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Exploring the Meanings of Social Support Networks

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SIT Study Abroad

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Table of Contents

❖ Acknowledgments	p. 4
❖ Abstract	p. 6
❖ A personal Connection	p. 7
❖ Introduction	p. 7
❖ Literature Review	p. 12
❖ Methodology	p. 15
❖ Unpacking the Complexities of Street Life	p. 19
❖ Contextualizing the Meaning of Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar	p. 23
❖ Expressions of Instrumental Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar	p. 26
❖ Expressions of Informational Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar	p. 27
❖ Expressions of Emotional Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar	p. 29
❖ Expressions of Appraisal Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar	p. 31
❖ Social Relevance – Conclusion	p. 33
❖ Future Research	p. 34
❖ References	p. 36
❖ Appendix	p. 39

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This research study is warmly dedicated to the children of the Serviluz Community.

Abstract

There are eight million children on the streets of Brazil. As a result of this alarming statistic the study of street children has increased. However, literature on the matter assumes a deficit view of these children, emphasizing the social and developmental aspects of their suffering. While it is essential to identify the origins and consequences of becoming a street child, it is equally as crucial to identify factors within the environment that help impoverished children to build resilience against the many stressful events that accompany their reality. Hence, instead of continuing the trend of investigating the role that inadequate education, poverty, and parental neglect play in the rising number of Brazilian street children, the present research study explores how social support networks diminish an impoverished child's vulnerability to adopt the streets as his home and to become involved in illicit activities. It further questions how such networks serve to strengthen the relationships of resiliency which contextualize the daily experiences of these children. Through semi-structured interviews, standardized observations, and daily, unstructured observations this study examines the social support activities offered at Instituto Povo do Mar (IPOM), a non-government organization situated in the Serviluz neighborhood of Fortaleza-CE, Brazil, as a response to the high number of Brazilian children on the streets. Participant responses and first-hand field observations were analyzed and compared over a period of three weeks. Taken together, these findings outline IPOM's views on the following: factors influencing children to trade their home life for a life on the streets, the meaning of street life for a child, the prevalence of street children in Serviluz, and the significance and importance of social support. Specifically, these findings suggest that IPOM's social support efforts are preventative. By targeting children that are not yet living on the streets and by its group-oriented rather than individual-oriented pedagogy, IPOM seeks to diminish the amount of time a child spends on the streets. These findings further suggest that through experiential educational classes such as Maracatu and English Language learning IPOM provides instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal social support to the children in the Serviluz community.

A Personal Connection

In the Spring of 2005 my parents divorced. I was thirteen and my brother five when I realized that we were destined to grow up in a home absent a father's love. Although I was affected by the tragic split, I found security in the arms of my mother and in her words of comfort. To the contrary, my brother became distant and frigid. Without his father, he pulled away from my mother, performed poorly in school, and expressed social alienation. Watching my brother's struggle to adapt to my parent's divorce, I developed a fervent interest in the mental and emotional growth of children. That said, my familiarity with literature on child development, mental health, and social psychology provides me with a lexicon to decipher the effects of parental indifference, emotional abuse, and economic instability on the healthy development of a child. As a mentor to my brother, I have come to understand that in stressful situations children experience a wide range of emotions, some of which may be new and therefore doubly distressing. The many and unavoidable changes that accompany social, financial, and emotional stress undermine a child's sense of security and attachment, making them fearful of the future: as they wonder, "what's next?" will we have enough to eat, will I have to stop going to school, will I lose my pet rabbit, will I still see my friends? As my brother's source of support I have come to understand that it is not so much an event or sudden change in environment that affects a child. Rather, it is the manner in which individuals around them explain, relate, and aid them that creates the greatest impact. It is for this reason that I executed an ethnographical study in which I examined the relationship between social support and an impoverished child's ability to build resilience in fight of the environmental pressures that may encourage him to trade his home for life on the streets.

Introduction

Walking into Serviluz, Fortaleza-CE, Brazil is like walking through a beach town. To the left and to the right one sees people in bathing suites and with surf boards. Although some streets are paved, most of them are made of dirt and broken pieces of concrete. Alongside the streets one finds people of all ages from children to the elderly walking from their homes to local schools and small markets. The residents are rather chipper, exchanging vibrant "good mornings" from across the street. The children, some in

school uniform others in sandals, shorts, and t-shirts loudly talk to each other and laugh to themselves. The smell of freshly baked bread, opened coconuts, and caught fish is almost strong enough to draw one's attention away from the breaking waves crashing on the shore. Despite the beauty of this scene, however, one cannot refrain from noticing the many houses cluttered onto a relatively small piece of land: these are the homes of those individuals who were forced to leave Praia Mansa when the government needed the land to build the port that currently lines the community.

The community of Serviluz is enclosed by three beaches: Praia Mansa, Praia Titanzinho, and Praia Vizinho. Praia Mansa although overshadowed by four omnipotent windmills, the port, and yellow cargo ships is a beautiful deep blue and surrounded by massive rock build-up. Unlike Praia Vizinho, Praia Mansa is not frequented by the local surfers and fishermen. Walking along the shore of Praia Titanzinho one notices the towering lighthouse that overlooks the community. Having been a museum (*Museu Do Jangadiro*) decades ago, the lighthouse is over 300 years old and unfortunately not very well preserved. Despite its broken windows, its crippled wooden floor panels, its shattered walls, and its swirling, decrepit iron stairway the lighthouse is now visited by community children and provides the routine onlooker a panoramic view of the surrounding seascape. This view also underscores the hallmarking presence of the port, and thus the concealment of the community; Serviluz is tucked away from the naked-eye and on the bordering rim of a highly touristic area, Beira Mar. Home to 25,000 residents Serviluz holds the largest concentration of fisherman in Fortaleza, Brazil (R. Cavalante, journal entry, May 13, 2013 at 11:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.31); the sea to this community not only signifies beauty and freedom, but it also symbolizes survival (R. Cavalante, journal entry, May 13, 2013 at 11:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.31). It is imperative to note, however, that Serviluz was not always known as "Serviluz:" many decades ago a power and energy company on Praia Mansa that supplied light to the residents dominated the landscape. Ever since the presence of this company the community became known as Serviluz, whose literal translation is "serve light;" before the arrival of the power and energy service the community was known as "farol" or "lighthouse" (R. Cavalante, journal entry, May 13, 2013 at 11:20am,

ISP Field Journal, p.31). For many years the lighthouse defined the community and provided its residents with a common identity: “the dwellers of the farol.”

Much like other Northeastern favelas in Brazil, Serviluz is victim to drug trafficking, gun and gang related violence, and prostitution (R. Cavalante, journal entry, May 13, 2013 at 11:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.32). Despite the presence of a police station in the community, “violence, murder, and crime are still very high. . .people are killed right in front of the police station and the response from the policemen is not a strong enough one to put an end to crime” (R. Cavalante, journal entry, May 13, 2013 at 11:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.32). The mere presence of the military police does not necessarily translate to peace, safety, and security for the residents of Serviluz. The construction of several residential homes is reflective of one of the previously mentioned illicit activities: prostitution. Although most houses in the community are of equally the same size, there are some that are more expansive: these houses served as prostitution houses, hence their multiple floor levels and the rows of small windows that line their outer walls (R. Cavalante, journal entry, May 13, 2013 at 11:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.31). Although large families now occupy the rooms once used for sexual activity, prostitution, especially child and adolescent prostitution is a prominent concern in the community (R. Cavalante, journal entry, May 13, 2013 at 11:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.31). As one might assume prostitution does not stand on its own. Children prostitute themselves with a higher objective in sight: “to be able to buy drugs, crack specifically” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 75). Lured by the glamour of attractive women, status, money, and material possessions local children are being bewitched into prostitution and the drug trade (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.67). Attending only an average of four hours of school per day (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 75), community children run to the streets where their vulnerability to becoming involved in these alluring, illicit activities is quickly heightened. The violence of these criminal networks coalesced with a financially and emotionally unstable familial structure (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.66) has created a quandary in which absolute generations of children are being obliterated. Hope however, exists in this

favela community. It is alive through powerful outlets of social support such as Instituto Povo Do Mar (IPOM). This organization which was opened in 2010 is a community center that offers local children involvement in the following classrooms: *sala de informatica* (computer classroom) which facilitates the “Surfista Digital” activity, *sala de artes* (arts and crafts classroom) which facilitates the “Artes Visuais” activity, the “Maracatu Povo Do Mar” activity, and the “Grupos Operativos” activity, and the *sala de linguas* (classroom for language learning) which facilitates the “Wide Open Minds” activity. Although the children IPOM caters to are not street children, the organization works with children between the ages of seven and seventeen and aims to reduce the vulnerability they face of becoming involved in criminal activity by providing for their primary needs, by “working in the third sector through socio-environmental education” (IPOM, 2013), and by creating a sustainable future for the communities in which they operate (IPOM, 2013).

As one approaches IPOM’s facility its blue, white, and yellow walls slowly emerge from the ground up. The large blue letters spelling “IPOM” protrude the skyline, making it nearly impossible for anyone to walk through Serviluz without noticing the building. Walking through IPOM’s radiating blue entrance door one is immediately aware of the many colors that embellish the facility’s walls. Upon descending the three steps that lead to IPOM’s courtyard one spots five colored benches that are pushed together to the left side of the courtyard. Just to the right of the benches stands a large blue and white wave. The wave is made out of “filo do vidro” or “glass sponges.” Behind the wave is a large white wall that is masked with multicolored stencils. The stencils take the shape of marine life such as fish, octopuses, stingrays, sea turtles, seaweed, seahorse, and sea sponges. These designs together with the wave are representative of the cultural relationships of identity that community residents possess with the sea. Strolling further into the building one notes the cumbersome, gray drinking fountain that is situated adjacent to the *sala de artes*. The *sala de artes* houses thirty white desks and three wide, rectangular tables. The classroom’s sea-green walls display an expansive whiteboard and three blue, white, and yellow posters which depict the mission statements of three of IPOM’s activities: “Maracatu Povo Do Mar” (see journal entry, April 30, 2013 at 10:40am, ISP Field Journal, p. 8), “Grupos Operativos” (see

journal entry, May 3, 2013 at 9:20am, ISP Field Journal, p. 13), and “Artes Visuais” (see journal entry, April 29, 2013 at 11:00am, ISP Field Journal, p.4). As one exits the *sala de artes*, the *sala de linguas* is in clear view. Entering the *sala de linguas* is like walking into the inside of a kaleidoscope: the walls are varnished with maps of Brazil and with colorful drawings of sea animals, of land animals, of the ocean, of surf boards, of flowers and trees, of the alphabet, and of the community. Furthermore, in accordance with the goals of “Wide Open Minds” to build communication, habits of academic study, relationships, friendships, awareness of social justice issues (drug use, alcoholism, domestic violence, and prostitution), community, and collaboration words of wisdom and morality adorn the classroom walls; the words “humility,” “patience,” “peace,” “love,” “gratitude,” “family,” “forgiveness,” and “friendship” are written in luminous bold colors above the whiteboard. As one retires from the *sala de linguas* and makes a left, the door to the *sala de informatica* is visible. To the right of the door the mission statement of the “Surfista Digital” activity hangs on the wall (see journal entry, April 29, 2013 at 10:30am, ISP Field Journal, p.3). The *sala de informatica* is enveloped by four bright white walls. While one of the walls displays a whiteboard another wall displays a large colorful painting of a surfer surfing under the sunset. There are twelve computers in the classroom all of which sit on hefty, grey desks. The desks are arranged in sets of two and are placed in two columns facing the front; one of the columns lines the far left side of the classroom and the other lines the far right. This arrangement leaves a spacious and far-reaching aisle down the middle of the room. Walking through IPOM one quickly notices that its well-equipped facility is truly a safe haven that provides local children with the social stimuli needed to keep them off the dangerous streets, and thus from trading their homes for street life.

This monograph begins by outlining the views previous research has taken on the accelerating presence of street children in Brazil and the measures of social support and resiliency most commonly used by academics. It then provides an overview of the methodology implemented to collect the present ethnographic data. It further explores the manifestations of social support present at IPOM. Special attention is given to how instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal social support mitigate the

negative effects of the psychologically and physically taxing events present in the lives of the children the institution caters to. The monograph will conclude with a delineation of steps for further research.

Literature Review

The overwhelming presence of children living on the streets is a phenomenon of growing concern in the poor cities of Latin America. It is estimated that over 36% of the population in these areas lives below the poverty line (Raffaelli, Koller, Cerqueira-Santos, & Aruajo De Moraes, 2007). As a result, Latin America is home to more than 40 million street children (Raffaelli et al., 2007). Specifically, in the country of Brazil skyrocketing degrees of poverty stem from “extreme income inequality [where] the poorest 20% receives just 2.65% of the nation’s total income” (Raffaelli et al., 2007, p. 566). Despite residing in the world’s eighth largest economy, Brazilian families with children under the age of 14 are forced to survive on less than half of the minimum wage per capita (Raffaellie et al., 2007). Consequently, 8 million of Brazil’s children are pushed to the margins of society to work in illicit businesses, such as drug-trafficking and prostitution (Neyra-Castaneda, Cuevas, Gill, Gurgel, & da Fonseca, 2004). Children who work on the streets later adopt the street as their homes and become known to society as street children (Fernandes & Vaughn, 2008).

The idea that street children are a heterogeneous population is poignant in the research literature. Fernandes et al. (2008) describe two main categories: “meninos de rua” (children of the street) and “meninos na rua” (children on the street). The former refers to children who left their homes for reasons due to hunger, neglect, and abuse; as a result, the street is their home. Such children must struggle for survival and often live in shelters, such as abandoned buildings. Although family ties may exist, they are often remote and lead to infrequent home visits. The latter, however, refers to children who despite working on the streets visit their families on a regular basis. Such children have been forced by extreme poverty to frequent the streets in aims of supplementing their families’ income. In contrast with children of the streets, children on the streets might attend school and spend afternoons in the streets but return home to sleep. In light of this categorization, researchers believe that if the 1990 Brazilian public policy, *Estatuto da Crianca e Adolscente* is to be faithful to its promise to protect “children’s rights to life”

(Neyra-Castaneda et al., 2004, p. 675), then it is the responsibility of those who encounter such daunting statistics to seek to improve the effective functioning of street children and their families. They further suppose that to ensure that the best social practices become the norm rather than the exception it is imperative to scrutinize the plethora of contextual factors influencing the epidemic of street children. In light of this frame of thought Siqueira, Spath, Dell'Aglio, and Koller (2011) state that such children are at risk for removal from their family, poverty, mental and physical illness, maltreatment, and abandonment. Fernandes et al. 2008 further state that such children are at a heightened risk for substance misuse, specifically inhalant abuse; “the use of inhalants may be a form of self-medication used by street children to overcome hunger, fear, and abandonment” (Fernandes et al., 2008). Although it is essential to identify the origins and consequences of becoming a street child, it is equally as critical to identify factors within the environment that protect a child from navigating the streets. Such knowledge might better enable service providers to construct responses that reinforce and affirm those positive environmental aspects, such as social support relationships.

Kessler, Price, and Wortman (1985) define social support as the means by which interpersonal relationships shelter individuals from the deleterious effects of stress and inopportune life circumstances. Heany and Israel (2008) identify four specific types of social support: emotional support, instrumental support, informational support, and appraisal support. Emotional support refers to assistance provided in the form of verbal and non-verbal affection, care, trust, and empathy. Instrumental support refers to the provision of tangible goods and services. Informational support refers to the provision of advice and guidance. Appraisal support refers to information provided for self-appraisal. Rooted in these four categories, research affirms that social support promotes and protects one’s psychological well-being. Previous research further suggests that what is most effective in the overall adjustment to distressful events is the perception that support and care is immediately available; “it is the perception that others will provide resources when they are needed that is the key to stress-buffering” (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, p. 7). Thus, research measuring the impact of social support networks on the adjustment of children is rather vast.

Many of the research studies on social support networks examine the adjustment of victims of maltreatment and community unrest. For example, Berman, Kurtines, Silverman, and Serafini (1996) found greater adjustment to violence among inner-city youth who had ties of social support made available to them. Similarly, Flores, Cicchetti, and Rogosch (2005) found that adaptive functioning in abused and neglected Latino children was mediated by strong social relationships. Among child victims of multiple stressful events in South Africa, social support was determined to be inversely related to acute anxiety and depression (Cluver, Fincham, & Seedat, 2009). Furthermore, social support has been suggested as a mitigator of the negative effects of the psychologically and physically taxing events present in the lives of street children. A study conducted by Tyler, Tyler, Echeverry, and Zea (1991) in Bogota, Columbia reports that levels of social support predict the psychological attributes of street children. Furthermore, a study done by Westhoff, Coulter, McDermott, and Holcomb (1995) in the Dominican Republic shows that more than 90% of the street children interviewed reported having strong social support networks at their disposition. In light of the said relationship between social support networks and adjustment, resilience as a byproduct of adjustment must be carefully considered.

Resilience is defined as the belief in one's personal competence and the acceptance of one-self that leads to individual adjustment (Rew, Taylor-Seehafer, Thomas, & Yockey, 2001). It is a "set of personal qualities such a self-efficacy, engagement of the support of others, having an action-oriented approach, and adaptability, that allows one to thrive in the face of adversity" (Cleverley & Kidd, 2011, p. 1049). Research has shown that qualities associated with resilience further included a strong self-esteem, confidence in one's own self-efficacy, personal initiative, faith, morality, trust, attachment, and a sense of identity (*The International Child and Youth Care Network*, 2013). It is a legitimate concern that social support networks are directly tied to the development of resiliency. For example, positive self-esteem develops from "an acceptance by individuals whose relationships one values," (*The International Child and Youth Care Network*, 2013) and trust and attachment develop from a sense of reliability on and security with specific individuals (*The International Child and Youth Care Network*, 2013). Thus, the overall commonality between networks of social support and resilience is that they corroborate the

importance of relationships in the prediction of an individual's adjustment. That said, Heaney et al. (2008) maintain that social support exerts its buffering effect by influencing individual coping resources and by raising awareness to community resources. Despite these research findings, however, "current programs of Brazil's federal government have been attempting to target [solely] the socio-contextual problems of street children, such as hunger, poverty, and children's labor and school attendance (Fernandes et al., 2008, p. 677). Examples of such programs are *Fome Zero* and *Toda Crianca na Escola*. Although these programs endorse local initiatives such as "Law no. 3411/2002 [which] emphasizes the need to assist street children in Brazil" (Fernandes et al., 2008, p. 677), they are characterized by both a significant lack of prevention strategies and a failure to address the role social support systems play in the resiliency of such children (Canoletti & Soares, 2005). Although a substantial problem, targeting only hunger and poverty will not address the need to understand the situation of street children or children in "out-of-home-care" (Siqueira et al., 2011) from their own perspective. I believe this can only be done through multifaceted approaches that provide family support and educational/social activities. Therefore, programs like IPOM which include a multidisciplinary team of teachers that provided the said services can shed light on how relationships of social support help such children to give meaning to their everyday lives.

Methodology

I focused my research study on a sample size of eleven individuals. Among these eleven staff members were six teachers, two life-time residents, and three administrative members. I executed semi-structured interviews with four of the teachers and the two life-time residents. I distributed questionnaires to nine of the participants and executed standardized observations in the classroom of two teachers. I also engaged in daily, unstructured observations. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to put forth a range of questions, which in accordance with the idea of participants being actors of their own right, also allowed me and the interviewee to delve deeper into the initial response when it was desired. Among the questions (see field journal, Appendix D, ISP Field Journal, p.96) I asked were: (1) "what is your view of Brazil's growing group of street children," (2) "although the children IPOM works with are not street

children, how does the institution address the following issues: poverty, mental and physical illness, maltreatment, and abandonment,” (3) “how do you define social support,” (4) “what are the verbal and non-verbal symbols of love and care present at IPOM,” and (5) how do you work to foster a positive self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence within the children.” Complementing my use of interviews was the use of a questionnaire.

Throughout the research literature the measure most used to assess social support among children is the *Social Support Scale for Children* (Harter, 1985). The scale assesses a child’s perceived social support from caregivers, educators, friends, and classmates. However, given the fact that this scale has been used primarily with Caucasian samples researchers are skeptical to use the scale with racially diverse samples (Taylor, Casten, & Flickinger, 1993). Thus, instead of using this scale I implemented the use of *The Social Support Questionnaire for Children* developed by Gordon (2011). As a “culturally sensitive measure of social support for children” (Gordon, 2011, p. 25), the scale is a 50-item self-report measure (see field journal, Appendix C, ISP Field Journal, p. 94-95) that assesses social support networks in five different areas: support from parents, support from relatives, support from non-relative adults, support from siblings, and support from peers. Although the scale is designated for use with children, I used its general framework to create an adaptation suitable for caregivers to answer (see field journal, Appendix B, ISP Field Journal, p.91-93). For example, instead of a question reading “I have a peer who cares about me and makes me feel wanted,” it read “the children have a peer who cares about them and makes them feel wanted.” Although I did not include the data collected from the questionnaire in this monograph, for reasons later explained, it brought to the surface steps and themes that should be scrutinized in future research. Along with making use of a questionnaire I also engaged in structured observations.

It is well acknowledged in the academic literature that when studying society’s marginalized and stigmatized groups, researchers must alter their data collection techniques to the sensitivity and vulnerability of the research subjects (Punch, 2002). In response to these concerns I undertook the role of a participant observer rather than an observer. While the former emphasizes “learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting”

(Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 91), the latter emphasizes a detachment from the subjects of study (Schensul et al., 1999). Thus, I participated in several of IPOM's classes such as Maracatu, ceramics, drawing, and English learning. I also made use of a field journal through the course of my study. Journaling my daily observations created a permanent record of my experiences, thus allowing me to carryout data analysis and critical reflections across a period of three weeks. This technique also enabled me to offer participants a copy of the summary of my reports. I also conducted standardized classroom-based observations. I used the *Caregiver Interaction Scale* (Bryant, 2010) (see journal, Appendix E, ISP Field Journal, p. 97) and The *Caregiver-Child Social/Emotional and Relationship Rating Scale* (Fish, Groark, & McCall, 2010) (see journal, Appendix F, ISP Field Journal, p. 98-100). While the former assessed the "emotional tone, discipline style, and responsiveness of [IPOM] teachers" (Bryant, 2010, p. 4) the latter assessed caregiver engagement, caregiver/child-directed behaviors, behavioral control, caregiver affect, child engagement, child affect, and quality of the child relationship with the caregiver (Fish et al., 2010).

Although the study did not included child participants, ethical concerns around informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and data usage were relevant. Participants have the right to be informed both about the aims of and their involvement in the research, to decide about their participation, and to withdraw from research at any time without consequence (Schenk & Williamson, 2005). Therefore, it was my ethical responsibility to continually inquire about and act on the ethical parameters of my research. While conducting this study I gave utmost consideration to ethical questions grounded on the concept of causal responsibility for humanity (Andreotti, 2006). Questions such as "why am I doing this study?", "what is my relationship to the participants?", "who benefits from this research?", and "who may be at risk?" were entertained. In light of the said need for an appropriate ethical framework, there were specific steps I took to ensure that the above concerns were addressed. For example, in seeking to safeguard the interests of those involved in the research process, I informed participants about the focus of the research study and how data was to be disseminated and stored. Furthermore, in aiming to keep all data confidential I removed personal identifiers (when the participant asked not to be identified) and

provided feedback on the research process to anyone who asked for such information. In addition to allocating attention to the ethical issues around child-centered research, I constantly inquired about those ethical concerns that could have arisen because of my choice of research methods.

Despite the richness of the information interviews can bestow they may be the cause of confusion. That is, an interviewee's possible lack of understanding of the question or of the interviewer's possible lack of understanding of the response, may lead to ill communication. In light of these ethical concerns, I emphasized to participants their right to avoid answering questions that made them feel uncomfortable and I debriefed each interviewee immediately after each interview session. That said, questionnaires also have their pitfalls. Whether it is in the form of invasion of privacy, the amount time taken to complete a questionnaire, or the degree of threat presented by the questions, a questionnaire may be an intrusion into the life of a participant. Thus, I continually reflected on the following questions: "how clearly are the questions worded?", "will the questionnaire be understandable by all participants?", "are any of the questions confusing or ambiguous?", "is the translation of the questions from English to Portuguese clear and cogent?", "are all of the questions absolutely necessary?", and "how long do I expect the participants to spend completing the questionnaire?" Like was the case when conducting interviews, I made participants aware of their liberty to both turn in a blank questionnaire and to avoid answering questions they wished not to address. Paralleling the concerns around the usage of interviews and questionnaires is the issue of observer bias. Observational research may lead to observer bias. Such a bias might have led me to see what I wanted to see, what I expected to see, or what I thought I saw (Delgado-Rodriguez & Llorca, 2004). Unfortunately, having read over a period of weeks about the deficit and narrow lens through which street and impoverished children are seen, I entered my research experience with the expectation that the children at IPOM were going to be psychologically maladjusted, illiterate, and in great emotional suffering. Thus, in order to address this serious problem I distanced myself from "the possibility of speaking for others" (Sharp, 2009, p. 110) by engaging in ethnographic research from the perspective of moral obligation (Andreotti, 2006). That is, through the acts of active listening and attentive observation I was able to both engage in care-centered thought (Raghuram, Madge,

& Noxolo, 2009) and to think ethically about my role as an observer and about my relationships between myself, the participants, and the children.

Unpacking the Complexities of “Street Life”

If a thorough analysis of the social support efforts present at IPOM is to be presently divulged, then a scrutiny of the community’s collective beliefs about the driving factors that push children to the streets and about what such a reality might represent for a child must first be provided. Although some of their perspectives converge with those of previous research and academics well-versed in the matter, this monograph is one that was created with the collaborative help of research participants, and thus their views are taken seriously and into consideration. That said, interviews conducted with Nabir de Jesus Santos (professor of the “Surfista Digital” activity), Brayner Feijo (professor of the “Maracatu Povo Do Mar” activity), Thiago Feijo Ponte (professor of the “Artes Visuais” activity), and Jonathan Feijo Ponte (Educational Psychologist and professor of the “Grupos Operativos” activity) provide the following reasons as propulsive forces in the high incidence of street children in Brazil:

“I think that the principle factor that pushes a child to a life on the streets is an unstructured family, a broken family nucleus. If a child has a well-structured family then he or she does not have any incentive to leave his or her home. Now, I think that this is the most influencing factor, but every case is different. However, I do believe that this is a common denominator found in all cases of street children” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 71).

“The primary motivator is an unstructured family. Another factor is the lack of a good school. By a good school, I am referring to a school that is concerned with the holistic well-being of a child. A school that cares for the emotional development and stability of a child and his family. If a child misses school for an entire week, the school will not call home or make an effort to understand the child’s absence. However, I believe that the strongest factor is a poor economic state. A lot of the time children are asked and expected to contribute to the economic well-being of their families...many times they live on the streets because they want to escape and abusive and violent household” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 63).

“I believe that this is due to the lack of care and instruction on behalf of the parents because they let the child leave the house without having any kind of worry or concern about the whereabouts of their child. Some parents allow their children too much liberty to go out because they do not have another option. That is to say, they need to work in order to provide for their family and so they cannot take care of their children and they do not have someone they can count on to take care of them. As a result, you see children living in the streets” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 58).

“The principle cause and leading factor is an unorganized, unstructured, and broken familial atmosphere. The majority of street children have families that do not have a paternal figure. Most families do not have a father inside the household. Why is this a problem? Here in Brazil the job of a man is to economically sustain his household; to bring financial support to his wife and children. When a father is not present in the

home the children must stay with and be looked-after by their mother. What is the problem with this situation? The mother needs to work and to take care of the child. It is impossible to do both of these things. Another factor that pushes children to the streets is financial instability. Such instability obligates children to beg on the streets for money” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.66).

It is thus explicit that IPOM personnel understand three overarching concepts as the influencing agents in the rapid increase of children on the streets in Brazil: an unstructured family, an impoverished economic state, and the lack of a “good” school. While an unstructured family is characterized as one absent a parent’s love, care, and attention, an unstable economic state is characterized by the need of a household to send its children to the streets in search of income and daily meals. The absence of a “good” school is characterized as the lack of community schools that express a sincere interest in the physical, emotional, academic, and familial well-being of the child. It refers to a lack of local institutions that show an interest in what would seem to be nonchalant aspects of a child’s life: “did the child eat a meal today?”, “why did the child not attend school today?”, “why is there a sudden change in the behavior of a child?”, “is the child struggling with an abusive or violent household?”, and “is the child’s peer group one that will increase his vulnerability of becoming involved in illicit activities?” In view of these identified causes, it is imperative to address what a life on the streets may symbolize for a child.

Among those participants interviewed there exists an overwhelming consensus concerning the significance of street life. Life on the streets may represent “a condition of involuntary liberty” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 63). That is, it symbolizes an environment in which children possess the freedom to make decision about their daily activities without imposed parental parameters: “although the children may be aware of the dangerous that may arise as a result of living on the streets, they prefer to run to the streets where they will not be ‘controlled’ and where they will be far away from familial abuse and violence” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 63). Life on the streets may also represent “a family structure and a sense of group identity” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 58). That is, it may symbolize belonging to and inclusion in a group. Such a sense of identity however may not always be a positive one: “daily contact with a group can turn into a gang affiliation. Here the children may get

involved in drug trafficking one afternoon and that becomes their life” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 58). Street life may also represent “a continual existence” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.66) sustained by monetary income: “for a child that does not go home to a structured household, that is, he does not have a set time to go to school, to complete homework, to eat dinner, and to go to sleep, the streets will signify survival” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.67). On that note, it is imperative to inquire if the presence of street children in the Serviluz community is a prevalent one.

Once on sight I realized that I had began my research process with erred preconceptions and expectations. That is, having read in-depth about the confined view research literature assumes toward impoverished children, I began my observation process with ideas about the social and developmental aspects of their suffering at the forefront of my thoughts. I concentrated on the types of threats to development street children experience, to the types of abuse they experience, and to the different types of risks linked to psychological maladjustment. Thus, I resolved that a rather vast portion of the local children in Serviluz were going to be street children. Contemplating on such a perspective though, prevented me from seeing the reality of the children at IPOM. Although it is true that these children live in an economically depleted community where violence and the trafficking of drugs are prevalent, these aspects of their reality do not translate to an absent parent or to the lack of a household. Interviews with IPOM staff allowed me to understand that (1) the streets of Serviluz are not homes to children, (2) local children who frequent the streets are “*meninos na rua*” (children on the street) and not “*meninos de rua*” (children of the street), and (3) the children who IPOM caters to are not street children:

“I must say that the children here at IPOM are not street children. Most, if not all of the children IPOM works with have parents to whom they go home to everyday. Now, we do see some of the children who attend IPOM on the streets here in the community, but this does not mean they are ‘street children.’ They are in the streets because they have assigned the streets as a meeting place at which they can play and talk with their friends” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 63).

“There are children who spend their day on the community’s streets but they are not ‘street children.’ Although they might frequent the streets as an escape from a violent and abusive household, they do not live on the streets. They have houses and families to go home to everyday. These children are ‘*meninos na rua*’ (children on the street) and not ‘*meninos de rua*’ (children of the street)” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.66).

“Serviluz is not home to very many street children. The streets of our community are not the homes to children. Although the children in our barrio are most definitely impoverished, there are no children whose home is the streets. Although the children spend some time on the streets, playing and conversing with their friends, they have a house and family to go home to every night. They may not be going home to a stable or loving family, but the point is that they are going home. The fact that they go home at night differentiates them from street children” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 71).

It is imperative to underscore that although the children attending IPOM are not street children, they are still at risk for suffering developmental and social constraints to the healthy evolution of their well-being. They are at risk for interfamilial unrest, for removal from their home, and for mistreatment. For example, “perhaps their parents consume drugs inside the household or perhaps their parents are separated” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 76). It may be the case that the children are exposed to unstable household dynamics: “some children do not have a mother or a father figure, others have parents who use and sell drugs, others have family members who have committed suicide, and others have parents who live with HIV” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.67). Furthermore, despite its significant amount of inhabitants the community of Serviluz “turns into a small barrio because many residents are turned into the police for maltreating and abusing their children” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 77). Even though children in the community do not face abandonment (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 72) they are prone to verbalizing the following sentiments: “my parents fought” or “my mom yelled at me yesterday” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 77). Although these comments do not necessarily signal domestic violence, IPOM staff “makes sure to pay very close attention [when such comments are made]. [They] want to make sure that the child is not being mistreated or abused at home” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 77): “there was a case of a child whose mom was not abusing her but she wanted to make her a slave to domestic work. She wanted her eight year old daughter to run the household for her and to take care of her two other children” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 77). As a result of these mercurial familial dynamics the children are prone to psychological distress: “at IPOM there was a

case in which a child was suffering from severe depression” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 77) there was also “a recent case of a child who attempted suicide” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.68). Environments containing factors that may push children to the streets however are not only present inside the household. They exist outside as well. Children that attend IPOM have contact with street children: “they do talk to children who enter the community who do not go to school, who do not attend IPOM, and who spend days and nights on the streets” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 63). When such contact is forged the children of Serviluz “are [then more] vulnerable to [becoming] involved in drug trafficking, prostitution, and crime” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.67). Seeing that the children despite not being street children are liable to risk-elevating situations, it is essential to underline the manner in which “social support” is defined by the IPOM personnel. Such an understanding will allow for an in-depth analysis of the organization’s efforts to reduce a child’s vulnerability to becoming involved in illicit activities.

Contextualizing the Meaning of Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar

IPOM identifies social support as the fluid and genuine communication between an adult and a child that signifies to the child that “[he is] important and that [his life has] a purpose” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 64). At IPOM social support aims to (1) create a collective identity for the children and to (2) demonstrate a “sincere concern for the emotional and social well-being of a child” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 64). For example, social support efforts “[provide] the children of the community with a space in which they can meet other children from the barrio. It gives them an environment in which they can socialize with people of their same age, socio-economic background, and life experiences” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 72). The children at IPOM are very well aware that the facility is in the community for them: “they know that IPOM’s walls house...the ‘Povo Do Mar’ (people of the sea). And who is this ‘Povo Do Mar?’ they are. This unifying identity minimizes their vulnerability of becoming street children” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field

Journal, p. 64). By reducing the amount of time a child spends on the streets the organization views social support as a mitigator of the negative effects of the psychologically and physically taxing events present in the lives of the children it caters to: “every child who attends IPOM leaves IPOM to go straight to school or to another activity. IPOM saturates a child’s time” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 72). Furthermore, IPOM emphasizes a relationship between social support and an impoverished child’s ability to build resilience against the many stressful events that accompany his reality:

“This social support that IPOM provides allows the children to create resistance against becoming involved in criminal behavior, such as prostitution, murder, and drug trafficking” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 59).

“A child who grows up in an environment where social support is provided will be resilient. If a child grew up in a place where love and care were shown for him, then he will remember those values and make use of those values when in hardships” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 64).

“One of the many benefits of social support is that it builds a barrier between a child and the possibility of becoming involved in drug trafficking and prostitution. Although there are many factors that may influence a child to become involved in the world of drugs, I think that the primary reason is a lack of feeling included in a group; not feeling like you belong may encourage you to participate in any activities that make you feel important, even if those activities are negative. I think that IPOM helps to fortify the personality of the children by making them feel part of a group. I honestly believe that catering such a feeling of inclusion to the children protects them from wandering into the streets in search of acceptance and recognition” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 72).

In light of the foreseen link between social support and resiliency it must be highlighted that IPOM’s efforts are preventative. That is, the organization is group-oriented rather than individually-oriented, most of its work is with children not yet living on the streets, and it is fixed on a knowledge-base that shows its efforts are effective in preventing a child from becoming involved in criminal activity and in stimulating his healthy social and psychological development. According to Cowen (1982) these are the characteristics of a “primary prevention” program. All activities offered at IPOM, from “Maracatu Povo Do Mar” to “Surfista Digital” and “Grupos Operativos” are facilitated with groups of children and not on an individual basis: “although I would like to work with each child individually, there is not enough time in the day to do so. Individual sessions with a child will take-up to an hour. Clearly, I cannot spend an hour with fifty children in one day. It is impossible. So, this session on group dynamics that I facilitate on Fridays and the other activities offered at IPOM allow me and the other professors to be in a

large group with all of the children in one sitting” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.70). As previously stated, IPOM does not work with street children directly: “what [IPOM does] is provide [local] children with activities in aims of diminishing the time they spend on the streets” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 72) and it “instructs them in such manner that is distant from the world of drugs and prostitution” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 59). Additionally, although IPOM does not have a standardized and quantitative measure to assess the effectiveness of the program, it does implement a qualitative method for evaluating a child’s progress: “IPOM staff observes closely a child’s behavior...we speak about a child’s behavior toward his peers and professors, about a child’s participation levels in the classroom, and about a child’s attendance record” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.70). Over the years IPOM staff has observed that the “children fight less, are more relaxed, are able to concentrate in activities for more than twenty seconds, are less verbally aggressive, and are more interested in learning. When IPOM first opened the children were out-of-control and very aggressive with their peers” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 61). According to one of the life-long residents of Serviluz, “the children [at IPOM] are very well received. They either attend school in the morning and then they attend IPOM or they attend IPOM in the morning and then they attend school. Thank God this program has helped to reduce the number of children that roam the streets” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 75). IPOM provides the children with a familial atmosphere in which they are truly cared for, loved, and listened to. As Thiago mentioned (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 59), IPOM provides the children with more attention and love than they would find on the streets, thus preventing them from searching the streets for a group of friends or individuals who will accept them. The above perspectives on the function and purpose of social support are made manifest in specific manners. That is, social support at IPOM can be categorized into the four different types of social support outlined by Heany et al. (2008): instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal social support.

Expressions of Instrumental Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar

Instrumental support as previously explained, refers to the provision of tangible goods and services (Heany et al., 2008). This type of support is prevalent and very much embedded into the pedagogy of social support at IPOM. For one, all of the classes offered by the organization are properly stocked with materials that the children can use at will. For example, when engaging in the activity “Maracatu Povo Do Mar” the children are provided with drums and drum sticks, and when engaging in the activity “Artes Visuais” they are provided with clay, sculpting instruments, markers, colors, and drawing paper (see journal entries under the title “Week One,” April 29- May 3, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 3-16). Similarly, in the “Wide Open Minds” classroom the children are provided with workbooks, writing utensils, and story books; in the “Surfista Digital” classroom they are provided with computers. Not only are these materials placed at the dispositional use of a child but they are also gratuitous: “the Maracatu drums that the children play are made specifically for their use. The children can come to IPOM and use those drums when they please...the drums and their use is completely free. In fact, every activity here at IPOM is free” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 65). Furthermore, two times during the day IPOM offers a snack to the children. These snacks which are prepared by Marcia range from a warm bowl of bean soup to a refreshing cup of juice and a sweet cookie (see journal entry, May 9, 2013 at 10:15am, ISP Field Journal, p.25). Instrumental support however is not only offered to the children, it is extended to their families as well. On occasions throughout the year IPOM hosts sporting events at which food is provided for the children and their caregivers (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 73). Furthermore, the physical building of IPOM is a form of instrumental support within itself. It provides community caregivers with a space to drop-off their children while they work during the day: “mothers and fathers now go to work knowing that their children are safe at IPOM. The parents of these children can go to work calmly and without needing to worry about where their children are; they can be certain that they are involved in positive activities and under the supervision of people who care for them sincerely” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 75). It must be stressed however, that

because IPOM is a non-governmental organization the funding it receives limits the amount of material it can purchase to furnish its facility: “it is difficult to maintain a program like IPOM which supplies everything for the children for free...we run out of materials very quickly” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.69). Nevertheless, viewed from a macroscopic perspective the mere presence and existence of IPOM can be labeled as one of instrumental support. More than just a place where the children can enjoy “a snack in the middle of the day, a place where they [can] learn English, and a place where they [can] learn to use a computer” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 75), IPOM acts like a daycare and tutoring center for the children of Serviluz: “children can come to IPOM to do their homework and we will help them to complete it and answer any questions they may have” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 59). Though instrumental support helps to meet to an extent the physical needs of a child such as the need for food, IPOM staff believes that “material objects can help attract a child to IPOM [but they are] not the most important thing. These objects are not what will keep these children off the streets and away from drugs... it is the other types of support, like guidance that will keep these children from becoming street children” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 60). Given this frame of thought it is thus crucial to examine the manifestations of another type of social support offered at IPOM, that of informational social support.

Expressions of Informational Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar

As formerly stated, informational support refers to the provision of advice and guidance (Heany et al., 2008). IPOM personnel demonstrates this type of social support through both their offering of advice to the children on how to face problems in productive manners and through their willingness to console a child if need be. In his interview Jonathan divulged that in aims of minimizing the impact of a divided and unstructured household, he carries out annual family visits in which he assures that the children are not being mistreated (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.68). Furthermore, IPOM staff executes the responsibility to assure that a child is receiving the attention he is need of: “we encourage the children to share with us stories about their home life. We build a

relationship of trust and compassion with them. Such a relationship enables them to feel comfortable and safe when speaking to us about their personal and familial struggles” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 77). For example, in the previously discussed case of the child whose mother was forcing her to take on the role of a domestic servant, Marcia explains: “I spoke with the child’s mother. Thank God that after our talk [she] changed her attitude toward her child. Now, on occasion I ask the child how her mother’s behavior is toward her and thank God she always says that her mother is now a different woman than she was before I spoke to her” (M. Dias de Souza, personal communication, May 15, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 77). Moreover, an expert from Thiago’s and Nabir’s interview exemplifies the efforts of IPOM staff to advise the children:

“The children here at IPOM most certainly lack guidance and orientation. For the most part their parents do not guide them or give them advice. For example, the girls from a very young age begin to have boyfriends and become involved in serious relationships. When we see this occurring we offer them advice. We do not want them to get pregnant at such an early age...we immediately inform parents if their children have boyfriends or girlfriends. Also, if we see someone who is in a relationship we try to help him understand the beauty of being a child. Through play and conversation we explain to them that they do not need to rush to get boyfriends or girlfriends. We teach them to enjoy their childhood” (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 60).

“Last week there was a case of a child who arrived at IPOM with a very sad look on her face. I approached her and knowing that she has difficulty communicating with her mother at home, I told her that sometimes situations in life are difficult but that things change and they never stay the same. I tried to encourage her” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 73).

In addition, the songs and poems Brayner introduces to the children during his “Maracatu Povo Do Mar” activity can be considered as forms of informational support. By contextualizing the reality of the children’s lives and that of their community’s these works of art speak about the role of a responsible citizen, about the role of a responsible student, and about the role of a responsible son and daughter (see journal entry, May 9, 2013 at 10:30am, ISP Field Journal, p.25): “I have recently introduced poetry into my classes. I believe and hope that this becomes an indirect way through which I can provide advice and guidance to these children. I believe that these poems which speak about how to foster self-esteem and confidence in oneself, will provide for me the opportunity to offer advice to the children I work with” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 65). The organization’s preparedness to console and comfort a child can be further seen in its inclusion of an educational psychologist on sight.

Given his background in child psychoanalysis and therapy, Jonathan instructs the staff on how to best approach a child in a given situation (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 61). However, Jonathan is not the only staff member equipped to provide guidance for a child.

Thiago's background in art therapy and child pedagogy "allows [him] to better understand and respond to the attitudes and behaviors of the children" (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 60) and Brayner's awareness to the everyday reality of these children enables him to "comfort [the children] and to console them in ways that they will appreciate and understand" (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 65). Informational support at IPOM is also seen through the staff's in-class behaviors toward the children. In his "Maracatu Povo Do Mar" Brayner does not simply highlight when a child has missed a drumbeat; he (1) explains the reason for their mistake (2) explains the steps to correct the mistake and then proceeds to (3) provide them with words of encouragement (see journal entry, April 30, 2013 at 10:40am, ISP Field Journal, p.8). Similarly, in his "Grupos Operativos" classroom Jonathan frequently introduces group activities that will encourage the children to exhibit pro-social behavior such as respect, trust, care, empathy, and active listening (see journal entry, May 3, 2013 at 9:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.13). Social support in the form of informational support is rather prevalent within the relational networking of IPOM. However, as Jonathan stated it is not "merely [enough to] offer words of consolation and guidance and believe that [one's work] with the children is done... what is most important to a child is [one's] willingness to listen [and] to receive them for who they are" (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.70). It is therefore necessary to underscore the practice of another type of social support present at IPOM, that of emotional social support.

Expressions of Emotional Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar

As noted by Heany et al. (2008) emotional support is expressed as the assistance provided in the form of verbal and non-verbal affection, care, trust, and empathy. Such social support was made evident at IPOM through the structured in-class observations conducted in the classrooms of Andrea and Jonathan. The teaching styles and practices of these two teachers are rather similar and often overlap.

That is, their interactions with the children are hallmarked by an impeccable ability to articulate a sentiment of undivided attention, comprehension, and consideration: they both listen attentively when the children speak to them, they speak warmly to the children and at a level that they can understand, they establish concrete eye-contact when conversing with the children, and they are enthusiastic about the children's efforts and performance (see journal section entitled "Structured Observation/Questionnaire Data," ISP Field Journal, p. 45-57). The staff as a whole is also responsive to the children's desire (see journal section entitled "Reflections/Emerging Themes" under "Week Three," ISP Field Journal, p. 84-85) to be surrounded by individuals that allow them to safely share their feelings and thoughts, that are willing to be patient when they are not ready to speak, and that are prepared to provide a sign of affirmation or understanding like a hug, a smile, or a gentle touch. For example, if a child is perceived to be sad or low-spirited IPOM personnel "[approach him] and [give him] a hug or try to get [him] to smile" (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 60). Furthermore, the teachers seek to develop a relationship of trust and love with the children by "giving them a hug and kiss on the head, a smile, and a helping hand, [and] by showing them that [they] care for all of them in [an equal] manner" (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 66). Such a relationship is further sought by the creation of a "safe space." The organization makes much use of what in Portuguese is known as "a roda" or "a circle." This idea of sitting or standing in "a roda" allows individuals to see one another as peers that share a common purpose, a common commitment to creativity, and a common center. In "a roda" the focus is the experimentation of dialogue and the exploration of learning with each other. Engaging in "a roda" allows the children at IPOM to be grounded in a common experience and thus, facilitates a "safe space" in which they feel heard, acknowledged, and valued. Most importantly, by creating the expectation that both the facilitators and the children are participants, a roda blurs the authoritative line between instructor and child, thus allowing the "the child-adult relationship [to] become more intimate and loving" (T. Feijo, personal communication, May 6, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 59). The use of "a roda" can be seen in the multiple activities undertaken at IPOM: the table in Andrea's English classroom is a round one situated in the center of the room, in the "Maracatu Povo Do Mar"

activity the children stand in a circle and learn to play as a unified whole, and when Jonathan facilitates an activity he rearranges the chairs in his classroom to resemble a horseshoe (see journal entries under the title “Week One,” April 29- May 3, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 3-16). Such non-verbal attention to the inclusion and participation of all children “transmit[s] to [them] confidence and love” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.69). On that note, complementing emotional social support is that of appraisal social support.

Expressions of Appraisal Social Support at Instituto Povo Do Mar

The last type of support articulated by Heany et al. (2008) and exercised by IPOM is appraisal support. Defined as information provided for self-appraisal this kind of support is full-heartedly endorsed by IPOM staff. However, its application is executed with great caution. Given that the largest obstacle children at IPOM face is low-self esteem (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 74), teachers provide the children with tasks and activities that they assuredly know the children can carry out on their own: “I foster confidence within in a child through play and enjoyable activities. I provide them with activities and tasks that I know that they will be able to complete. When they complete the activity on their own, it becomes visible that the child has gained a new perspective on his abilities” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.70). It must be denoted that most of the children who attend IPOM are constantly surrounded by individuals who “only point out the things they do wrong or the things they are failing to do” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.70). It is for this reason that IPOM focuses a child’s attention on the “positive qualities [of his] personality and [of his] abilities” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.70). Thus, a child’s self-esteem and self-efficacy is cultivated by the use of affirmations that validate and make him feel capable:

“I attempt to foster self-esteem by saying *good job* or *congratulations* when I see that they have completed a task well” (N. de Jesus Santos, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 74).

“I like to give-out a lot of genuine compliments to the children. If I see that a child has performed well in an activity, I will affirm him by saying *good job* or *I knew you could do it*” (B. Feijo, personal communication, May 7, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p. 65).

“[A teacher] might say the following to a child: *you have done a wonderful job, your behavior is improving, or you are a unique and intelligent child*” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.69).

Nonetheless, this type of support does not translate into a continuous outpouring of compliments on behalf of the IPOM staff toward the children. As stated by Jonathan, “boosting self-esteem does not just involve complementing the person all of the time. It also involves making the person aware of his errors and how he can correct those errors” (J. Feijo, personal communication, May 10, 2013, ISP Field Journal, p.70). Therefore, appraisal social support at IPOM is accompanied by another facet: constructive criticism. Through open dialogues and careful observations, IPOM staff provides the children with alternative approaches to a task that might make accomplishing the activity easier or make the finished product of better quality. For example, during my second week at IPOM I watched as a child approached Thiago with his finished design and asked him if it was of good quality. Although Thiago made positive comments on the child’s drawing he also mentioned that it “could have been colored more neatly” and that “the figures could have been shaded-in more darkly” (see journal entry, May 8, 2013 at 10:20am, ISP Field Journal, p.22). Likewise, during the first week on the field I observed as Andrea taught a lesson on the how to describe the weather in English: she was teaching the children how to say “it is snowing,” “it is raining,” “it is sunny,” “it is cold,” and it is “windy.” While she supervised the worksheets the children were filling-out on the subject, a child asked her the meaning of the word “windy.” Andrea, instead of directly telling him the meaning stood off to the side of the classroom, raised her arms and began to violently swing them from side to side and to blow into open space as to communicate the definition of the word. In the midst of laughter and excitement she encouraged the child to guess the meaning of “windy;” eventually, the child understood the significance of the word. Although this event may not seem as one representative of appraisal support, it most definitely is. By avoiding to provide a direct answer to the child’s question and by encouraging him to deduct the answer on his own from her playful gestures, Andrea fostered a sense of self-efficacy and confidence within the child (see journal entry, April 30, 2013 at 9:00am, ISP Field Journal, p.6). Thus, appraisal support at IPOM involves both providing affirming compliments when appropriate and raising awareness to possible areas in which the children can improve.

Social Relevance - Conclusion

Academic literature focusing on Brazilian street children demonstrates a primary concern for the violations of the rights of these children, for the various types of violence and abuse these children fall victim to, and for the governmental policies that have been implemented to protect them. Although the significance of prior research is recognized it is necessary to contemplate an alternative interpretation of street life; the possibility exists that street children construct and perceive their reality through conceptual structures that cannot be understood from a lens of violence and hopelessness. Life on the streets may very well symbolize despair, hunger, and violence, but it may also symbolize freedom and an escape from an abusive household. The streets may also symbolize protection, a sense of identity and belonging, and a sense of group solidarity. However, this does not translate into a conclusion that the situation of street life is either acceptable or manageable. Even if children are able to develop the mentioned competencies that help them to survive on the streets, it is the ethical responsibility of those aware of such a reality to uncover what can be done to not force children to develop such competencies on the streets. Thus, more humane and wholesome avenues must be scrutinized. Furthermore, if social support networks or “sets of systems and significant people who compose the ties of perceived and received relations of an individual” (Siqueira et al., 2011, p. 112) can foster a positive well-being (Siqueira et al., 2011), then consideration must be given to the relationships impoverished children forge and how such social networks can help them to build resilience against exchanging their home life for street life. It is for this reason that I worked alongside IPOM. As a non-government organization IPOM offers a range of daily activities such as art, music, language learning and computer classes, as well as collaborative work sessions led by an educational psychologist. Catered to children who would otherwise be on the streets these activities help to reduce the vulnerability community children possess of becoming involved in drug-trafficking, prostitution and gun-violence. IPOM’s powerful and impactful networks of social support most definitely influence an impoverished child’s personal competence and acceptance for one self, two overarching concepts that characterize resiliency.

Future Research

Although the present research fosters an insight into the daily life contexts and interpersonal relationships at IPOM that provide impoverished children with “happiness, life satisfaction, hope and optimism,” (Siqueira et al., 2011, p. 112), all of which compose of a positive well-being, it is essential to state that this research study is limited in two manners: length of time spent with IPOM and personal characteristics of the participants. Ethnographic research, as is the present study, relies on qualitative research methods in which the researcher observes and interacts with participants in their real-life environment. Thus, it takes a substantial length of time to construct trust with informants in order to facilitate candid and honest discourse. Short-term studies, like the one present, are at a particular disadvantage in this regard. However, that is not to say that the relationships I developed with IPOM staff members were not significant; spending a longer amount of time on site would have however, enriched my understanding of the research topic studied. Furthermore, given that most interviews and questionnaires were facilitated with individuals closely related to the organization, research findings may be biased. They are admittedly absent of those views held by community members distantly connected to the program. The viewpoints of these two groups may differ sharply: perhaps the opinions held by IPOM staff about its social support activities and efforts are biased because of their interaction with the children within the context of the program, and thus are more positive than that of community mothers, fathers, and caregivers. Hence, it is important to clarify that the present findings are not representative of the entire community of Serviluz, just of a selected few. Only the judgments and suppositions of these selected individuals are systematically analyzed as data entries. Therefore, future studies must explore and embed the latter perspective into their findings.

The research conducted is also lacking in contextual richness. Even though a questionnaire assessing the differing levels of social support children at IPOM receive from their parents, relatives, non-relative adults, siblings, and peers was distributed to participants, this data was not included in the monograph at hand (see journal section entitled “Structured Observation/Questionnaire Data,” ISP Field Journal, p. 45-57). Although I originally sought to include it I soon realized that doing so was out of the

scope of possibility. A three-week research period was not a long enough time-span to gain a thorough understanding of both the social support efforts provided by the organization and its staff, as well as of the ones provided by individuals not necessarily related to IPOM. Furthermore, although I identified themes in my interviews and observations other than those relevant to social support, an analysis of such data is not provided. Again, given the time constraint under which I found myself under, I only included that data which most closely supported the theoretical framework that I outlined in my research proposal. However, these themes are clearly articulated in my field journal. Further research must factor in an analysis of each of the following themes: “learning by observation,” “learning via the teaching of concepts that are relevant to the child’s life,” “visual learning,” and “eagerness to teach/creativity” (see journal section entitled “Reflections/Emerging Themes,” ISP Field Journal, p. 77-85). In fact, an independent research project can be carried out on each of these thematic elements manifested at IPOM.

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Appendix

1) Could you have done this project in the USA? What data or sources were unique to the culture in which you did your project?

-I could have not done this project in the USA. The richness and success of the present research study was contingent on my physical presence in Serviluz, Fortaleza-CE, Brazil. Working closely alongside the non-governmental organization Instituto Povo Do Mar (IPOM) where I explored how social support networks diminish an impoverished child's vulnerability to adopt the streets as his home and thus become involved in illicit activities, could only have been executed in a favela community that has experienced such activities. Also, involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting and gaining an understanding of the physical, social, cultural and economic backgrounds that underpinned the lives of the community children could only have been done in Serviluz.

2) Could you have done any part of it in the USA? Would the results have been different? How?

- I could have not done any part of this research study in the USA. My focus of interest was *Brazilian* street children. I was specifically interested in identifying factors within an environment that help impoverished *Brazilian* children to build resilience against the many stressful events that accompany their reality.

3) Did the process of doing the ISP modify your learning style? How was this different from your previous style and approaches to learning?

- In the past I have felt as if I have mindlessly regurgitated learned information onto written pieces. This project, however allowed me to move away from such a distant and frigid manner of creating knowledge. My ISP research project was created through first-hand experiential contact with my participants, their community, and their daily reality. There were features of my time in the field, such as conversations and observations that were not suited to be included in the present monograph; however, these are included in the ISP Field Journal. Such aspects of my time spent in Serviluz are of much more value to my understanding of the researched topic than the data in the present report. Additionally, it was rather revitalizing to have the opportunity to write in such a creative and descriptive manner.

4) How much of the final monograph is primary data? How much is from secondary sources?

- My final monograph is composed of about thirty percent secondary sources and seventy percent primary sources. Although I am aware that this is a rather substantial amount of secondary sources, I believe that it was crucial to include such information in order to contextualize the complexity of the research topic studied. However, I believe that a large part of the analysis was facilitated by my first-hand findings on the field.

5) What criteria did you use to evaluate your data for inclusion in the final monograph? Or how did you decide to exclude certain data?

- In my monograph I included that data which most closely supported the theoretical framework that I outlined in my research proposal. Although I identified themes that were not part of my proposed framework, I was not able to explore those thoroughly in my monograph because of the time constraint I saw myself under. However, these themes are mentioned in my field journal and are supported with concrete observations and examples.

6) How did the “drop-off’s” or field exercises contribute to the process and completion of the ISP?

- Although the “drop-off” activity was helpful in preparation for the ISP period, I believe that the “field exercises” we were asked to complete throughout the beginning of the program helped the most. These activities allowed me to familiarize myself with the creative and rich writing style necessary for the monograph and with the ethnographical techniques needed for proper engagement on the field. That said, I believe that the most helpful “activity” of all was the homestay portion of the program. My homestay experience provided me with key interactions that prepared me for my encounters on the field. For example, being in a situation in which I absolutely had to speak Portuguese allowed me to practice those aspects of communication, such as active listening, close observation of facial expressions, and actual speaking that I would later use on the field.

7) What part of the RME most significantly influenced the ISP process?

- I believe that the in-class lectures and assignments were equally helpful in preparation for the ISP period. The lectures on conceptual understandings of field-base learning, ethical considerations for field-base research, and data analysis and report writing recording allowed me to identify the methodology appropriate for my research and taught me how to label, list, and outline the data collected on the field. The most helpful assignments were the “participant observation & field journal assignment” and the “interview assignment.” While the former provided me with a first-hand insight into the art of using a journal as a method of data collection and creation, the latter provided a space in which I could reflect on the ethical issues that arise as the result of implementing certain methodology.

8) What were the principle problems you encountered while doing the ISP? Were you able to resolve these and how?

- One of the principle problems was a technical one. Several times while I was on the field my voice recorder suddenly stopped working and thus, prevented me from recording my interviews. Although I did not allow this to impair me from engaging in other activities throughout the day, it did make me realize that I must become comfortable with uncertainty. It allowed me to learn that when working in the field set plans and schedules may crumble. Although this did not happen with frequency, I resolved the problem by using my phone to record interviews. Furthermore, my computer broke during the third week of the ISP period. Luckily, I had saved all of the much needed files such as my interviews, field journal, and monograph on a flash drive. My host-mother, Sandra allowed me to use her computer for the last two weeks of the ISP period.

9) Did you experience any time constraints? How could these have been resolved?

- I experienced time constraints very early on in the ISP period. I quickly realized that many of the individuals in the community with whom I very much wanted to (and did) conduct an interview with, lived very eventful lives. As a result, it was very difficult to schedule a concrete time for an interview. Even though at times the interviewee and I would schedule a set time, sometimes I would arrive for the interview and it would be rescheduled. Although this did not provide significant setbacks in my research process, it required that I be flexible with my time and with the schedule that I had written for myself to follow during the ISP period. I resolved this problem by continually asking my advisor for advice on how to approach each situation with ethical responsibility. Also, a three-week research period was not a long enough time-span to conduct interviews with those individuals not strongly associated with IPOM. The view that IPOM staff holds toward the networks of social support that are received by the children may differ greatly from that of community residents who may be less connected to the program. Although I would have very much of liked to gain a concrete understanding of this perspective, doing so was out of the scope of possibility given the short amount of time allocated for field-work.

10) Did your original topic change and evolved as you discovered or did not discover new and different resources? Did the resources available modify or determine the topic?

- My research topic of interest did not change while on site. I had narrowed down and articulated my thesis well in my research proposal. Thus, my problem statement proved to be suitable for the efforts of social support executed at IPOM.

11) How did you go about finding resources: institutions, interviews, publications, etc.?

- For my research proposal I found resources such as academic journals and publications through the online database facilitated by my home institution, Occidental College. While on the field I scheduled the interviews on my own, with the exception of one out of the six which my advisor helped to schedule. The standardized observations facilitated and the questionnaire that I distributed were found in academic research journals. All of my citations can be found in the "Reference" section of this monograph.

12) What methods did you use? How did you decide to use such methods?

- I focused my research study on a sample size of eleven individuals. Among these eleven IPOM staff members were six teachers, two life-time residents, and three administrative members. I executed semi-structured interviews with four of the teachers and the two life-time residents of Serviluz. I executed standardized observations in the classroom of two teachers and distributed questionnaires to nine of the participants. I also engaged in daily, unstructured observations. In accompaniment to my field-based research I also executed a literature review on the theories and measures of social support and resiliency, and on the views researchers take on the overwhelming presence of street children in Brazil. I chose these research methods because I believe that they were best fit for my research project. That is, while interviews were going to provide a thorough background of the history and goals of the program, daily observations were going to provided a visually and experientially rich contextualization of the organization's physical space, and standardized observations and questionnaires were going to provide a systematic manner to analyze and organize obtained data.

13) Comment on your relations with your advisor: indispensable? Occasionally helpful? Not very helpful? At what point was she/he helpful? Were there cultural differences which influenced your relationship? A different understanding of educational processed and goals? Was working with your advisor instructional?

- Throughout my research, my advisor, Andrea Vasconcelos was truly a dependable and constant support system. She provided me with a rich introduction to both the Serviluz community and IPOM, she introduced me to potential interviewees, she scheduled a wonderful tour for me of the community with a resident, and most importantly she was available and willing to help me in any way she possibly could. Given that her academic and professional interests are similar to mine, it was wonderful to provide Andrea with my daily observations and themes and have her respond in an engaged and constructive manner. Furthermore, given that Andrea was also my RME instructor, I always knew I could approach her with questions about my research methods or about ethical responsibility in the field. With Andrea as my advisor I never felt alone, misguided, or unsupported during the ISP period. I must also mention that watching Andrea teach English (Andrea is also an English teacher at IPOM) to the children with such kindness, patience, and devotion motivated me to take complete advantage of the magnificent opportunity I had to create knowledge alongside the community residents and the IPOM staff.

14) Did you reach any dead ends? Hypotheses which turned out to be not useful? Interviews or visits that had no application?

- Although I did not reach any “dead-ends” during the ISP period, I did realize that I had unfortunately, entered IPOM with preconceptions that later proved to be wrong. Having read in-depth about the deficit view research literature assumes toward street and impoverished children, I thought that most of the children at IPOM would be deprived from social support networks outside of IPOM. I thought that because these children live in an impoverished community where violence and the trafficking of drugs are prevalent, they were all going to be in some way or another involved in substance abuse or in abusive households. In entertaining the above preconceptions I anticipated answers to the questionnaire I conducted on social support to be negative; I thought most, if not all participants were going to circle “nunca e verdade” or “it is never true” for all fifty statements. Although some statements were answered in that manner, most participants circled “a veces e verdade” or “sometimes it is true” and “muitas vezes e verdade” or “it is true a lot of the time.” This data served as a rude wake-up call. As soon I became aware of these preconceptions I was able to properly reflect on the relationship between social support and an impoverished child’s ability to build resilience against the many stressful events that accompany his reality. All of the interviews and observations I conducted were useful. They each provided me with either a unique contextualization of the program or with a rich perspective on the concept of social support. Although there was data that was not inserted into the final monograph, such as identified themes and the results of the questionnaire, this does not mean that such data was not useful. Given the short amount of time that was at my disposition to work in the field, I simply found it best to analyze thoroughly the data that paralleled my problem statement.

15) What insights did you gain into the culture as a result of doing the ISP, which you might not otherwise have gained?

- I learned that Brazilian culture is one truly centered on the notion of collectivism. That is, it attempts to promote thinking in such a manner where the social institution or group is prioritized over the individual self. Each person is encouraged to be an active player of the group and to do what is best for the group. IPOM’s emphasis on “humility,” “patience,” “peace,” “love,” “gratitude,” “family,” “forgiveness,” and “friendship,” I believe is indicative of the unity, selflessness, and brotherhood present in the Serviluz community. Thus, working and cooperating with one another is the norm; everyone is encouraged to supports each other. Another insight I gained was the impact geography can have on the identity of a given people. For example, my interactions within the Serviluz community taught me that the ocean is a sacred area to which residents have a strong emotional relationship. Through my interviews, specifically through my interviews with the two residents of Serviluz, I understood that this affective bond is dependent on reconstructing the past as a trajectory to build a common present and a unifying future.

16) Did the ISP Process assist your adjustment to the culture? Integration?

- The ISP process most certainly assisted my adjustment and integration into the culture. For one, I was placed in an environment in which everyone around me spoke, for the most part, Portuguese. As a result, I very quickly had to become cognizant to the non-verbal forms of communication such as hugs, kisses, and facial expressions. I also had to learn to listen and observe rather than to speak and to act. This in turn allowed me to share the appreciation for the sea and for surfing that identifies and unites the community. Walking into Serviluz early in the mornings allowed me to rapidly begin acknowledging the presence of others. That is, being surrounded by individuals who cheerfully screamed “good morning” across the street to their neighbors encouraged me to also direct joyful “good mornings” to the children I saw walking on the streets. Furthermore,

having had the opportunity to sit with the IPOM staff everyday for lunch and participate in their conversations encouraged me to be well-versed on the most pressing aspects at the forefront of the community's struggles, such as drug trafficking and prostitution.

17) What were the principal lessons you learned from the ISP process?

- One of the principal lessons I learned during the ISP process was that planned and outlined schedules will collapse. While on the field I learned to become comfortable with ambiguity and to give-up control to and learn from unforeseen situations. I also learned the importance of fostering rich, caring, and loving relationships; most of the data presented in my monograph was a result of cultivating intimate bonds with the IPOM staff and residents of the Serviluz community. Most importantly, I learned that more ethical and experiential manners of creating knowledge exist. I now know that I do not always have to opt to create knowledge in the frigid and disconnected way I was taught to. That is, I do not always have to run after an academic journal article when conducting future research; I can approach human beings and learn from their tangible life experiences.

18) If you met a future student who wanted to do this same project, what would be your recommendation to him/her?

- If I met a future student who wanted to do this same project I would advise him to narrow his research focus to the manner in which the four identified types of social support are present at IPOM. Specifically, I would advise him to have half of his participants be individuals closely associated to the organization and the other half individuals less connected to the organization. This would allow for these two possibly differing perspectives to be compared and contrasted, thus allowing lucrative and rich data to be created. I would also advise him to not conduct more interviews than he thinks he will need; I conducted six interviews and this was rather ambitious. Not only were the interviews difficult to translate, but they were incredibly time consuming to transcribe.

19) Given what you know, would you undertake this, or a similar project again?

- Given what I know I would absolutely undertake this, or a similar research project again. Now that I know that I would need to refocus my research question regarding the presence of social support at IPOM to embed the perspectives of those directly involved with the organization and of those less associated with the organization, I would be very eager and curious to embark on further field research. Most importantly, carrying out this research project again would allow me to work with those individuals with whom I developed wonderful relationships with once more.