, and its continued absence potentially led them to crime. A perception of needing food or material goods compared to others was often a reason they gave to explain their initial involvement in crime.

372: Your mama ain’t buyin’, my momma she struggled just taking care of us.

You feel me. I done lived every single fear my mama done had, you feel what I’m saying, so it’s been plenty of times like, I wake up, mama crying on the couch wondering how she’s going to goddamn feed us. You feel what I’m saying, I’m 6’5”, you feel me, 300. My brother is 6’8”, 400, You feel me?... You know, it’s eight people in the house. How you supposed to do that when we eat eight people portions. How you fittin’ to do that?... So, you feel me, I did what I had to do.

Some participants communicated a similar feeling with regards to expressive social support. “If he’d been more involved maybe, like, ‘cause I was really, really good at sports, and if, maybe, he’d been a little bit more in that, that aspect of my life, I maybe stay on that track (817).” Taken together, the lack of instrumental social support was more often a reason they gave for committing crime than lacking expressive support.

### **Supplementary Results**

While not initially intended to be coded or analyzed since they were not included in the interview protocol, there was an additional dimension of social support,

*institutional social support*, and a related concept, *coercion*, that came up in a few of the interviews. These results are not comprehensive, but since they are related and naturally emerged in some of the conversations they warrant inclusion here, if only to suggest the need for further research in these areas.

**Institutional Social Support.** Throughout the interviews a total of ten participants mentioned a form of institutional social support unprompted by the interviewer. All ten mentioned traditional forms of government assistance such as Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP; i.e., “food stamps”), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF; i.e., “welfare”), and social security benefits. Three of the participants are currently utilizing government assistance, and one of them uses it to provide instrumental social support to others.

INT: When you go to their houses do they ask you to bring something to stay there, or do they just let you stay there?

933: Well actually that’s, that’s the reason I bounce around, because I can’t stay that long because I’m not bringing anything to the table. Uh, but uh, like I get uh stamps now. I’ll help them out with food and stuff a lot of times.

The other two mentioned that they were on social security when asked what they do for money. One of them does not provide financial support to others, and the other only provides financial support to his immediate family. Half of this subsample mentioned other people in their lives received government assistance. One participant noted her mother received assistance when she was younger because her father did not help financially. Two mentioned at least one of their children’s mothers received food stamps.

One of these participants claimed that he should be benefitting from the food stamps. His children live with him, and when asked about the arrangement:

INT: Did you ask her if you could have them all the time?

677: But she don't give me no benefit for 'em.

INT: She doesn't?

677: No, she don't give me food stamp. She don't give me nothing for them.

Another participant mentioned government assistance as a side note as to why he was providing instrumental assistance (food) to a child that was not his. This exchange also highlights how some individuals can abuse the support.

364: Like, I had this one girl, she had an apartment on Cleveland. She like, she had a little girl, but she, she needed a job, and her mama bought her apartment, she was paying the rent for three months, and she was telling her daughter she needed to get a job and stuff, but she was so lazy. She always sitting in the bed. She ain't have, she had food stamps, she ain't even touch the food stamps. She was saving up the food stamps trying to sell the food stamps.

Still another participant mentioned social security and the lump sum death payment. He currently has legitimate employment but had been unemployed for fourteen years prior.

This was his reasoning for trying to keep his current job:

428: Yeah, I looked, I looked at my social security print out, but if you don't work, you don't eat.

INT: And what's it say now? Like a thousand dollars a month or something like that?

428: No, it's 177 dollars.

INT: Oh. You need to put some more time into work...Nobody's gonna get by on 177 dollars though man.

428: Hell no, and then if I want to be buried, the state will only give me 355 dollars. What that gonna do? That ain't gonna get a suit.

The participants did not always mention government assistance in relation to something they get or did. One participant described how her aunt who is on government assistance was still receiving financial support from her grandmother while her family was not given any support.

720: And my auntie, she feel like her children and them they like they, how can I put it? Like they living off social security, like don't nobody wanna work. So, it, it's a big difference. She feel like my mom in, in our column, but there is nobody there in my auntie column. So, she be in my auntie column, but that my auntie fault... So, you know, like every month they call my grandma. When my grandma need to pay her bills. We can't call my grandma and ask her to pay us no bills cause she gonna say she ain't got it. But if you bet my auntie done call, she gonna say, hell yeah. She not gonna say, hell yeah, cause she's 80, but she gonna say, yeah, get the card out.

The last participant that discussed government help mentioned the Georgia Fatherhood Program. He had lost his driver's license due to a couple of his children's mothers applying for TANF resulting in overdue child support payments. He stated this program would allow him to get his license back.

Besides traditional government assistance, two participants mentioned non-governmental institutional support programs, the Empty Stocking Fund and Big Brothers

Big Sisters of America. Participant 428 oddly brought up Big Brothers Big Sisters as an explanation for why he believes there is more crime in the neighborhood today than when he was younger.

So, if you have big sisters and big brothers, just think about when your mom or your daddy can't do nothin' for you. You got a big brother come over here, help you do your homework, take you to Six Flags, take you to do shoppin', take you and show you how to be a productive child; but they ain't, they ain't none of that no more.

While the participant mistakenly points out that they are not around anymore, this exchange highlights how he believed institutional social support is important to dissuade children from criminal activity.

Finally, many participants mentioned “the streets” as an entity, but one participant discussed “the streets” as providing social support.

639: Most of the people from the hood is self-raised, the streets raised ‘em, the prison raised ‘em, and that’s where they get they mentality, you know, from the street. You know, like me, I got my mentality from the street, and had the best parents...The streets call you, and if you answer they’ll deal with you. Show you so much love. That’s how they get you.

“The streets” is not a recognized institution, but it seemed appropriate to include it as a potential criminogenic informal institution that provides social support.

**Coercion.** In addition to institutional social support, there was an analysis done of coercion. Coercion is “a force that compels or intimidates an individual to act because of the fear of or anxiety it creates (Colvin et al., 2002, p. 19).” Twenty participants provided

examples of coercion during the interviews. The analysis included two forms of coercion; *interpersonal* and *impersonal*. Twelve participants related examples of interpersonal coercion, and fifteen mentioned examples of impersonal coercion. With regards to interpersonal coercion, the majority described examples of harsh discipline they received, but in one case the participant was giving harsh discipline to his children. Participant reactions to coercive tactics ranged from leaving the situation to undermining the conveyed message. For example:

880: It made me want to be rebellious, you see what I'm saying? Like, you telling your child like, you beating your child or not. Beating like whoopin', you know what I'm saying? Like you grow, you know how you grew up, you probably never gotten a whoopin'.

In a related interpersonal coercion, some participants described being the perpetrator of coercion in the form of domestic violence, such as one participant's response to her boyfriend coming home late:

720: So, then I was like, ah, man, you better get the fuck out of my house. So, I pushed him. So, he grabbed me by my neck. My quick reflexes I just goddamn (makes hitting sound). Hit him dead in the head. Blood went everywhere, on the goddamn wall. My baby she was 5 months. She upstairs in bed. So, okay, we fighting...So, we just fighting and everything. Blood all on my shirt. He bleeding. I'm bleeding. I done went and got a knife. I done stuck him all in the head. Then, I done went and got the fork, he got holes all in his chest.

The other forms of interpersonal coercion mentioned were victimization and the threat of removing social support.

With regards to impersonal coercion, the two most common forms mentioned were dangerous neighborhoods (7) and financial stress (9). Participants described the neighborhoods as dangerous which made them stressed and fearful.

639: Well, the rough side...It's uh, it's going and it's dangerous. It's probably just about what you think...Your surrounding that you grew up in, your surroundings that you're living in. It gobbles you up. You ever take a nice kid, real cool kid, and then you put him over there and he just change. He ain't no nice kid no more 'cause he been gobbled up by the bad guys.

Descriptions of coercion as financial stress differed in strength, or severity, from mild to extreme. Mild coercion looked something like:

677: Yeah, cause the kids they had need some clothes and stuff, and I'm like, man I can't have my lil boy going to school like that, and they call my phone and like, they wanna, um, 3 pound of, it was, it was just spur of the moment, cause they like, they wanted like 3, 3 pound of, um, mids.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas a more extreme version is evident here:

841: Shit, growing up nothing there to eat, you know what I'm saying?  
Everybody else ate good, and you goddamn, you got water and you're eating noodles and shit. Pork and beans and shit like that, you know what I'm saying?

There were other times the participants mentioned feeling stressed or out of control, but there were no other forms consistently given by participants.

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<sup>1</sup> Mids is a slang term for middle-grade marijuana. Middle-grade refers to the potency and quality of the drug in comparison to other variations; it is not the best or worst available.

One example not necessarily identified in the literature as coercion but could expand the concept is the possibility of *positive coercion*. In other words, something that stresses or pushes a person to desist or slow down. For instance:

452: It was a lot of my friends that, that's been killed and never getting out of jail, you know, so uh, it's just with me sitting back and observing everything, and that's it...

INT: Did you ever think about going back to that kind of stuff? Has money gotten tight and you're like, yeah, I just need to go out and do a lick or something like that?

452: Mm, no, I haven't thought about going to do that in a while. You know, and truthfully, mostly why I haven't thought of doing that is because a lot of the guys I used to do it with, like I said, they're not around anymore, you know what I'm saying?

There were not a lot of examples of this concept, but again, coercion was not the focus of the study and so the interviewers did not question it thoroughly. However, it is an idea that is worth researching further.

While seemingly disparate, the results are all related through the lens of social support. Relationships can give rise to both social support and coercion, and the type of relationship can affect how both concepts play out within exchanges. Social support and coercion are often inversely related or a function of the same, as coercion in the form of social support removal threats. In addition, the message behind both concepts is important in determining the outcomes of each. A detailed discussion of these results and their connections follow in the next chapter.

## Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion

This study focused on expanding our knowledge of social support within interpersonal relationships, specifically the types found in criminogenic environments, and the messaging behind them. As indicated in Chapter II, social support can be beneficial to individuals for a variety of reasons (see Hakulinen et al, 2016; Taylor, 2007). For criminality specifically, the relationship is complex, where the origin of the social support particularly matters for the outcome (Colvin et al., 2002). Traditionally, researchers have found social support from criminals or a lack of conventional support leads to deviance and/or law-breaking (Ardelt & Day, 2002; Brezina & Azimi, 2018; Haynie, 2002; Kurtz et al., 2014). Previously, researchers assumed the message accompanying social support always matched the identity – criminal or conforming – of the source. It was the aim of this research to question that assumption and suggest that both criminals and conformist can provide messaging contrasting with their identity. While preliminary, the results show questioning the assumption of message/messenger congruence is recommended and that there is more to social support messaging than the identity of the person giving it.

In addition, other disciplines have emphasized the need to study and relate the specific kinds of social support according to the environment within which the message occurs for researchers to have a truly comprehensive understanding of its effects (see Cassel, 1976; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Haber et al., 2007). But, this orientation has been lacking in criminology. Criminological research instruments on the subject often employ generic questions related to social support that may not separate instrumental and expressive support (i.e., Kurtz, et al., 2014; Zavala & Kurtz, 2016) or only measure one

type of support (i.e., Ardel & Day, 2002; Baron, 2015; Beaver et al., 2014; Kurtz & Zavala, 2017; Meadows, 2007; Vazsonyi & Belliston, 2007), and do little to take into account the context within which support is being considered.<sup>1</sup>

This research gathered examples of social support found within criminogenic environments that may not be present in other environments, and researchers can apply them in future studies with similar populations. Further, by examining specific kinds of social support, I determined that criminals can provide traditional non-criminogenic forms of social support and that conforming others can provide criminogenic support. Taken together, when determining whether social support is a risk or protective factor, this research indicates that social scientists and practitioners should consider matching specific social support types to the sociocultural context as well as evaluating the source of support separately from the message they are trying to provide or perceived to be imparting.

## **Discussion**

It is important to note again that results are based on the participant's *perception* of social support in their lives and therefore do not represent an objective presence or absence of social support. That said, perceptions of social support can be valuable in their own right, as they are responded to by the receiver or giver of support in ways that are systematic and consequential. In fact, many researchers believe that perceptions of social support are more relevant when determining various related outcomes (see Cohen, 2004; Son et al., 2008). However, using perceptions makes it necessary to interpret findings within the respondent's cultural and lifestyle context (see Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010).

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<sup>1</sup> However, prison and reentry literature tailor the social support to items related to prisons and getting reintegrated (i.e., Cochran, 2014; Hochstetler et al., 2010; Taylor, 2016; Woo et al., 2016)

**Relationships.** Previous research indicates that the structure of relationships differs in inner-cities and low-income areas compared to middle-class environments (Cherlin 2010; Newport & Wilke, 2013; Hartnett et al., 2018). To understand the differences in social support within the study environment it was necessary to determine if the participants' relationships were consistent with previous research in similar environments, and the perceived quality and importance of those interpersonal relationships.

Consistent with previous work (Anderson, 1999; Wrzus et al., 2012), participants viewed family relationships as more important than peer relationships mostly due to stronger emotional connections. This difference in emotional connection could be due to feelings of distrust within friendships as indicated by participant 841, "Niggers are always talking out here. These niggers all loose, you know what I mean, but, fuck these niggers" and participant 933:

933: Well, I have people I associate with in the streets, but, but really, I don't really have this like best friends or anything. I just associate with people.

INT: So, the only people that you would say you're close to is family?

933: That I really trust is family. Closest family.

Distrust among people in these environments is consistent with previous research on urban crime (Raudenbush, 2016; Ross et al., 2002; Way, Gingold, Rotenberg, & Kuriakose, 2005), and especially prevalent amongst street-oriented individuals within such environments (Anderson, 1999).

While this suggests the existence of mostly shallow and distrustful friendships, participants still spent most of their time with friends. This disparity can be explained by

examining the two different types of friendship qualities assessed in previous research, *attachment* and *affiliation* (Mikulincer & Selinger, 2001; Weiss, 1998). Attachment is related to traditional understandings of relationship quality such as emotional support and caring, whereas friendship affiliation is associated with the notion of cooperative partnership, including reciprocity, and instrumental benefits that promote social status or respect (Martin, Davies, & Cummings, 2017). Based on the quality of friendships described by the participants and how they interact with them, it can be determined that their friendships are more affiliative in nature. The opposite is true of familial relationships, which appear to have more of an attachment quality to them. Given this, familial relationships should provide more expressive social support than friendships among the participants, which the data confirmed in analysis.

Intimate relationships were also important to analyze as these can reduce offending including through social support (Abrams & Tam, 2018; Rayburn & Wright, 2017; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Wyse et al., 2014). In these environments, partner concurrency is normative (Carey, Senn, Seward, & Venable, 2010; Nunn et al., 2012; Petersen & Hyde, 2010), especially for males (Kerrigan et al., 2007; Sprecher, Treger, & Sakaluk, 2013), and the number of participants having multiple partners confirmed its normalcy. Also consistent with prior research (Bauman & Berman, 2005; Eyre, Flythe, Hoffman, & Fraser, 2012a; Levant, 1996; Nunn et al., 2012), participants either ignored concerns of their partner and/or felt they had control of the relationships, indicating a lack of emotional connectedness. A possible explanation for why they were unconcerned with their partner's opinions about exclusivity is that non-monogamy in these environments is viewed as a way to boost one's reputation, and this makes it difficult for strong bonds to

form for those who are concerned with achieving respect and enhancing their masculine reputations (Anderson, 1999; Froyum Roise, 2004). This lack of connectedness in intimate relationships would make it unlikely they are receiving from and/or giving social support to intimate others (Charles et al., 2018; Gardner & Cutrona, 2004), and this is precisely what the data showed.

However, there were a few participants who had an exclusive significant other, (some of whom had only recently become exclusive). For those who eventually became exclusive, the majority said they received expressive support from their partner. This is consistent with prior research showing expressive social support can increase connectedness (Antonucci & Israel, 1986; Cutrona et al., 2007; Gardner & Cutrona, 2004; Lawrence et al., 2008) and increased connectedness and trust are the main reasons individuals shift to exclusivity in a relationship (Chaney, 2014; Eyre et al., 2012b; Towner, Dolcini, & Harper, 2015). Overall, expressive social support and connectedness in relationships seems to be recursive in nature with increases in one producing increases in the other. Relationships high in connectedness and social support would more likely be exclusive. This was evident from my interviews, as participants who were exclusive received more expressive support than those who were not.

**Expressive Social Support.** Since most participants said females, especially family members and children, were most important in their lives, it is unsurprising that females and children provided or received the most expressive support from the offenders I interviewed, confirming prior research (see e.g., Ray, 2016; Wellman & Wortley, 1990). Basically, participants felt expressing emotions should only occur in front of females, “Yeah, that why I got a lot of girls. That’s for girls (944)” or, “you ain’t fittin’ to be that

fruity more with your partners (841).” These notions were common, in line with previous findings that many low-income and African-American men believe in traditional masculinity that promotes physicality, toughness, and emotional stoicism (Levant, Majors, & Kelley, 1998; Morgan, 2005; Young, 2007), especially within the inner-city culture where showing weakness can reduce one’s respect and invite victimization (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Anderson, 1999<sup>1</sup>). Thus, it is crucial for men in such areas to maintain an appearance of toughness.

Traditional ideas of masculinity were also evident in that many participants were reticent to be forthright about needing expressive support even though most produced at least one example of receiving it. This reluctance was particularly evident in the presence of the male interviewer.<sup>2</sup> In the participants’ eyes, admitting needing help with emotional troubles would signal weakness and cost them respect. So, participants tried to distance themselves from the appearance of putative weakness by limiting exposure of their vulnerability (Schwab, Addis, Reigeluth, & Berger, 2016). In fact, many respondents said their friends would tell them to “suck it up” or ask if they wanted to get into something, meaning either partying or crime, to assuage such feelings. Basically, notions of masculinity limit their network for expressive social support and thereby reduced the potential benefits normally accrued from having rich and diverse social networks (Taylor, Chatters, Hardison, & Riley, 2001; Barger, Donoho, & Wayment, 2009).

Beyond identifying masculinity concerns as a reason to avoid seeking out expressive social support, a few participants believed expressive support was ineffectual,

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<sup>1</sup> Although, while perceived by those living in these environments that it can protect them, it is more likely to result in victimization (Stewart, Schreck, & Simons, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> When only a female interviewer was present, the participants tended to reveal more about their emotional connections to people but would downplay their violence.

a waste of time, and thus did not seek it out. To be clear, they did not claim that it did not help in relation to their own feelings, but instead contended it did not matter because they felt “trapped” in the streets, where such feelings were a dangerous sign of weakness to begin with. This idea of entrapment is consistent with previous literature for a variety of reasons. First, offender lifestyles demand fast money, which encapsulates them in cycles of criminality that are difficult to break (see Wright & Decker, 1994; Wright, Topalli, & Jacques, 2017). Second, once they have felonies on their record, it is hard to gain employment (Grogger, 1995; Pager, 2003), and suffer from other ongoing consequences of formal punishment (e.g., incarceration, disenfranchisements, etc., see Kirk & Wakefield, 2018) making it harder to leave the criminal life behind. Thus, their lifestyle limits feelings of hope for the future and makes it unlikely they will change (see Brezina, Tekin, & Topalli, 2009). Further, their reluctance to seek expressive social support works against them escaping the negative cycles within which they are trapped.

Their reluctance to talk about expressive support during interviews or feel they need it likely limited to some extent the richness in my data. While most interviewees experienced some level of expressive support in their lives, it often arose from just one or two sources. As such, further research should determine just how weak the expressive support is in these neighborhoods, and whether it is weak specifically due to the investment of male offenders in maintaining “tough” identities or because of other factors.

***Kinds of Expressive Social Support.*** Due to the limited data on expressive support, it is likely that some forms of this support remain uncovered. However, the most common forms found – talking and spending time with people they care about as well as

feeling love from somebody – are consistent with prior literature (Gottlieb, Cohen, & Underwood, 2000).

More importantly, there were a few forms unique to offenders which researchers should utilize for analysis with these populations to have a better understanding of the effect of support on desistance. The first kind discussed was receiving phone calls and visitations from loved ones during incarceration. This is an extension of the common forms of expressive support previously mentioned and already studied in prison research (Cochran, 2014; Jiang et al., 2005; Woo et al., 2016). When this form of support was lacking, the participants mentioned this increased their offending while imprisoned which is consistent with prior work (see DeClaire & Dixon, 2017; Jiang et al., 2005).

Based on the data gathered in the present study, when studying social support, it is important to separate calls and visitation in prison from the more general calls and visitation since the level of support received by the participants changed with their incarceration status. Thus, these changes in social support can result in positive or negative changes in the relationship (La Vigne, Naser, Brooks, & Castro, 2005). Previous social support research focused on general types of social support (Ardelt & Day, 2002; Baron, 2015; Kurtz, et al., 2014; Vazsonyi & Belliston, 2007; Zavala & Kurtz, 2016), but future research should consider the socio-cultural contexts of social support since situational effects matter. This is especially true because changes in social support in varying environments could have continuing effects on those relationships (La Vigne et al., 2005) and future social support.

Another form of support mentioned by some participants was repeated concerns for their safety and requests to change their lifestyle from significant others, be they

family or intimate partners. This could have positive or negative connotations depending on the perceptions of the recipient. First, since worry can be a form of caring (Van Manen, 2002<sup>1</sup>) recipients could view it as a sign of love and thus expressive social support, and one participant interpreted it as such, “My mom, she ain’t gonna never stop. She gon’ cry ‘til the end and I love it. I love to hear her cry...It’s showing a lot of love (639).” Second, recipients could interpret these statements as “nagging” or attempts at control, producing anger and resentment in the recipient and leading them to disassociate from that person. In fact, some participants did interpret it this way. It is possible that the perceptions of the statements vary according to the relative closeness of the relationship. Identifying the factors determining why some perceive this as a social support and others do not warrants further study. This is especially important considering for the latter group these statements potentially could lead to a loss of a conforming source of support which allows them to continue offending.

Sentiments regarding the interviewees’ concern about significant others worrying about them were evident. One participant related lying about his criminal activity as a form of emotional protection for his aunt. Unfortunately, the aunt’s actual reaction to this lie was not possible to obtain. If perceived as caring it can reduce her anxiety and thus be a form of expressive social support (DePaulo & Kashy, 1998; Seiter, Bruschke, & Bai, 2002). However, if she did not believe it or perceived it as deceptive, then it could produce more anxiety and be a source of strain (Gordon & Miller, 2000; McCornack & Levine, 1990), an interpretation more likely for females (Levine, McCornack, & Avery, 1992). Interestingly, if it were a form of expressive support, it would be one that produces

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<sup>1</sup> Though worry can produce negative health effects on the distressed individual (Barr, Simons, Simons, Beach, & Philibert, 2018; Brosschot, Gerin, & Thayer, 2006)

potential increases in offending for the provider while potentially decreasing negative health outcomes in the receiver. Determining if it should be considered a true form of expressive social support and what outcomes might result requires future dyadic research.

Overall, there were only a few potentially new kinds of expressive social support found, specifically sentiments of worry and lying. This data also highlights the need to be more specific in the kinds of social support received based on context and individual perceptions than past research that included only general types of social support (Ardelt & Day, 2002; Baron, 2015; Kurtz, et al., 2014; Vazsonyi & Belliston, 2007; Zavala & Kurtz, 2016).

**Instrumental Social Support.** Unlike expressive social support, examples of instrumental social support were prevalent in the sample. However, as with expressive social support, the sentiments behind instrumental social support tended to include ideals of traditional masculinity especially with regard to financial social support. Consistent with traditional masculinity, most participants viewed providing financial support positively whereas they viewed receiving it negatively. For instance, participants claimed giving financial support to family as a necessity and most respondents said they provided financial support,<sup>1</sup> consistent with the idea of being a provider within the precepts of traditional masculinity (Mahalik et al., 2003; Paschal, Lewis-Moss, & Hsiao, 2011). However, whether the financial support was sufficient in providing for their families was unknown since the participants used vague or general terms when discussing giving financial support and the recipients of said support were not interviewed. However, based on previous research (Nelson, 2004; Smock & Manning, 1997a, 1997b) and the fact they

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<sup>1</sup> The participants who did not provide financial support did not have any children, and so the following discussion could possibly still apply to them.

mentioned other extravagant spending consistent with the criminal lifestyle (Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994), it is likely they are providing it inconsistently and only when they have extra money. Thus, based on the data it is unclear whether they were fulfilling the role of a provider or just giving enough financial support to be able to claim they are a provider so as to appear to fulfill the role while continuing to engage in a lifestyle that is hedonistic and reputation-enhancing. Future dyadic research could discern which possibility is more likely.

Alternatively, participants viewed receiving financial social support as a weakness that could jeopardize one's status in the neighborhood...

322: I don't need you talking about me. I don't need you talking about how he went over there and got that house, and he can't even pay for it. Look at him calling me, asking me for 200. No, you'll never get the opportunity to speak like that about me.

...or they discussed it as "borrowing" as evidenced by statements such as:

944: Borrow money, pay it back. That's just, I might borrow the money from you 'cause you gonna end up asking me for it anyway. So, the money that you give me is the same money I got from you. I'm just giving it back to you.

Again, this reasoning is consistent with gaining respect (Anderson, 1999) and the emasculating implications of not being able to be a provider or take care of one's self (Paschal et al., 2011; Young, 2007; Willott & Griffin, 1997). For many, robbing someone or committing another crime and getting it on their own was preferable to accepting financial support. This protects their status in two ways. First, they are not permitting

anyone the chance to ruin their reputation by gossiping about their lack of money (Anderson, 1999). Second, committing a crime, especially a violent one, boosts their reputation of being someone not to mess with (see Topalli et al., 2002). Overall, within the lens of traditional masculinity, whether the participants accepted or provided financial social support is consistent with previous literature.

***Kinds of Instrumental Social Support.*** Direct financial help was just one example provided by the participants of instrumental social support they received or provided. Many of the other examples offered by the participants are common in the instrumental social support literature, such as giving rides and helping with household responsibilities (Shakespeare-Finch & Obst, 2011), and advisement and information (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992; Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). Providing information and assistance for drug rehabilitation and management care in recovery were two additional kinds of social support commonly noted in addiction research (Munton, Wedlock, & Gomersall, 2014; Tracy, Munson, Peterson, & Floersch, 2010).

Besides the above-mentioned conventional instrumental social support examples, participants mentioned three common types of criminogenic support found in the literature. The first example was providing drugs for consumption (see McIntosh, MacDonald, & McKeganey, 2005; Marin, Kelly, & Parson, 2017; Ouellet, Bouchard, & Malm, 2016), or to engage in dealing (Fader, 2016; Harding, 2010) to improve financial returns (Morselli, Tremblay, & McCarthy, 2006) in their drug dealing careers. The second example included violence or other forms of crime to help acquaintances and family members deal with retaliation (Wright, Topalli, & Jacques, 2017) or provide protection (Way et al., 2005). Helping in these ways is providing a necessary support to a friend

dictated by the code and helps with success on the streets (Anderson, 1999). The third example was advisement, specifically on how to commit crimes and avoid detection by the police (i.e., providing criminal capital) (Kleemans & De Poot, 2008; Morselli, 2009; Ouellet et al., 2016). Having criminal capital can be effective in avoiding capture and increasing chances of financial success (Bouchard & Nguyen, 2010; Morselli et al., 2006), and even more so when coming from criminal family members because recipients can acquire the resource when needed (Fader, 2016<sup>1</sup>).

Aside from these kinds of traditional instrumental social support, there were instances where the above listed support was employed or provided in unexpected ways. The first was using conventional forms of instrumental social support in support of unconventional pursuits. This included using financial support intended for clothing or food on drugs, which is consistent with drug market research (McCrystal, Percy, & Higgins, 2007; Mills & Noyes, 1984; Palamar & Kamboukos, 2014; Palamar & Ompad, 2014). While not a new form of social support, this shows how recipients can inadvertently exploit or misuse conventional forms of social support to further criminal careers, thereby leading to more rather than less offending.

The second included forms of instrumental social support coming from unconventional sources. This could include, for example, non-criminogenic instrumental social support coming from offenders, and criminogenic support given by conformists. Examples of this included participants or other criminals helping children with their homework, giving advice on finding a job, or teaching conventional work skills. This was

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, families can provide the instrumental social support with more certainty and celerity.

also evident when a conforming person provided support that promoted an offender's efforts in the criminal world, such as holding drugs/money or lying to the police.

Relatedly, researchers may regard an ex-offender as a conforming individual if they are not currently committing crimes. They may have the criminal capital necessary to impart onto others and are likely to do so if they believe that a person will not change until they are ready, advising and helping them to keep them safe within the limitations of a criminal lifestyle. While providing these kinds of support is not unusual, the identity of those providing it is of importance. It is possible to have both conforming and criminal individuals "switching" their ideals to provide social support that promotes messaging incongruent with their identity (see e.g., Anderson, 1999). When previous research assumed the message/identity match, they were likely to have missed these examples of social support and unintentionally skewed the significance of research that ignored this hidden group. If a criminal is providing social support solely with a non-criminogenic message, then it could potentially promote conformity (and vice versa). Thus, it is important to examine the two concepts separately.

Previous criminological research used general types of social support when analyzing outcomes, sometimes only asking people if they feel supported (Ardelt & Day, 2002; Baron, 2015; Kurtz, et al., 2014; Vazsonyi & Belliston, 2007; Zavala & Kurtz, 2016). Other disciplines believe it is necessary to understand the specific kinds of social support found within a given environment to analyze outcomes as a result of that environment (see Cassel, 1976; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Haber et al., 2007). Thus, to further refine a criminological conceptualization of social support it would seem necessary to find the specific kinds of social support common and of importance within

criminogenic environments. This research showed what forms of social support are common in southwest Atlanta neighborhoods, which are stereotypically poor and disadvantaged. Future research should confirm these results and study these forms of social support in similar areas to eliminate the possibility that they are endemic to the specific neighborhoods or areas where I recruited my subjects. In addition, using specific types of social support as opposed to general types allows for greater specificity in identifying the content of the support without having to rely on the identity of the source alone. Basically, it provides a way to avoid assuming the content of the support will automatically align with the origin of the support.

**Social Support Message.** Related to the idea of separating the type of support from the origin is distinguishing the message provided along with or by the support from the origin. Traditionally researchers assumed the message and the origin of support were the same (see Martinez & Abrams, 2013), and the following discussion provides evidence contrary to this notion. However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the sample in this study only allows for *perceptions* of criminal messages from conforming others because the interviewees were all criminals, and I had no systematic access to their conformist or non-conformist significant others. In addition, some of the non-criminogenic messages from criminal others were also based on perceptions, but these often aligned with the messages that came directly from the source.

**Messaging from Conforming Origins.** Unsurprisingly, it was common for the participants to relay that conforming individuals in their lives communicated messages that were non-criminogenic. However, there were also perceived messages that were either mixed (both criminogenic and non-criminogenic) or that changed over time. This

often led to messaging conveyed as acceptance, if not encouragement, of criminal behavior. This messaging came in a few forms: *defeatist*, *safety warnings*, *religious protection*, and *if-then statements*. The first three imply acceptance, but the if-then statement adds encouragement by communicating that if an infraction of the law is going to take place then the message provider is determined to ensure the recipient do it well. When the messages occur together or within a short span of time, this is equivalent to sending variable or mixed messages, often alluding to acceptance, which is criminogenic (See Pinquart, 2017). Thus, when the message changes over time, it may promote persistence over desistance.

Even when the message is verbally clear and does not change, conforming individuals' actions sometimes send a conflicting message that recipients can perceive as acceptance of crime. This can promote persistence, or it can promote onset if others were to see the exchange. For instance, participants construed accepting money or items accrued through known criminal means as either being desperate or as acceptance of offending. Even when construed as desperate, accepting the money or items can present the criminogenic message of crime is acceptable if one is desperate. Even if perceived as such, taking the money does not inherently mean that a person accepts the values of the street. It is possible that the need for survival and protection that comes with accepting "dirty" money could be another manifestation of code switching.

No matter how individuals portray or perceive the message, the recipient has a choice as to how they respond to it. There are three response choices: *agree to*, *rebut*, or *ignore* the message. All three possibilities were in evidence across the participants' interviews. Interestingly, even when they agreed with the message, they did not always

desist. Many participants talked of “slowing down” instead. “Slowing down” is not desisting from crime entirely (see Maruna & Immarigeon, 2013). Instead, the participants talked of shifting their criminal activity to less violent or serious crimes, changing their procedures to be less likely to get caught, or committing offenses more infrequently. When the participants said they agreed with the message and adjusted their behavior, it was often because the message had changed or their interpretation of the message changed due to new life circumstances, such as aging and having children. It is known that people change their offending as they age (Glueck & Glueck, 1940; Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990; Massoglia & Uggen, 2010) or have children (Rocque, 2015; Rocque, Posick, & White, 2015), and often because they have a shift in thinking which changes their perceptions (Giordano et al., 2002; Maruna, 2001; Paternoster & Bushway, 2009), so this is not an unexpected or inconsistent result.

With regards to rebutting or ignoring the intended message, it is possible this was due to offender respondents not taking it seriously because they did not perceive any consequences. Had there been serious, constructive penalties for noncompliance, the participants might have felt pressure and adapted their choices and behaviors to the message accordingly. Some participants were aware of the threat of consequences, but they were never delivered or experienced. Such was the case of participant 372, “Yeah, every time my mama done say like, look don’t call my phone. Don’t call me. You gonna rob somebody, don’t call me. Look, I done heard the worst of the worst...How she gonna not see me.” When this occurred, the person often ignored the message as the validity of the threat was weak (Capaldi, Chamberlain, & Patterson, 1997; Weinblatt & Omer, 2008). Other participants received harsh consequences, like corporal punishment, which lead to

the opposite effect (misbehavior) (Farrington, 2002; Piquart, 2017) or to the participants disengaging from the relationship for periods of time (see Gershoff, 2002).

While it is important to note that they do not always listen to the obvious non-criminogenic message, the more important take-away from these results is that either directly or indirectly conforming individuals in this environment at least sometimes present a message perceived as criminogenic. Based on the findings, the combination of a message and its origin appear more complex than assuming conformists always present a non-criminogenic message. Thus, future research should focus on the extent to which conforming sources present criminogenic messages along with social support and whether this could lead to criminal outcomes. To accurately identify the intentions behind the actions of conformists requires more research. In addition, there needs to be a recognition that intentions and perceptions of this messaging are often different. Thus, including both the source of social support and the recipient in future studies should attain the most robust findings.

***Messaging from Criminal Origins.*** Unlike conforming others' messages, non-criminogenic messages from criminal origins were not as speculative since the participants were able to speak on their own behalf. Participants presented messaging in three ways: *non-criminogenic*, *mixed*, and the assumed, *criminogenic*. Most non-criminogenic messages were supplied to younger loved ones (offspring, siblings, etc.) directly and backed up with actions or rewards. As with perceived conforming messages, participants also supplied mixed messaging or messaging that changed over time that ranged from acceptance to encouragement. The consensus for why they presented non-criminogenic messages was they did not want loved ones to have to deal with the

consequences of a lifestyle they knew to be difficult and wanted them to have a better life. That participants presented non-criminogenic or mixed messages suggests again that future research should separate the source of social support from the presented message. Prior research assumed that social support from a criminal other is automatically criminogenic in nature (Colvin et al., 2002; Cullen, 1994), but the results of this study call this into contention as they may present other messages as well. It is possible that if criminals present only a non-criminogenic message with their social support it could lead to a reduced likelihood of criminality in the recipients. That some participants who presented this message have only legitimate grown children would seem to lend some credence to this notion. Future research should examine the potential outcomes associated with the three types of messaging presented by offenders to determine whether the message or the source has a greater impact.

One caveat to conclusions regarding the messaging from criminal others is that there were no recipients of the messaging<sup>1</sup> from the study respondents sampled so there was no way to determine if the messages were perceived as intended. Thus, the participants might have wanted a particular outcome for their loved ones, but their actions or other unconscious ways of communicating might unintentionally allow for confusion in the perception of the message (much like conforming others' actions in their lives). Future research employing dyads of conventional and criminal others would allow researchers to parse out the perceptions of the recipient compared to the intent of the messaging to further elucidate the effect of non-criminogenic messaging from a criminal and how the recipients respond. This more accurate understanding of the interaction

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<sup>1</sup> Except one, but the dad providing the message sent criminogenic messaging to his sons and the non-criminogenic messaging to his daughters. The son perceived the criminogenic message accurately.

between messenger and recipient can be employed to better understand how the accompanying social support affects the recipient's likelihood of criminality.

**Lack of Social Support.** While having social support can be a risk or protective factor for a variety of reasons as stated above, a dearth of social support can serve as a risk factor for criminality (Colvin et al., 2002; Wright & Cesar, 2013). This was confirmed when some of the sample equated their lack of social support to the onset of their offending. Participants mentioned lacking instrumental social support more than lacking expressive support, especially in relation to their own criminality. This could be due to the added value placed on instrumental support in neighborhoods that adhere to the code of the streets and that are more tolerant of the criminal lifestyle in general. Both impart the importance of materialistic pursuits, e.g., having money in hand, nice clothing, cars, jewelry etc. (Anderson, 1999; Shover, 1996; Wright & Decker, 1994). Thus, depending on when they adopted the street identity, the lack of instrumental social support could feel more coercive than the lack of expressive support. The perceived lack of social support as a factor in the adoption of a street identity is an avenue for further study. There are some extreme cases where a deficit of social support (neglect) would be coercive regardless, but it would be important to determine if a comparative lack of social support would change with adoption of a street identity. In other words, would the perception of lacking instrumental support alter after the adoption of the street code when comparing oneself to others? Knowing the importance of instrumental support in relation to adoption of a street identity could help determine which types of support need emphasis to avoid onset or promote desistance in individuals living in criminogenic environments.

**Supplementary Results.** Adding to the findings already discussed, a few concepts were pulled from the existing data and analyzed that were not originally intended to be included. The decision to include them afterwards resulted from them organically appearing in the interviews and their relation to the overarching theme of this research. The two concepts are institutional social support and coercion.

***Institutional Social Support.*** While originally excluded due to the paucity of overall institutional social support in disadvantaged environments, ten of the participants did spontaneously bring it up in the interviews, mostly with regards to government assistance. There are mixed findings as to whether welfare sufficiently reduces crime (Foley, 2011; Hannon & DeFronzo, 1998; Savage, Bennett, & Danner, 2008; Worrall, 2005), but the three participants who are currently receiving government assistance stated they were not currently committing any offenses.

There was also a mention to mentoring programs which have many positive benefits on high-risk children, including psychological well-being, but the benefits with regards to deviant or criminal behavior are mixed (see Cohen, 2004; Ciocanel, Power, Eriksen, & Gillings, 2017; Grossman & Tierney, 1998). As seen above, people in these neighborhoods can receive criminal mentorship and gain criminal capital (Morselli, 2009), which could possibly explain the mixed results in conventional mentoring programs if their mentorship is insufficient in balancing what is being provided on the street it would likely not affect their criminality. In the future, the impact of both should be determined in concert to understand which is providing a more instrumental function in these neighborhoods.

Many participants discussed “the streets” as an entity of itself. Oliver (2006) previously made the argument for the streets as an institution (2006). If the streets are an institution, then they can provide institutional support. Evidenced in the interviews where one participant said the “the streets” lures and “shows love” to people. According to him, the streets can provide emotional social support at least temporarily. Researchers should look at this concept in greater detail especially with regards to whether it can send mixed messages regarding offending. Payne & Hamdi (2009) delineated this concept of “street love” at the individual, group, and communal level. They defined this conceptualization of street love as providing real help to the neighborhood that formal institutions cannot. Examples include food, money, and advice to community members. There are also other instances of gangs providing support to their neighborhood, both criminal and non-criminal (Brotherton & Gude, 2018; Venkatesh, 1997). If residents perceive the gangs as doing more for the neighborhood than formal institutions, then it seems likely that the messaging they are conveying will have greater impact on crime than the messaging and support from the government. If gangs and street-oriented individuals can come together to help their communities, then a consideration of “the streets” and gangs as an informal institution is worthy of study within the social support framework.

It appears that both formal and informal institutional social support occurs in these neighborhoods. While the conventional institutional support found has already appeared in social support research, the idea of the “the streets” as an entity and gangs should be studied alongside more traditional institutions especially in environments like the current study setting. This would allow researchers to understand criminal

institutional sources and the messages they provide better and whether they have a greater impact on criminal outcomes at community and individual levels.

**Coercion.** As with institutional social support, coercion arose as a concept during analysis. This inclusion centered on the fact that coercion can indicate when someone might need social support or when their current social support is in jeopardy. Recall that Colvin et al. (2002) thought of coercion as a separate but often inversely related concept to social support that creates anxiety or fear compelling an individual to act. There are two different sources of coercion, *impersonal* and *interpersonal*. Impersonal coercion, such as economic pressure, comes from structural conditions beyond a person's control. Interpersonal coercion, such as the actual or threatened removal of social support, stems from interpersonal relationships and involves the use or threat of force and intimidation for compliance (Colvin et al., 2002<sup>1</sup>). There are two dimensions of coercion that influence its effect on behavior, the strength and consistency with which it occurs (Colvin, 2000).

The results revealed two main types of both interpersonal and impersonal coercion. The two types of interpersonal coercion were *harsh discipline* and *domestic violence*. Both types of coercion are common in the environments the participants live (Amato & Fowler, 2002, Ettinger, Riley, Colantuoni, & Mendelson, 2018), and they can increase the likelihood of crime (Farrington, 2002; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Pinquart, 2017). Thus, unlike social support, interpersonal coercion introduces a negative influence into the relationships that affects behavior. Participants presented impersonal coercion mostly as dangerous neighborhoods or financial stress. Dangerous

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<sup>1</sup> There are interesting parallels to Agnew's (1992) concept of general strain, where the removal of positive influences is assumed to engender criminality through strain.

neighborhoods can be characterized as sources of environmental stress, and research shows this increases the likelihood of offending (Dubé, Gagné, Clément, & Chamberland, 2018; Kort-Butler, 2010), but social support can help alleviate those effects (Scarpa & Haden, 2006; Tandon, Dariotis, Tucker, & Sonenstein, 2013). Like environmental stress, financial stress can also increase the likelihood of offending (Aaltonen, Oksanen, & Kivivuori, 2016; Hoeve et al., 2014) and social support can alleviate effects of financial stress (Ajrouch, Reisine, Lim, Sohn, & Ismail, 2010; Taylor, Budescu, Gebre, & Hodzic, 2014). These examples show a recursive link between coercion and social support.

Besides using the removal of social support as a form of interpersonal coercion or the lack of social support as an impersonal coercion, there is another way to connect this concept to the larger picture of social support. When coercion arises, social support can help alleviate the effects that stem from it (Cohen & Wills, 1985; French, Dumani, Allen, & Shockley, 2018). Viewed this way, the social support literature can add concepts from the deterrence research. The three concepts of deterrence are certainty, severity, and celerity (Beccaria, 1764/1986). Certainty relates to the likelihood of sanctions being employed after a crime was committed. In the case of social support, it can be the likelihood of receiving social support or to bring it back to the concepts within social support research, the consistency. Thus, it is how certain someone is that they will receive social support when needed. Severity is the seriousness of the sanction related to a criminal offense, such as the length of a prison sentence. To bring this concept to social support, severity could be the strength of, or how much, social support a person receives. Connecting social support and coercion with this concept, social support severity, or

strength, could be considered in relation to how well it alleviates the effects of coercion. In other words, does the amount of social support received eliminate the feelings of anxiety associated with the coercion or eliminate the source of coercion altogether? Celerity is how quickly an individual receives punishment after a crime is committed. Celerity for social support and coercion could be how quickly the social support is received when the need arises or when a coercion is introduced. As shown above, criminal networks are more effective in building capital when the networks are mostly comprised of family (Fader, 2016). This was determined to be because the social support appeared “on demand” due to the ready availability of family members. Thus, applying these redefined concepts, it could be that familial criminal networks are more effective because of the certainty and celerity of social support they provide. Future research should determine whether these concepts are applicable to social support in acting as a buffer to the effect of coercion.

Besides highlighting the connection between social support and coercion, the data showed a potential new form of coercion. One participant mentioned how negative experiences in his life made him reevaluate and “slow down.” In other words, the impersonal coercion of his friends dying and imprisoned for long terms pushed him to change his behavior in a positive light. This is opposite of how researchers normally thought coercion affected behavior. While this could be specific to this one participant, the idea of positive coercion is worth looking into in the future. Also, if coercion can be non-criminogenic, can criminogenic social support buffer the positive effects of it?

## Conclusion

Overall, the study presented results and conclusions that were unexpected, expected, and assumed through logic. There were three major unexpected results found. First, the concept of viewing “the streets” as an entity that can provide social support at the community level was apparent. It is important to study this further as it could be that individuals with inconsistent or low levels of social support have the criminal support needed to move beyond exploratory deviance and could be an additional factor as to why these neighborhoods are criminogenic. Second, there is the concept of positive coercion. While this idea was specific to one participant, it is an intriguing concept to explore further especially considering it could potentially help explain why the cognitive shift preceding desistance occurs (Maruna, 2001). Third, there may be value in using social support as a buffer for coercion and incorporating the terminology of deterrence (i.e., certainty, celerity, and severity) to describing the delivery of support. The idea of social support as a buffer to stress and anxiety is already known to have health and mental health benefits (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona, 1986a; Lin & Ensel, 1989; McInnis et al., 2017; Thoits, 1995; Viswesvaran et al., 1999), while coercion is a force that creates fear and anxiety (Colvin et al., 2002), and so social support as a buffer should produce beneficial outcomes. The question is whether these outcomes relate to the likelihood of offending, and whether the certainty, celerity, and severity of social support are factors that determine the appearance or strength of such outcomes.

Some of the results were anticipated and confirmed existing social support research while others were new but provided evidence to support the idea of identifying

environmentally specified kinds of social support (Cassel, 1976; Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010; Haber et al., 2007) into criminological research. There were new kinds of social support found and different ways traditional social support manifested itself among those from a disadvantaged environment with some providing potentially different outcomes than would be expected in other environments. Thus, using social support examples tailored to the environment can better refine criminal outcome predictions.

There were also new concepts uncovered and confirmed to exist in this research that should be incorporated within the social support framework. In particular, the message as defined in Chapter II was found to be separate from the identity of the person presenting it. The offender participants in this study presented an overt or mixed non-criminogenic message to many of the most important people in their lives. In addition, they perceived that conforming individuals in their lives presented a mixed message through their words and actions. Thus, it is necessary in future research to separate out the message from the origin of the provider of social support for purpose of analysis and interpretation. Figure 1, which delineates eight combinations of social support, could serve as a parsimonious model for determining criminal outcomes resulting from interpersonal social support. The specific kinds of instrumental and expressive support within the boxes should be measured and contextualized specific to the environment within which the message of the social support is delivered. For instance, having a friend's back in this environment would be a criminogenic message (violence) and instrumental in nature; whereas, in another environment, it may be expressive in nature and non-criminogenic.

## **Policy Implications**

Policy implications can be deduced from some of the findings of this research. Lack of social support while incarcerated was a concern for the participants and had the potential to increase their offending later. In addition, it had the potential to change the participants' relationships and the future social support provided from these relationships. Since having support while incarcerated is important, a community level outreach program could be implemented to increase such support. This could entail informing residents in high crime, low-income neighborhoods of the importance of visiting or calling loved ones while they are incarcerated. Also, it would be important to deliver services that would enable the residents to get to or call the prisons since research has shown that residents in these environments have difficulty securing transport or funds to provide this social support (Christian, Mellow, & Thomas, 2006; Naser & Visher, 2006). The offered services could include bussing offenders' loved ones from their neighborhoods to the prisons and back and providing phone cards so phone calls between loved ones could occur. With regards to more formal policies for these same barriers, corrections officials could both reduce the cost of phone calls as well as house offenders closer to their communities. Besides reducing the barriers, correctional policies could create programs to reinforce positive relationships with loved ones that offenders will likely rely on once released.

With regards to the main take-aways of the research, there are a few policy implications to address. It is important for interventionists that deal with reforming offenders to recognize that social support needed and provided vary and change based on the environment. Thus, the programs provided should be tailored to each environment.

Basically, the advice and help provided should be different for offenders from high crime, low-income neighborhoods compared to middle-class neighborhoods. This could include encouraging individuals from criminogenic environments to seek out social support from their loved ones since many participants felt that they did not need it or it would not help, and to help offenders in these environments view social support more positively instead of seeing them as antithetical to traditional masculinity ideals.

Besides environmentally tailored services, it is also important for program providers to consider that offenders may be affected by mainstream associates and family members in unanticipated, criminogenic ways. More specifically, they may unwittingly deliver criminogenic social support or allude to acceptance of offending through their words or behaviors. Thus, probation, parole, reentry programs, and other rehabilitation programs should broaden their reach to include and educate offenders' significant others and not just the offenders themselves. The significant others to include should at least be individuals in their residence, but could expand to the those most important to the offender who do not live with them. These programs could teach both the offenders and their loved ones the best way to provide social support for the environment where they live and inform them of what they may be doing, saying, or providing that unintentionally contributes to persistence in crime.

Relatedly, parenting programs for families with small children could be implemented in high-risk neighborhoods to help dissuade the onset of offending. Most current parenting programs provide positive disciplinary techniques, child development education, and strategies to enhance parent-child attachment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). These types of programs could include instruction on providing

appropriate social support and how to avoid giving criminogenic social support and unintentionally presenting criminogenic messaging.

### **Limitations**

Like any study, this research has limitations. The most obvious is that its design did not include interviewing conforming individuals as a comparison group. This was a logistical choice and not a theoretical or conceptual one. Unfortunately, it limited the extent to which conforming individuals' true intentions regarding messaging could be ascertained. In addition, it did not allow for an analysis of how conformists view a non-criminogenic message from a criminal source, and for the response to this perception. However, even without conforming individuals, it is evident that messaging is worth studying within social support research on its own. More specifically, it provided a good enough understanding of the offender's perceptions and opinions of messaging and their perceptions of social support to imply needing further exploration.

Another limitation is that the design did not anticipate the use of research dyads, and the few that existed were not known of beforehand but were part of the study through fortunate happenstance. The interview protocol was not designed for this purpose and did not allow for the comparisons between them. In addition, all dyads were criminal and thus discussed social support and offending from the same perspective, and therefore likely to perceive each other's messages similarly. Planned dyads of differing identities would have allowed an understanding of the perception and intent of the same message. It also would have allowed a clarification and explanation of the intent behind the response of accepting known criminal financial support.

Sample size is another limitation. It was a budgetary decision as the offenders and recruiter received compensation for each interview and funds were limited. While originally intending to have thirty participants, only twenty-six participants were actually interviewed. It was becoming increasingly difficult to find more active offenders to interview partially due to the recruiter having some health complications, and I made the decision to stop recruitment at the already reached twenty-six. I felt saturation had been reached on the concepts that I was initially interested in and the study was designed around and so felt confident in this decision. With regards to these concepts, since the results were largely majorities it does not seem to affect the main takeaway that non-criminogenic messaging and criminogenic messaging should be new concepts to the field of social support. Certainly, analysis of the interviews (hundreds of pages of them) strongly suggested that I achieved concept saturation on the most important variables proposed in the study. However, there were some potential concepts and kinds of social support that came up later that had not reached saturation since they were unanticipated and emerged through post-data collection analysis. These include the notion of the streets as an entity, positive coercion, and worrying and lying as social support. If budget and time had not been an issue, I would have engaged in a second phase of data collection to increase the number of participants and include follow-up interviews to probe these concepts more thoroughly.

The mainstream setting where the interviews took place could have influenced the participants' responses. This had the potential to be problematic as the main concept being studied dealt with whether offenders presented non-criminogenic messaging. If the setting influenced the participants to give more mainstream sentiments, then it is possible

the number of participants who said they prefer their loved ones not engage in crime was artificially higher than the actual number. It is also possible the specific messaging and mainstream social support they provided could have been exaggerated to reflect the setting. However, as they had no issue bringing up their own criminality and offered multiple instances where they presented criminogenic messaging, I do not believe the setting's potential influence negated the finding that they presented both criminogenic and non-criminogenic messaging. Future research where interviews are conducted in a different setting, such as their own neighborhoods, should determine how much influence the setting actually had in the mainstream messages and social support the participants presented. This would also allow future researchers interviewing active offenders to know whether an office setting could potentially affect their own data.

The sex of the interviewer seemed to have an influence in how the participants responded. When the interviewer was male (with the female still present), it seemed some of the participants played up their answers with images that showed them as tough and not needing anyone. When the interviewer was female (without another male present), some of the participants were more willing to reveal emotional aspects of their relationships. They were also more willing to talk about situations in their lives that had been emotionally upsetting. In both cases, the participants would still talk about toughness and emotions, but depending on the sex of the interviewer it seemed that they would present one side more readily than the other. This is a limitation as it is not known how much of an influence the sex of the researcher really played in the interviews, and whether this skewed the overall results.

Another limitation was the early decision to exclude institutional social support as a concept to analyze. While many of the participants were not utilizing institutional social support themselves, some discussed it in other ways. In addition, it did not allow for the probing of possible criminogenic institutions of the streets and community gangs. Each could be providing social support with a criminogenic message at a higher level than through interpersonal interactions.

A final limitation is that the design did not specifically probe for the lack of social support and coercion in the interviews. This was a weakness of the interview protocol, and only realized during the analysis. Had there been more information sought on these topics, the response to messaging could have been determined for all facets of social support. Luckily, even with this limitation, a glimpse at these concepts was uncovered.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Since there were clear signs of non-criminogenic messaging from criminals and mixed messaging from others, future studies should measure and analyze the message and origin of social support as different concepts. By doing so, it can be determined whether the message accompanied with social support matters or simply the identity of the one providing it. In addition, it will be necessary to not only study the intended message, but the perceived message as well. The dissonance between intention and perception could not only have implications for the prediction of offending but also interventions. Currently the research has very general measurements to determine the presence of social support in a person's life when testing crime outcomes. Future research should look at the specific forms of social support. Based on this research, sometimes the

specific social support provided can carry its own criminogenic or non-criminogenic message.

Due to limitations, future research should study the other side of messaging and focus on interviewing and studying conforming sources of social support. This would allow for a more complete look at criminogenic messaging from conforming origins and the perceptions of non-criminogenic messaging from criminal origins. For an even greater insight, future research should utilize dyads of mixed identities and have them respond to the message presented by each. Future research should also include a larger sample of people to ensure that these results were not a byproduct of this specific sample. Future research should search for the possibility of institutional social support from the streets and gangs and whether they are providing both criminogenic and non-criminogenic messaging. When discussing expressive social support with males, specifically male criminals, future research should more systematically compare the results based on the sex of the interviewer to determine if it affects the results. If there is opposite messaging in social support, then it is likely found within interpersonal coercion since it can sometimes be the social control of the message. Future research should look at whether this statement is true. On a related note, future research should investigate messaging and lack of social support.

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### Vita

Mindy O'Hara Bernhardt was born in Huntington Beach, California in 1984. She received her Bachelor's degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice with a minor in Psychology from Auburn University in 2007. She received her Master's degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice from CUNY John Jay College in 2009. Mindy's research interests are in offender decision making, criminological theory, and social support. This dissertation completes the requirements for her Doctorate of Philosophy in Criminal Justice and Criminology from Georgia State University.

Mindy has collaborated on a report for the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council of Georgia. She has done a book review and written an encyclopedia entry on robbery. In addition, she has written a book chapter about the situational dynamics of street crime. She has a publication in *Theoretical Criminology* about religiosity amongst hardcore criminals. She has received an award as a graduate teacher.