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# Understanding Deviant Behaviors Through Coercion And Social Support Theory

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UNDERSTANDING DEVIANT BEHAVIORS THROUGH COERCION AND  
SOCIAL SUPPORT THEORY

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## **DEDICATION**

For my mother, whose hard work, love, and unconditional support have encouraged me  
to believe and to not give up.

UNDERSTANDING DEVIANT BEHAVIORS THROUGH COERCION AND  
SOCIAL SUPPORT THEORY

by

MARIA NICTE-HA URIBE TINOCO, B.A.

THESIS

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## **ABSTRACT**

Mark Colvin, Francis T. Cullen and Thomas Vander Ven (2002) developed an integrated theory of crime called “coercion, social support, and crime” which hypothesizes that coercion and social support are inversely related and that these variables have direct effects on criminal and deviant behavior as well as a combined effect. Specifically if an imbalance between coercion and social support exists, crime is more likely to occur because coercion induces weak social bonds and low self control thereby increasing crime. On the other hand, social support prevents criminal involvement through organized networks of human relations that assist people in meeting their expressive (emotional) and instrumental (material) needs. In this research the purpose is to test the “coercion, social support and crime” theory which has not been tested using empirical data collected from 463 university students. Results focusing on the measurement of key concepts from the theory were presented; as well results from statistical analyses in specific bivariate correlations and ordinary least square regressions were used in order to analyze the direct effects of social support and coercion on crime; and the relationship between social support and coercion. The analyses support the hypothesis that coercion and social support are inversely related. Also, additional findings show the predicted positive association between coercion and deviance which supports the hypothesis that the more coercion a student experiences, the more their deviant involvement. However, results do not support the predicted negative association between deviance and social support. Overall, findings show only partial support for this emerging theory.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mark Colvin, Francis T. Cullen and Thomas Vander Ven (2002) developed an integrated theory of crime called “coercion, social support, and crime” that emerged as a combination of two important theoretical ideas, those dealing with the effects of coercive influences on crime and those that represent the sources of social support individuals might experience.

The theory hypothesizes that if there is an imbalance between coercion and social support, crime is more likely, and that coercion and social support will be inversely related (Colvin, Cullen, and Vander Ven 2002). Specifically if an imbalance between coercion and social support exists, crime is more likely to occur because coercion induces weak social bonds and low self control thereby increasing crime. On the other hand, social support prevents criminal involvement through organized networks of human relations that assist potential criminals in meeting their expressive (emotional) and instrumental (material) needs, thereby lessening their motivation for crime. For example, those who live in a coercive environment but who receive sufficient social support are predicted to engage in less deviant behaviors compared to similar people who do not receive sufficient social support.

Since the theory of coercion, social support and crime is relatively new and the authors have not presented any research testing on the predicted effects of coercion and social support (Akers and Sellers 2004) this study will empirically test the theory using data collected from undergraduate university students. Because the authors stated that coercion and social support theory was developed to explain a wide range of criminal and deviant behavior (Colvin 2007) this research is interested to see if indeed we can understand deviant behaviors through coercion and social support theory.

## COERCION

Coercion is the ability to cause fear and pressure individuals if they do not conform to the force of authority (Colvin, 2000). This force of authority emerges from impersonal and interpersonal sources. Impersonal sources come from structural inequalities such as economic and social pressures caused by a lack of employment, medical assistance, educational opportunities, poverty, etc. An example of an impersonal source could be a student who is unable to obtain financial aid for college and, as a result, experiences a limitation in his or her educational opportunities. Interpersonal sources of coercion refer to situations where one individual forces another to comply with his or her demands. An example of an interpersonal source could be women working against their will in a foreign country as sexual laborers because of their illegal status. Individuals experiencing coercion might increase their participation in crime because it creates a sense of desperation that pushes an individual toward immediate action to address these feelings (Hagan and McCarthy, 1997).

The coercion theory of criminality emerged from a number of researchers such as Gerald R. Patterson (1995) and his discussions of family dynamics and delinquency; John Pauly's (1983) studies of "coercive control patterns in work places, families, schools, and among peers to the production of serious chronic delinquency" (Colvin, 2000); and from Robert Agnew's (1992) research on general strain theory. These researchers contributed important insights in the development of Colvin's coercion theory. In the book "Crime & Coercion: An Integrated Theory of Chronic Criminality" Colvin (2000) mentions these three authors as his main sources used to develop coercion theory.

Gerald R. Patterson is described by Colvin as a pioneer in both the study and treatment of family dynamics that cause delinquency. He focuses on family disciplinary patterns as a primary element in the production or prevention of delinquent behavior. He argues that different parental disciplinary styles can create a different delinquent outcome (Larzelere and Patterson, 1990). Families that use coercive, cruel,

punitive and restrictive discipline styles tend to create children who engage in antisocial behavior. As a result, such children often get involved in delinquency at an early age (Snyder and Patterson, 1987).

Patterson's writings reflect Akers's social learning theory in that behaviors are learned and reinforced through rewards and punishments. This social learning perspective provides the insight that coercive punishment and other coercive interchanges create models for behavior that the individual imitates in his or her relations with others (Bandura, 1973). In other words criminal behavior is learned like any other behavior during association with others.

The importances of Patterson's contributions are highlighted in a study from the Oregon Social Learning Center that focused on the training of parents of delinquent children to discipline their kids with consistent and non-coercive methods. It consisted of instructing the families to new ways of positive interaction among its members. In this study, a series of experiments were conducted in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in which parents of delinquent children were randomly assigned to the training program. The results showed a significant difference in the delinquent interactions of experimental and control groups, with a significant lowering of delinquent interaction for the experimental group (Patterson et al., 1982). The experiments demonstrate that coercive discipline and coercive familial interactions play a causal role in the formation of delinquency (Colvin, 2000). Colvin also argued that a child's coercive behavior (learned initially in coercive family interaction) is brought into other social settings and is likely to create a coercive response in other environments. In other words children may transfer the coercive behavior learned in the family into other social settings like school or the playground. Coercion becomes a learned reaction to these children when they come across difficult situations (Snyder and Patterson, 1987).

Similarly, John Pauly's (1983) research shows that coercive control patterns in work places, families, schools and among peers can lead to serious chronic delinquency. Pauly and Colvin (1983) argue that "the experience of coerciveness in peer group control relations mutually interact with

juveniles alienated bonds to propel these juveniles into serious, patterned, violent delinquent behavior” (Colvin and Pauly, 1983). Weakened bonds and feeling of alienation can lead to crime according to the integrated structural-Marxist theory (Colvin and Pauly, 1983). This integrated structural-Marxist theory of alienation between the controller and the controlled is considered to be linked to social class based theory of delinquency (Paternoster and Tittle, 1990) because workplace experiences are class differentiated and have an important effect on family interactions as a result of experiencing domination at work through normative, remunerative or coercive control. In the family, school, and workplace, as well as among peers, individuals may experience coercive interactions that can lead to delinquency, but low socioeconomic status can magnify the impact of these interactions because it creates a conforming behavior in individuals (Brownfield, 1986).

Another connection between coercion and low SES comes from a study by Larzelere and Patterson (1990) who showed that lower socioeconomic class parents are more likely to use coercive discipline and erratically monitor their children behaviors thereby leading to higher rates of delinquency. In this study parental management appears to mediate the relationship between social class and delinquency and it is recognizable because if low income parents have to work all day then it is most likely that they will erratically monitor their children in a coercive way.

The third inspiration for coercion theory comes from Robert Agnew’s general strain theory, which focuses on negative relations with others in which aversive situations (especially those that are repetitive) create a deep sense of anger and frustration that inclines a person to commit crime (Agnew 1992).

Agnew (1992) identified three major types of strain: 1) failure to achieve positively valued goals; 2) removal of positively valued stimuli and 3) the confrontation with negatively valued stimuli. Individuals who experience such strains are predicted to engage in crime as a way to cope with it. For example, using drugs or engaging in violence could represent coping strategies for those who experiencing strain.

General strain theory contributes to understanding the relationship specified in coercion theory because coercion represents one of the most aversive and negative forces that individuals may encounter.

General strain theory has received a great deal of empirical attention. For example, research by Agnew, Brezina, Cullen and Wright (2002) showed that juveniles with high negative emotionality and low constraint will be more likely to respond to strain with delinquency. This is very important not only because of findings that individuals with “high negative emotionality/ low constraint are more likely to experience intense emotional reactions to strain, less able to engage in noncriminal coping, less aware of and concerned with the cost of crime and more disposed to criminal coping” but it also helped explain why some people are more likely than are others to react to strain with delinquency (Agnew 2002).

In another study, Agnew (2001) specifies the types of strain that are most likely lead to crime and delinquency. He argues that strains are more likely to lead to crime when “individuals lack the skills and resources to cope with their strain in a legitimate manner, are low in conventional social support, are low in social control, blame their strain on others, and are disposed to crime” (Agnew 2001). Some of the major types of strain that individuals encounter according to Agnew include family, peer, school and work-related strains. In this study he also mentions something important to our definition of coercion. He describes coercion as a general type of strain that is said to be especially conducive to crime (Agnew 2000).

Thus, Colvin’s coercion theory represents a synthesis or integration of three theoretical ideas. First, a coercive parenting style may lead to learning coercive behavior that is then transferred to other social settings, thereby increasing the likelihood of developing additional coercive relationships. Second, Pauly’s research on the connection of low SES to developing weak and alienated social bonds demonstrates why coercion will tend to be stronger among individuals with low SES. Finally, Agnew’s general strain theory helps to further explain the development of feelings of coercion and how they may lead to criminal behavior. In all cases, coercion represents the perception of the individual as to whether

they are experiencing coercion and how intense this experience is and how long it has occurred. So, a given situation, such as the death of a loved one, losing a job, or having an argument, will be perceived as more or less coercive by different individuals. Such perceptions, then, impact criminal behavior, rather than the experience itself.

James Unnever, Mark Colvin, and Francis Cullen conducted a study to empirically test the theory of coercion using a sample of 2,472 students from six middle schools. This project was designed to test the theory for the first time and to gather baseline data on school bullying and school violence (Unnever et al., 2004). The findings of the study showed that students exposed to coercive environments develop social-psychological deficits (coercive ideation, anger, and alienated social bonds) and therefore engage in relatively serious delinquent behavior (Unnever et al., 2004). Overall the results supported Colvin's theoretical argument that people are more likely to engage in criminal behavior if they are exposed to coercion.

## **SOCIAL SUPPORT**

Social support represents the idea that organized networks of human relations can assist people in meeting both expressive and instrumental needs in our society (Cullen, 1994). Social support may thus serve to mitigate the impact of various problems that individuals might have, such as experiencing coercion. If social support did serve to reduce the effect of coercion, it might also reduce the impact of coercion on crime. Francis T. Cullen (1994) developed social support theory in regards to crime when he contended that social supports can prevent deviant motivations from arising because "they can channel these motivations toward more positive behaviors" (Cullen, 1994). He argues that "whether social support is delivered through government, social programs, communities, social networks, families, interpersonal relations, or agents of the criminal justice system, it reduces criminal involvement" (Cullen, 1994) because social support prevents stresses from arising or can lessen negative consequences if stresses should emerge (Vaux 1988). If we look at Agnew's general strain theory we understand how



adolescents that experience strain may use crime as a coping mechanism. If individuals have access to social supports, instead of turning to criminal activities, they may utilize social supports as an alternative coping mechanism.

Cullen's prediction is that, in the absence of social support, crime is more likely to happen. Nan Lin (1986) defines social support as having two components, social and support. The social component reflects the "individual's linkage to the social environment" that is characterized in three levels; the community, social networks, and intimate and confiding relationships (Lin, 1986). The support component reflects the assistance of expressive and instrumental needs that are accessible and perceived to the individual. As a result Lin's synthetic definition of social support is "the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners" (Lin 1986: pg. 18). Expressive supports include the sharing of emotions, the affirmation of one's own and sense of worth and dignity, the giving of advice and guidance. An example could be how while attending college, students receive expressive support from parents, friends, professors or counselors. Also, students receive instrumental support that includes material and financial assistance from parents, government help like financial aid or scholarships and others.

It's important to say that social support has been examined extensively in health literature, but it has only recently been recognized as an important variable used to explain delinquent behavior (Agnew 1992; Wright and Chamlin 1999). In a study by Paternoster and Mazerolle (1994) they investigate the moderating effects of social support on delinquency. Results from this study failed to find empirical support of the hypothesis. Another study conducted by Capowich, Mazerolle, and Piquero (2001), investigates whether social support moderates delinquent responses to strain and anger. Results indicated that social support was not a significant moderating effect on anger, but did significantly condition the effect of strain on shoplifting. Also, in a study by Monica L. P. Robbers (2004) she suggests that having a perception of high levels of social support moderates the influence on strain and

delinquency with a variation by gender. Her results show that social support works as a buffer between certain types of delinquency by directing them to a more positive attitude (Robbers 2004).

### **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OF COERCION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT THEORY**

In a recent qualitative study, Colvin stated that coercion and social support theory was developed to explain a wide range of criminal behavior. He applied the theory to understand prison organizations and argues that “organizational change and differences in forms of deviance are shaped by changes in both levels and types of social support for prisoners and levels of coercion experienced by prisoners” (Colvin, 2007). He reported shifts in proxy measures of social support and coercion among inmates at the Penitentiary of New Mexico from 1956 to 1980 and explained how these shifts affected inmates’ behavior in prison, either to an increase or decrease of deviant involvement and disorder by inmates. Colvin concludes that is very important to deliver constant social support to inmates through programs aimed at proving rehabilitation, education and pro-social skills to reduce involvement of deviant behaviors and disorder in prison. Although this study provides a great summary of how the model or mechanism of social support and coercion work as it relates to crime, further tests of these relationships need to be made and may wish to employ direct measures of these independent variables.

## **RESEARCH STRATEGY**

The goal of this project is to provide an empirical test of Colvin, Cullen and Vander Ven's (2002) integrated theory of coercion, social support, and crime. Since the theory is relatively new, the authors have not presented any research testing on the predicted effects of coercion and social support (Akers and Sellers 2004). As a result, the theory is going to be tested using empirical data collected from 463 university students. Results focusing on the measurement of key concepts from the theory such as the relationship between social support and coercion, and the direct effects of social support and coercion on crime will be presented using the statistical analyses of bivariate correlations and ordinary least square regressions.

The authors stated that coercion and social support theory was developed to explain a wide range of criminal and deviant behavior (Colvin 2007) this research is interested to see if indeed we can understand deviant behaviors through coercion and social support theory. If the results support the theory, it will indicate that in order to reduce crime "societies must enhance the legitimate sources of social support and reduce the forces of coercion" as the authors assert (Colvin, Cullen, and Vander Ven 2002: pg. 33).

## METHODS

### SAMPLE

The data used in this research were collected in March 2007 from an online anonymous crime survey conducted in a supervised computer lab. Subjects were asked to sign an informed consent and were assured that their answers would remain anonymous because they were not required to identify their name or student ID number. The convenience sample consisted of 463 University of Texas at El Paso undergraduate students enrolled and attending criminal justice, sociology and psychology classes that volunteered their participation. Several of the participants received extra credit from their professors in exchange for their participation.

The majority of these students reside in El Paso which is a city that has a low rate of crime in spite of its high poverty level, and thus is considered one of the safest cities in the nation (CQ Press City Crime Rankings 2008-2009). From the total number of students that participated in the survey 54 percent of the subjects were female and 46 percent were male. The majority of the students (44 %) ranged from 18 to 20 years, 32 percent of the students were 21 to 23 years old, 12 percent were 24 to 26 years old, 5 percent had from 27 to 30 years and the remaining 7 percent had over 30 years of age. Also, from all the students who participated in the survey 79 percent were Hispanic, 10 percent were non-Hispanic White and 6 percent were African American. 35.9% of students reported an income that is below \$32,124 the median household income reported by El Paso residents in the 2000 census.

### MEASURES

#### *DEPENDENT VARIABLE: DEVIANCE*

The dependent variable of deviance is measured by 26 items, divided into six categories: property deviance, drug deviance, physical violence, academic deviance, false appearance deviance and

violation of privacy deviance. In the survey respondents chose an answer from a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means none, 2 means just once, 3 means about 2-5 times, 4 means 6-10 times and 5 means more than 10 times. Responses were added together to create a summative scale of deviance (mean =40.49, standard deviation = 14.05). To create the scale, respondents were asked the following questions in reference to the six categories of deviant behavior: “How many times in the last six months have you...”

#### Category 1: Drug deviance

- Used marijuana (mean=1.47, s.d. =1.1).
- Used alcohol to get drunk (mean= 2.72, s.d. =1.5).
- Used a drug other than marijuana or alcohol to get high (mean=1.28, s.d. =.86).
- Sold marijuana or other illegal drugs to anyone (mean=1.21, s.d. =.79).
- Gave alcohol to someone under age 21 (mean= 1.67, s.d. =1.2).
- Driven a vehicle while intoxicated on alcohol or drugs (mean=1.79, s.d. =1.2).

#### Category 2: Property deviance

- Purposely destroyed someone’s property (mean=1.20, s.d. =.65).
- Taken (or tried to take) something from a store without paying for it (mean=1.33, s.d. =.79).
- Taken (or tried to take) something from another person without permission (mean=1.35, s.d. =.76).
- Used a credit card or debit card (or ATM card) that wasn’t yours without permission (mean=1.12, s.d. =.53).
- Knowingly written a bad check (mean=1.08, s.d. =.44).
- Used, made, or gave a pirated copy of commercially sold software (mean=1.57, s.d. =1.0).
- Illegally downloaded or copied music or video files from the internet or other source (mean=2.45, s.d. =1.6).

### Category 3: Physical violence deviance

- Threatened to physically hurt someone (mean=1.37, s.d. =.87).
- Been in a physical fight where someone got hurt (mean=1.25, s.d. =.71).
- Used or tried to use a gun, knife or other weapon to hurt someone (mean=1.13, s.d. =.59).

### Category 4: Academic deviance

- Cheated on an exam (mean=1.69, s.d. =1.0).
- Cheated on a class assignment (other than an exam), (mean=1.68, s.d. =1.1).
- Had someone else do some of your schoolwork (mean=1.47, s.d. =.94).

### Category 5: False appearance deviance

- Deliberately lied to anyone in order to give yourself some type of advantage (mean=1.82, s.d. =1.2).
- “Cheated” (or tried to cheat) on your spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend (for example, going on a date, kissing, or having sexual contact), (mean=1.49, s.d. =.98).
- Used (or tried to used) a fake ID to get into a bar or to buy alcohol or for some other reason (mean=1.36, s.d. =.96).

### Category 6: Violation of privacy deviance

- Acquired the account number and password of another computer user without that person’s permission (mean=1.11, s.d. =.48).
- Accessed another person’s computer account without permission (mean=1.14, s.d. =.53).
- Downloaded or copied the computer files of another person without that persons permission (mean=1.22, s.d. =.74).
- Changed or modified the files of another person without permission (mean=1.09, s.d. =.41).

### ***INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: SOCIAL SUPPORT***

The independent variable of social support is measured by 14 items adapted from the Interpersonal Support Evaluation List (ISEL) (Cohen and Hoberman 1983). The 14 items were divided into five different types of support. The five different types or categories are advice-guidance support

(perceived availability of someone to talk to about one's problems), socializing support (perceived availability of people one can do things with), emotional support (perceived availability of a positive comparison when comparing one's self to others), financial support (perceived availability of material aid) and practical support (perceived availability of people who can help you with everyday needs). All items are measured with a Likert scale on a five-point scale ranging from strongly agree (code 5), agree somewhat (code 4), neither agree nor disagree (code 3), disagree somewhat (code 2), and strongly disagree (code 1). All items were coded such that higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived social support resources and then added together to create a summative scale mean = 55.82; standard deviation = 10.22.

#### Category 1: Advice/Guidance Support

- There are several people that I trust to help solve my problems (mean=3.80, s.d. =1.3).
- There is no one that I feel comfortable talking about intimate personal problems (mean=3.73, s.d. =1.4).
- There is no one who can give me an objective view of how I'm handling my problems (mean=3.72, s.d. =1.3).
- If a family crisis arose, it would be difficult to find someone who could give me good advice about how to handle it (mean=3.90, s.d. =1.3).
- I know someone I could turn to for advice about making career plans or changing my job (mean=3.84, s.d. =1.2).
- I know someone I can trust to give me good financial advice (mean=3.83, s.d. =1.2).

#### Category 2: Socializing Support

- I often meet or talk with family or friends (mean=4.14, s.d. =1.0).
- There are several different people I enjoy spending time with (mean=4.24, s.d. =.98).

#### Category 3: Emotional Support

- There is someone who takes pride in my accomplishments (mean=4.11, s.d. =1.1).

- When I am together with my family members, they usually make me feel good about myself (mean=3.94, s.d. =1.1).
- When I am together with my friends, they usually make me feel good about myself (mean=4.02, s.d. =.97).

#### Category 4: Financial Support

- If I needed an emergency loan of \$100, there is someone (friend, relative, or acquaintance) I could get it from (mean=4.26, s.d. =1.1).

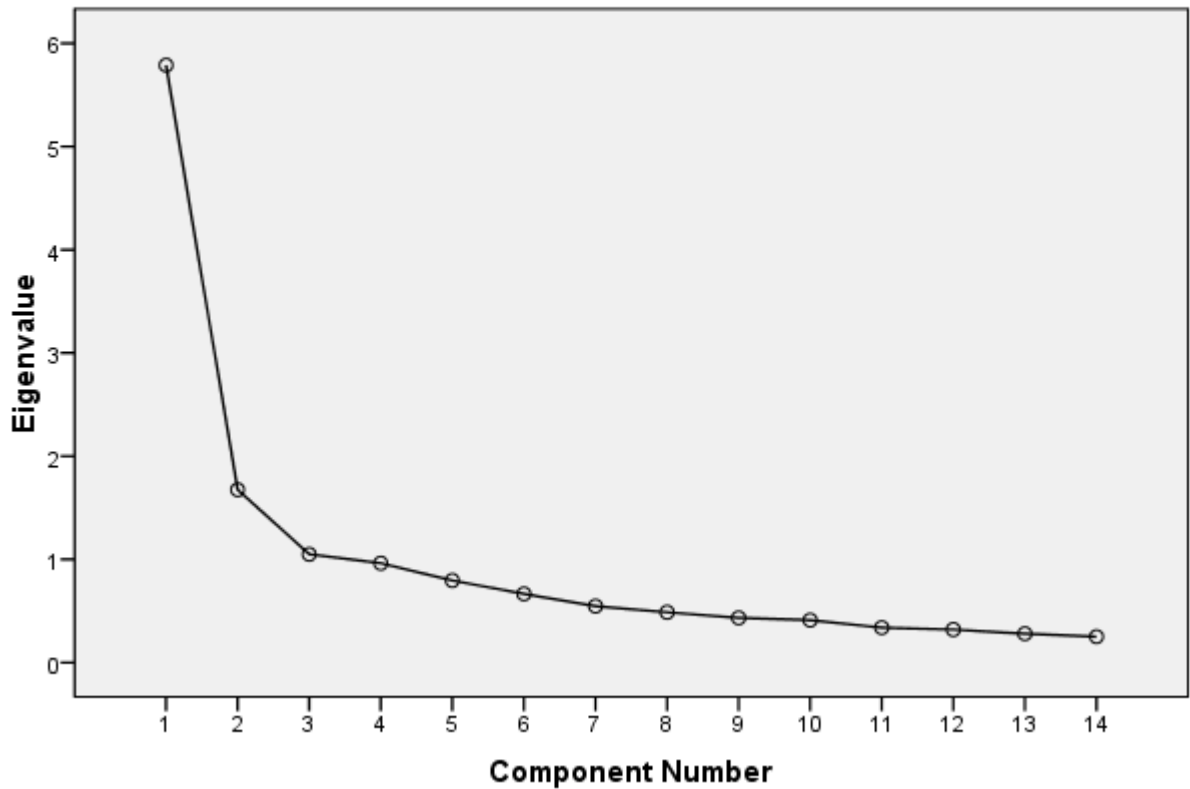
#### Category 5: Practical Support

- If I needed help fixing an appliance or repairing my car, there is someone who would help me (mean=4.06, s.d. =1.1).
- If I needed a place to stay for a week because of an emergency (for example, water or electricity out in my apartment or house), I could easily find someone who would put me up (mean=4.23, s.d. =1.1).

The Cronbach's alpha for the linear composite of the fourteen items of social support is .88. A principal components analysis yielded Eigenvalues of 5.79, 1.68, and 1.05. Although the results of a scree test appear to indicate a one-factor solution, these results are not conclusive. The differences between the Eigenvalues, however, indicate that a one-factor solution is appropriate (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).



### Scree Plot



**Figure 1: Scree Plot of Social Support**

#### ***INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: COERCION***

The independent variable of coercion is measured by 45 items adapted from a study of James Unnever (2004). The items to measure coercion were divided into five different categories: intimate partner coercion, family coercion, peer coercion, social coercion and neighborhood coercion. The items are measured with a four-point scale ranging from, a very big problem (code 1), a big problem (code 2), somewhat a problem (code 3), and not a problem at all (code 4). Responses to the items were added together to create a summative scale mean =159.83; standard deviation =21.83. Respondents were asked

the following question in reference these items: “How big of a problem have the following things been for you over the last six months?”

#### Category 1: Intimate Partner coercion

A girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse...

- Starting arguments with you (mean=3.16, s.d. =.96).
- Being rude, mean or inconsiderate to you (mean=3.22, s.d. =.94).
- Making mean comments about how you look (mean=3.60, s.d. =.80).
- Making mean comments about you in some other way (mean=3.45, s.d. =.86).
- Ignoring you or excluding you from things on purpose (mean=3.50, s.d. =.85).
- Telling lies or spreading false rumors about you (mean=3.59, s.d. =.81).
- Threatening to harm you in some way (mean=3.69, s.d. =.74).
- Being physically aggressive toward you, such as shoving or bumping you, knocking things out of your hands, hitting you or harming you in some other way (mean=3.69, s.d. =.75).
- Demanding that you do something that you did not want to (mean=3.58, s.d. =.84).
- Having stressful or difficult relationships with a girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse (mean=3.22, s.d. =1.0).

#### Category 2: Family Coercion

A family member (other than a spouse)...

- Starting arguments with you (mean=3.14, s.d. =.96).
- Being rude, mean or inconsiderate to you (mean=3.26, s.d. =.98).
- Making mean comments about how you look (mean=3.48, s.d. =.85).
- Making mean comments about you in some other way (mean=3.41, s.d. =.86).
- Ignoring you or excluding you from things on purpose (mean=3.53, s.d. =.85).
- Telling lies or spreading false rumors about you (mean=3.65, s.d. =.81).
- Threatening to harm you in some way (mean=3.73, s.d. =.72).

- Being physically aggressive toward you, such as shoving or bumping you, knocking things out of your hands, hitting you or harming you in some other way (mean=3.69, s.d. =.73).
- Demanding that you do something that you did not want to (mean=3.45, s.d. =.89).
- Having stressful or difficult relationships with family members (mean=3.21, s.d. =1.0).

### Category 3: Peer Coercion

A friend or any other people you socialize with...

- Starting arguments with you (mean=3.52, s.d. =.79).
- Being rude, mean or inconsiderate to you (mean=3.47, s.d. =.75).
- Making mean comments about how you look (mean=3.66, s.d. =.71).
- Making mean comments about you in some other way (mean=3.57, s.d. =.78).
- Ignoring you or excluding you from things on purpose (mean=3.53, s.d. =.81).
- Telling lies or spreading false rumors about you (mean=3.59, s.d. =.79).
- Threatening to harm you in some way (mean=3.77, s.d. =.65).
- Being physically aggressive toward you, such as shoving or bumping you, knocking things out of your hands, hitting you or harming you in some other way (mean=3.78, s.d.=.65).
- Demanding that you do something that you did not want to (mean=3.69, s.d. =.68).
- Having stressful or difficult relationships with friends and other people you socialize with (mean=3.55, s.d. =.78).

### Category 4: Social coercion

Any other people (such as work, fellow students, professors or elsewhere) you encounter...

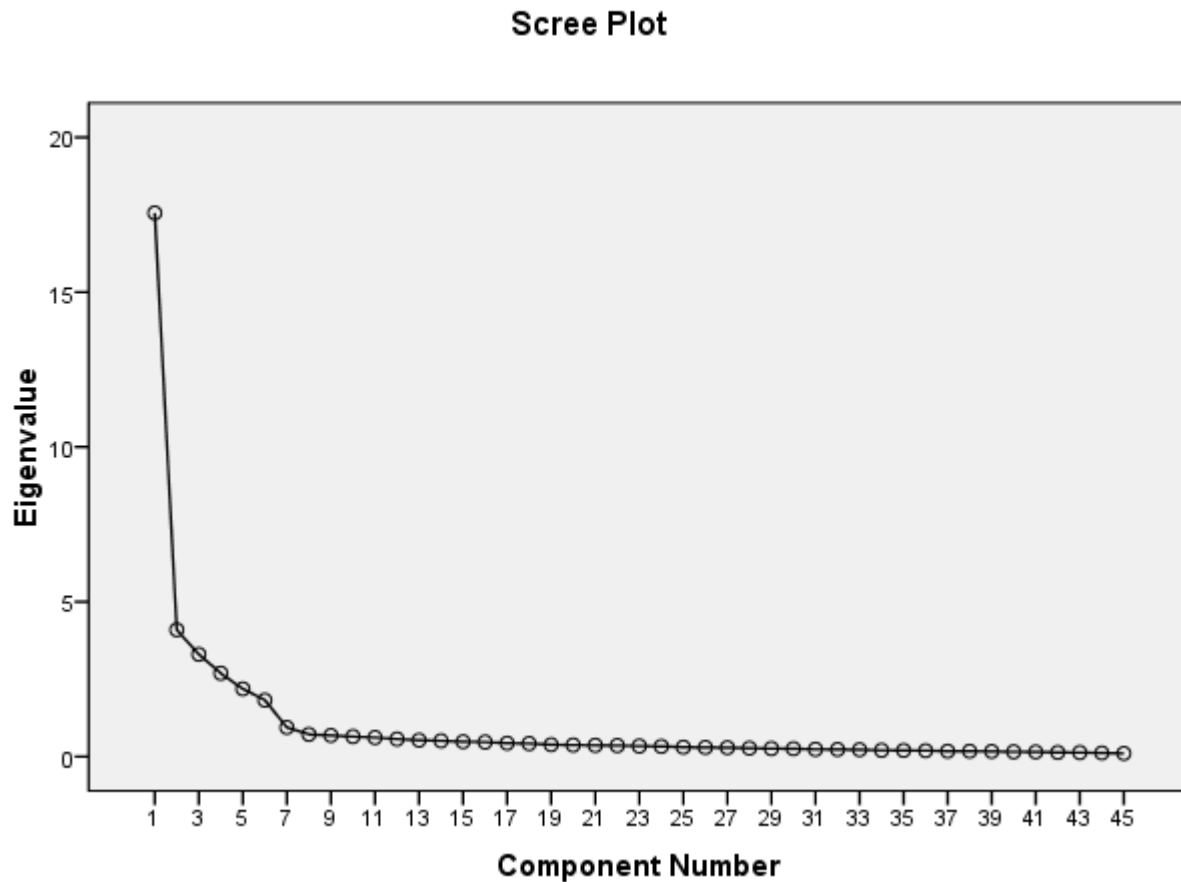
- Starting arguments with you (mean=3.64, s.d. =.71).
- Being rude, mean or inconsiderate to you (mean=3.52, s.d. =.73).
- Making mean comments about how you look (mean=3.70, s.d. =.70).
- Making mean comments about you in some other way (mean=3.67, s.d. =.70).
- Ignoring you or excluding you from things on purpose (mean=3.61, s.d. =.76).

- Telling lies or spreading false rumors about you (mean=3.71, s.d. =.65).
- Threatening to harm you in some way (mean=3.80, s.d. =.61).
- Being physically aggressive toward you, such as shoving or bumping you, knocking things out of your hands, hitting you or harming you in some other way (mean=3.80, s.d.=.61).
- Demanding that you do something that you did not want to (mean=3.65, s.d. =.75).
- Having stressful or difficult relationships with any other people you socialize with (mean=3.61, s.d. =.75).

#### Category 5: Neighborhood coercion

- The presence of vandalism, graffiti, or litter in your neighborhood (mean=3.41,s.d. =.87).
- The presence of run down or abandoned cars and buildings in your neighborhood (mean=3.65, s.d. =.71).
- The presence of street crimes in your neighborhood, such as assaults, break-ins, thefts or people selling drugs (mean=3.54, s.d. =.84).
- The behavior of the people in your neighborhood in general (mean=3.58, s.d. =.78).

The Cronbach's alpha for the linear composite of the forty-five items for coercion is .96. A principal component analysis produced Eigenvalues of 17.6, 4.10, 3.30, 2.70, 2.20 and 1.82. The results of a scree test as well as differences between the Eigenvalues indicate that a one-factor analysis is appropriate (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).



**Figure 2: Scree Plot of Coercion**

***CONTROL VARIABLE: PEER DEVIANCE***

Controlling for peer deviance is done to protect against the possibility of incorrectly attributing causal significance to relationships that are false (Hay 2001). The control variable of peer deviance is measured by 14 items in a five-point scale, where 1 means all or nearly all, 2 means most, 3 means some, 4 means only a few and five means none. All items were coded such that higher scores indicate a lower level of peer deviance and then added together to create a summative scale (mean=57.8; standard deviation=9.02). Respondents were asked the following questions in reference to these items: “How

many of your friends and the other people you socialize with have done the following things in the last 6 months?”

### Peer Deviance

- Cheated in some way on exams or class assignments
- Gotten drunk on alcohol
- Took drugs to get high
- Stole things from stores or other people
- Were in a physical fight with someone
- Acquired the account number and password of another user without that person’s permission
- Accessed another person’s computer account without permission
- Downloaded or copied the files of another user without permission
- Changed or modified the files of another user without permission
- Used, made, or gave to another person a “pirated” copy of commercially sold software
- Illegally downloaded music or video files from the internet or other source
- Drove a vehicle while intoxicated on alcohol or drugs
- Knowingly wrote a bad check or used an ATM or debit card that wasn’t theirs
- Sold drugs or gave alcohol to someone under age 21

### ***DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES***

Demographic variables asked during the survey consisted of race, gender, age, GPA, year in college, income, language, citizenship, and residence. Respondents were asked to identify their race. It was coded in four categories, each of which is a dummy variable: Hispanic, White, Black, and Other (Asian, Native American, other). Gender is also a dummy variable coded 1 for male. Age is coded as 1=18-20 years, 2=21-23 years, 3=24-26 years, 4=27-30 years, and 5=over 30 years of age. GPA is an ordinal measure where 1= below 2.0, 2=2.0-2.4, 3=2.5-2.9, 4=3.0-3.4, and 5=3.5 and above. Year in

college was coded such that 1=freshman, 2=sophomore, 3=junior, and 4=senior. Respondents were also asked to estimate the amount of money they and their family made within the last 12 months (in U.S. dollars). Responses were coded as 1=less than \$5,000, 2=\$5,000-\$10,000, 3=\$10,001-\$25,000, 4=\$25,001-\$40,000, 5=\$40,001-\$60,000, and 6=over \$60,000. For the language question, respondents were asked to indicate the primary language spoken in their family and it was coded as a dummy variable where 1= English and 0= Spanish or English and Spanish equally. Citizenship is a dummy variable coded 1 for U.S. citizen and 0 for other nationalities. Respondents were asked to identify where they have mainly lived in the last six months. Residency was coded as a dummy variable where 1=U.S. and 0= some other country. Because of a moderately high correlation ( $r=.225$ ) between language and residency, as well as considerable conceptual overlap, it was decided to exclude residency in the analyses.

## ANALYSIS

The analysis proposed in this research was to first conduct bivariate correlations of the dependent, independent, and control variables used in this research. These results provide preliminary information regarding hypothesized relationships. More definitive results come from a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression equations. The first OLS equation regresses coercion and social support on deviance and shows the relationship between each independent variable and deviance, holding the other independent variable constant. The second OLS equation adds the control variable of peer deviance, and in a third equation adds the demographic controls of race, gender, age, GPA, year, income and language. These equations provide key information regarding whether hypothesized relationships that may have been supported by correlations persist when control variables are included in the analyses, and how the controls might impact the strength of these relationships. An additional regression analysis examines the hypothesized relationship between coercion and social support. This equation uses coercion as the dependent variable, and included social support, peer deviance, and the demographic control variables.



## RESULTS

Bivariate correlations of the dependent, independent, and control variables were conducted in order to examine the statistical relationship among these variables (see Table 1). The results in table 1 show a significant negative relation between coercion and social support ( $r=-.382$ ). This result supports the hypothesis that coercion and social support are inversely related. Also, the results show a moderate association between coercion and deviance ( $r=.347$ ) that indicates that the more coercion a student experiences, the more their deviant involvement. Results show a negative correlation between deviance and social support but it is not significant and so does not support this hypothesis. The results show a positive but weak association between males and deviance with ( $r=.186$ ), and between males and peer deviance ( $r=.197$ ) that shows that males are more likely to get involved in deviant behaviors compared to females and have more deviant peers. A negative relationship exists between peer deviance and age ( $r=-.192$ ) which shows that as the age of a student increases, peer deviant involvement decreases. A positive weak association was found for GPA and social support ( $r=.113$ ) that shows that the higher the GPA the more social support a student has. There is a relationship between GPA and coercion ( $r=.174$ ) that shows that the higher the GPA of students the less coercion they experience. Also there is a weak negative association between year in college and their level of coercion ( $r=-.109$ ) and peer deviance ( $r=-.124$ ), which shows that as students progress in their college education the less coercion and peer deviance they experience. Income and social support are associated ( $r=.127$ ) such that the higher a student's income the more social support they have. Finally, there is a negative association between income and coercion ( $r=-.140$ ) that shows that the higher a student's income the less coercion they have.

Table 1: Correlations Among Dependent, Independent, and Control Variables (n=429)

	Deviance	Social Support	Coercion	Peer Deviance	Hispanic	White	Black	Other	Male	Age	GPA	Year	Income
Social Support	-.070												
Coercion	.347**	-.382**											
Peer Deviance	.506**	-.092	.347**										
Hispanic	.001	.079	.000	-.058									
White	-.009	-.036	-.072	-.019	-.652**								
Black	.046	-.084	.085	.055	-.486**	-.083							
Other	-.041	-.008	.008	.074	-.443**	-.076	-.056						
Male	.186**	-.076	.105*	.197**	-.179**	.062	.147**	.091					
Age	-.069	-.053	-.061	-.192**	.034	.007	-.075	.009	.087				
GPA	-.079	.113*	-.174**	-.018	-.054	.119*	-.102*	.046	-.126**	.011			
Year	-.095	-.032	-.109*	-.124*	.056	-.039	-.064	.019	.098*	.590**	.036		
Income	.011	.127**	-.140**	.015	-.150**	.218**	-.012	-.008	.127**	.014	.098*	.068	
Language	-.006	-.026	-.020	.016	-.385**	.302**	.240**	.042	.088	.079	.061	.061	.227**

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Ordinary least squares regressions were conducted to provide a stronger test of the direct effects of social support, coercion, and control variables on deviance. Equation 1 of Table 2 shows that coercion retains the significant relationship observed in the correlations ( $\beta=.38$ ) but social support, much as with the result for the correlations, is not significant. This equation shows an  $R^2$  value of .13 indicating that the combination of these variables explains only 13% of the variation in students' deviant behavior.

Equation 2 includes the variables of social support, coercion, and peer deviance. This equation yields an  $R^2$  value of .29 indicating that when peer deviance is added to the equation, the coefficient of determination more than doubles in size. Results of an F-test between the differences in the amount of explained variance between equation 1 and equation 2 show a significant difference ( $F=95.78, p<.01$ ). It also shows that coercion ( $\beta=.22$ ) and peer deviance ( $\beta=.44$ ) are significant but not social support as predictors of deviance behavior. It is important to notice that the effect of peer deviance is much stronger than that for coercion, and that the addition of peer deviance to the regression equation substantially weakens the strength of the effect of coercion. This shows that peer deviance attenuates or weakens the association observed originally between coercion and the dependent variable deviance. This outcome suggests that peer deviance might serve as either an intervening variable, that interprets the relationship between coercion and deviance or as an antecedent variable that renders the relationship spurious. Because coercion, social support and peer deviance are all measured at the same point in time and reflect situational factors, rather than underlying traits, that may influence deviance, it is difficult to specify whether peer deviance explains or interprets the association between coercion and deviance.

Equation 3 includes social support, coercion, peer deviance, and demographic control variables. After adding the demographic control variables in the equation there is no meaningful change in the effects of coercion ( $\beta=.21$ ) or peer deviance ( $\beta=.43$ ) on the dependent variable. Also, the results show that males ( $\beta=.09$ ) retains the weak but significant relationship observed in the correlations, but that none of the other control variables have a significant effect on deviance. Overall the results in this

equation show that control variables contribute very little to understanding variation deviant behavior in this sample. The equation yields an  $R^2$  value of .31 indicating that the combination of these variables explains about 31% of the variation in students' deviant behavior, which is only slightly larger than in the previous equation.

Table 2: Direct Effects of Social Support, Coercion, & Control Variables on Deviance

Independent Variables	Equation 1			Equation 2			Equation 3		
	b	Beta	p	b	Beta	p	b	Beta	p
Social Support	.10	.07	.14	.07	.05	.24	.07	.06	.22
Coercion	.23	.38	.00**	.13	.22	.00**	.13	.21	.00**
Peer Deviance	–	–	–	.64	.44	.00**	.63	.43	.00**
Hispanic	–	–	–	–	–	–	-.21	-.01	.92
Black	–	–	–	–	–	–	-.52	-.01	.86
Other	–	–	–	–	–	–	-5.12	-.08	.10
Male	–	–	–	–	–	–	2.34	.09	.05*
Age	–	–	–	–	–	–	.65	.06	.27
GPA	–	–	–	–	–	–	-.35	-.03	.51
Year	–	–	–	–	–	–	-.70	-.06	.26
Income	–	–	–	–	–	–	.21	.02	.60
Language	–	–	–	–	–	–	-.43	-.02	.73
Constant	17.78			8.97			9.69		
$R^2$	.13			.29			.31		
F	30.46		.00**	58.41		.00**	15.54		.00**

\*\* Correlation is significant at  $p \leq .01$

\* Correlation is significant at  $p \leq .05$

An additional OLS regression analysis was conducted to examine the hypothesized relationship between coercion and social support. Table 3 presents the results of the direct effect of social support, peer deviance, and the demographic control variables on coercion, which was chosen as the dependent variable as a matter of convenience. The regression shows that social support retains the significant negative relationship observed in the correlations ( $\beta = -.34$ ), supporting the hypothesis that social support and coercion are inversely related. It also shows that peer deviance retains the significant relationship observed in the correlations ( $\beta = .30$ ), supporting our previous observation that the more coercion a student experiences the more their deviant involvement as predicted by the theory. Also, the results show that GPA ( $\beta = -.11$ ) and year in college ( $\beta = -.10$ ) are significant supporting the idea that the more coercion a student experiences the lower their GPA and year in college. This regression yields an  $R^2$  value of .29 indicating that the combination of these variables explains 29% of the variance in coercion.

Table 3: Direct Effects of Social Support & Control Variables on Coercion

Independent Variables	b	Beta	p
Social Support	-.73	-.34	.00**
Peer Deviance	.73	.30	.00**
Hispanic	4.78	.09	.13
Black	5.94	.06	.21
Other	2.99	.03	.55
Male	.51	.01	.79
Age	.75	.04	.43
GPA	-2.25	-.11	.01**
Year	-2.05	-.10	.04*
Income	-1.24	-.08	.06
Language	.12	.00	.95
Constant	98.86		
R <sup>2</sup>	.29		
F	15.96		.00**

\*\* Correlation is significant at  $p \leq .01$

\* Correlation is significant at  $p \leq .05$

## DISCUSSION

The theory of coercion, social support and crime is relatively new and the authors have not presented any research testing on the predicted effects of coercion and social support (Akers and Sellers 2004). They have only offered policy implications in which they advocate restorative criminal and juvenile justice policies, and prevention programs aimed at offenders' rehabilitation. As a result, the present research sought to provide much needed empirical evidence to test this theory using data collected from undergraduate university students in an online anonymous survey.

The main idea behind the development of the theory is that in order to reduce crime "societies must enhance the legitimate sources of social support and reduce the forces of coercion" (Colvin, Cullen, and Vander Ven 2002: pg.33). The authors explain that these sources occur at both the macro and micro levels of society. With this idea in mind a research strategy was created at the micro level of interpersonal relationships to measure the support and coercion a student receives from friends, relatives, or acquaintances. Specifically the following hypotheses were measured: that coercion causes crime or deviance and social support prevents these behaviors, and that coercion and social support are inversely related. These hypotheses were tested with a convenience sample of 463 UTEP undergraduate students.

Because this is a new and integrated theory, there is no established methodology regarding the measurement of social support or coercion. However, existing scholarship on related topics guided the development of new measures used in the present research. Specifically, social support was measured by 14 items adapted from the ISEL scale (Cohen and Hoberman 1983) and coercion was measured by 45 items adapted from a study of James Unnever (2004). Both of these measures had high reliability and appeared to meet criteria for uni-dimensionality (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).

The findings support the hypothesis that coercion and social support are inversely related. This is a major contribution to the theory because it supports the authors assumed relationship between these

variables. Additional findings show the predicted positive association between coercion and deviance which supports the hypothesis that the more coercion a student experiences, the more their deviant involvement. However, results do not support the predicted negative association between deviance and social support. Overall, the results showed only partial support of this emerging theoretical consensus.

It's important to note, that the results of bivariate correlations show a moderate association between coercion and deviance ( $r=.347$ ) that indicates that the more coercion a student experiences, the more their deviant involvement. This relates to a previous study where results showed that middle school students exposed to coercive environments develop social-psychological deficits and therefore engage in delinquent behavior (Unnever 2004). In addition, the fact that the results in both studies are significant, confirms the reliability of the scale used to measure the independent variable of coercion because it was adapted from the scale used in James Unnever study (2004).

Another important thing to mention about the findings is that social support and deviance have a negative correlation but it is not significant. It failed to support the hypothesis that social support prevents deviance similarly to the study by Paternoster and Mazerolle (1994) where they failed to find empirical support to their hypothesis that social support has a moderating effect on delinquency. It's important to say that social support has been examined extensively in health literature, but it has only recently been recognized in the field of criminology as an important variable that could possibly help explain delinquent behavior (Agnew 1992; Wright and Chamlin 1999). Given the limitation on empirical research about this subject, further studies about the moderating effects of social support on deviance are needed.

There are several weaknesses in the study and the research strategy. One being that students were asked questions regarding their personal experiences of coercion and social support in their life, but were not asked how consistent or erratic their experiences were. According to the model of differential social support and coercion there needs to be a differentiation between consistent social support or



coercion and inconsistent social support and coercion (Colvin 2007), as this will affect deviant behaviors in diverse ways. As a result researchers interested in this theory should consider developing a scale of coercion and social support that measures not only the presence and magnitude of these experiences but their consistency.

Also, future research may wish to empirically test the theory using different subsets of populations like the unemployed, individuals who are currently in parole or probation, or who have a mental or chemical dependency problem to see if the findings in this study are replicated or change. Using subsets of the populations mentioned above could facilitate testing the theory in environments where coercion is assumed to be more prevalent. Another interesting way of testing the theory would be by random samples because they are more likely to yield a sample that truly represents the population and it also lets the researcher calculate the relationship between the sample and the population (Neuman 2003). A consideration of different types of deviance and crime, like index, property, or hate crimes could also provide valuable information on the accuracy of the theory.

Additional areas that can be improved for future research on this theory, is on the type of analysis performed. Other researchers might want to test for an interaction effect between social support and coercion regarding their combined effect on deviance. The effects of these two variables may not be simply additive, and testing for an interaction effect could show that the effect of one variable depends on the values of the other variables.

Overall, the aim of the study was to understand deviant behaviors of university students through the coercion and social support theory. Our results show partial support for the theory opening the door to other researchers who would like to take the endeavor of creating other empirical studies to analyze the theory. In the meantime, it is too early to generalize our results to other populations or to claim either way that the integrative theory works or does not work.

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## **CURRICULUM VITA**

Maria Nichte-ha Uribe Tinoco was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco MX on February 17, 1983. She was raised in Durango, Durango MX but in 1997 moved to El Paso, TX. She graduated from El Paso High School in May 2001 and began attending the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) that fall. She graduated with her Bachelors of Art degree with a major in Criminal Justice and a minor in Sociology in May 2006. Shortly thereafter, she began her graduate career at UTEP where she pursued a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. During this time, she worked at the College of Engineering as a student assistant, then she worked within the Sociology and Anthropology department as a teaching assistant, and is currently working as a licensed chemical dependency counselor intern for youth in Aliviane TRY non-profit organization

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