

INTIMACY IN FRIENDSHIP AMONG PORTUGUESE AND INDIAN ADOLESCENTS FROM IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the level of intimacy in the relations of friendship among adolescents with families originating from India, comparing it to Portuguese adolescents who did not undergo a process of acculturation and the factors that can predict the level of intimacy between them. Participants in this study were 467 adolescents. Three hundred and fifteen were Portuguese and 162 came from Indian families. The results showed a similar level of intimacy in the relations of friendship among adolescents originating from Indian families and Portuguese adolescents. Girls and adolescents currently in love showed higher level of intimacy. As expected, in both ethnocultural groups loneliness was negatively associated with intimacy in the relations of friendship.

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Key words: adolescents, gender, intimacy, migration.

INTRODUCTION

Intimacy in friendship

From a psychological perspective, the ability to attract and maintain peer relationships, such as friendships with non-kin, is essential for the well-being of adolescents (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). Prager (1995) considers as the definitions of intimacy samples of several and different theories of personality and of interpersonal relations, each of which has a contribution to our perception of intimacy. Acitelli & Duck (1987) noted that the definitions of intimacy commonly fail in specifying if intimacy is an individual capacity of interactions, or a characteristic from close relationships. A good definition of intimacy then must facilitate perception of conceptual attachments between intimacy in daily interactions and intimate relations.

The importance of pair relationships in social development of individuals justifies the study of intimate friendship relations of friends of the same sex (Sharabany *et al.*, 1981). In a previous article a Portuguese adaptation was proposed for the Intimacy Friendship Scale between friends of the same sex (Pinto & Neto, 2003). In this article we compare the intimacy in relations of friendship between adolescent friends of the same sex from Indian immigrant families living in Portugal to Portuguese adolescents who have never gone through an acculturation process.

Indians in Portugal

At present Portugal is simultaneously an emigration and immigration country (Neto, 2008). If emigration in this country has an old tradition, Portugal has recently become an immigration country. In 1498 Vasco da Gama arrived in India. The Portuguese remained in India until 1961. After the integration of Goa, Damao and Diu in the Indian Union, many Indians came to Portugal. A new wave from Mozambique came immediately after decolonization (1974-75), but it was in the 80s that thousands of immigrants from India established themselves in Portugal, mostly originating from regions which were former Portuguese territories.

There are no current statistics on the number of people from India living in Portugal. The Embassy of India in Portugal estimates the ethnic Indian community and Indians in Portugal together would number approximately around 70, 000, including seven thousand with Indian passports. According to the Center of the Department of Immigration, Control and Tutors Documentary supplied by the Foreign Service (SEF), there are currently 15 thousand Indians awaiting citizenship. Data for 2005 from Central records, estimates that there are only 1623 Indian citizens authorized to reside and work in Portugal, and 3353 with authorization to stay until 2010 as people who can live in the country and pursue a work of subordinates, but do not have the freedom to travel in the European Union. These are mostly concentrated in the Lisbon area.

There are four distinct communities (Hindus, Muslims, Ismaeliens, and Roman Catholics of Goa). They differ not only in religion, but also education: Goans have a high educational and occupational standing compared to other groups. The Indian community in Portugal specialize their activities (usually with a family) in retail trade of products imported from the East, as well as restaurants and other services marked by ethnic origin. This community is well integrated in the country and has a low rate of child delinquency and school failure (Pinto, 2004).

The present work

The purpose of this investigation was two-fold. The first objective was to examine whether migration had an effect on intimate friendship, thus in the present study we will compare intimate friendship of young Indians living in Portugal to that of young Portuguese living in the same country.

One basic question about bicultural individuals is whether they are confused outsiders or special individuals with a broader understanding. Until recently, the dominant western view of the multiethnic person was portrayed as troubled and anxious outsiders who lack a clear identity (e.g., Nakashima, 1992). However, the results of recent empirical research have indicated that multiethnic individuals are at no psychological disadvantage in comparison to monoethnic individuals (Neto, 2009). Researchers have consistently found no differences between self-esteem of multiethnic and monoethnic groups (Phinney & Alipuria, 1996). Two studies have shown that young Portuguese living in France did not differ on loneliness and satisfaction with life from young Portuguese who had never migrated and were living in Portugal (Neto, 1995, 1999). In another study there were no significant differences in level of life satisfaction between Portuguese adolescents living in Portugal and those living in Switzerland (Neto & Barros, 2007), and Indian adolescents from immigrant families in Portugal (Pinto & Neto, 2008). In

a recent study there were no significant differences in happiness between Indian adolescents with an immigrant background and Portuguese adolescents (Neto, & Pinto, in press).

Thus, the previously negative picture has been replaced by a more optimistic one. Specifically, the contention is that whereas immigration and acculturation may inherently be risky and exacerbate one's vulnerability to symptoms of maladaptation, risks are in themselves not a destiny.

The second aim was to examine if intimate friendship can be understood on the basis of socio-demographic variables and loneliness. In this vein we will examine whether there were differences in the intimate friendship according to certain background characteristics, such as gender, religious involvement, and being currently in love.

According to Prager (1995) several authors claim that the investigations have indicated the gender differences with regard to intimacy. In a previous study it could be confirmed that Catholic adolescents had higher scores of friendship with a friend of the same sex (Neto & Pinto, 2003). Within the category of intimate relationships is included friendship and love. The clearest example of a relationship that engenders happiness is without doubt that of being in love (Argyle, 2001; Neto, 2005). Being in love is one of the events of existence that is evaluated as being more positive. Therefore, it is expected that the participants currently in love feel more intimate friendship than those who are not.

Loneliness has been conceptualised as an individual's dissatisfaction with social relationships accompanied by a negative psychological state (Peplau & Perlman, 1982). A wide range of factors may contribute to increased vulnerability of people to loneliness. These factors are likely to increase the likelihood of a person feeling lonely and make it more difficult to restore satisfactory social relationships. Friendship seems to be largely related to the quality of our social relationships. Sullivan (cited by Sprinthall and Collins, 1999, p. 368) "argues that friendship in pre-adolescence and adolescence meets a basic psychological need that is common to all subjects: the need to overcome loneliness". According to this author it is at this stage that the adolescent seeks to validate his/her importance as a person through the extended family relationships, especially in relations with friends. The establishment of friendships among adolescents of the same sex leads them to overcome loneliness.

In summary, this paper was interested in understanding both the level of intimate friendship among adolescents with immigrant background and its predictors. Specifically, on the basis of theory and existing evidence, the following hypotheses were tested:

Hypothesis 1 – Intimate friendship scores of adolescents from Indian immigrant background living in Portugal will not be different from the Portuguese adolescents living in the same country.

Hypothesis 2 – Girls will show higher intimate friendship scores than boys.

Hypothesis 3 – Religious involvement and being in love will influence the level of intimate friendship.

Hypothesis 4 – A negative correlation should be found between scores for intimate friendship and loneliness.

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 467 adolescents. Three hundred and fifteen (135 boys and 169 girls) were Portuguese and 162 (84 boys and 78 girls) were from Indian families residing in Portugal. The ethnocultural groups were not significantly associated with gender ($\chi^2=2.24$, $df=1$, $p = .15$). Participants were aged between 16 and 19 years, with an average age of 17.54 ($SD = 1.19$). The teenagers from Indian immigrant families ($M = 17.56$, $SD = 1.25$) had a similar average age to Portuguese adolescents ($M = 17.54$, $SD = 1.17$), $F(1, 466) = .02$, $p = .88$. All participants were enrolled in high school education in the Lisbon area.

Material

All participants were administered the Portuguese versions of the Intimate Friendship Scale (Sharabany, 1994; Pinto & Neto, 2003) and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980; Neto, 2000).

After completion of the scales, participants were requested to complete a short biographical form, including questions such as, sex, age, religion, being in love, and ethnicity.

Procedure

Participants were asked to fill out the questionnaire in the school environment. It took about 20 min to complete. Confidentiality was stressed and the response rate was above 95%.

RESULTS

Cronbach's alpha (0.94) for the total Intimacy Friendship Scale score was satisfactory. The corrected item-total correlation for each Intimacy Friendship Scale item was substantial, that is, more than 0.40.

A number of specific questions pertaining to the participants' background were included to assess in an orderly way some of the potential suppositions about how intimate friendship functions. The approach used treated each background variable as an independent variable, using participants' sum scores on intimate friendship scale as dependent variable. One-way analyses of variance were performed on the data.

The means and *F* ratio for Intimate Friendship scores are shown in Table 1 for ethnocultural group, gender, religious involvement, and currently in love. The *F* ratio for each one-way analysis is shown at the top of the relevant column of means.

Ethnocultural group. To examine the effect of ethnocultural group in intimate friendship an ANOVA was performed. There were no ethnocultural group differences on intimate friendship $F(1, 466)=.15, p>.05$. Indian adolescents ($M=168.7$; $SD=29.7$) showed similar scores on intimate friendship to Portuguese adolescents who did not go through an acculturation process ($M=169.8$; $SD=28.0$). These findings support our first hypothesis.

Gender. There were gender differences on intimate friendship, $F(1, 466)=79.36, p<.001, \eta^2=.15$. Girls ($M=179.7$; $SD=22.6$) showed higher scores on intimate friendship than boys ($M=157.8$; $SD=30.2$). Thus these findings concerning gender support our second hypothesis.

Religious involvement. There were no religious involvement differences on intimate friendship ($F(2, 466)=.12, p>.05$). The believers/regular attendees ($M=169.9$; $SD=29.3$), the believers/non attendees ($M=169.3$; $SD=27.7$), the nonbelievers/non attendees ($M=168.3$; $SD=28.8$), showed similar intimate friendship.

Currently in love. There was a significant effect of being in love $F(1, 466)=17.25, p<.001, \eta^2=.04$. Participants "currently in love now" ($M=173.1$; $SD=27.6$) showed higher intimate friendship than those "not currently in love now" ($M=161.5$; $SD=29.2$). Thus these findings concerning religious involvement and currently in love support partially our third hypothesis.

Table 1 Means and *F* ratio for intimate friendship as a function of selected background variables

Variable	N	Intimate friendship
Ethnocultural group		$F=.15$
Portuguese	304	169.8
Indian	162	168.7
Gender		$F=79.36^{***}$
Males	219	157.8a
Females	247	179.7b
Religious involvement		$F=.12$
Believers/regular attendees	216	169.9
Believers/non attendees	155	169.3
Non believers/non attendees	95	168.3
Currently in love		$F=17.25^{***}$
Yes	317	173.1a
Non	149	161.5b

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

For each variable with means with no subscripts in common differed at the 0.05 level, either by *F* test directly for a pair of means or by Scheffe test for three means.

As expected, there were significant negative correlations between intimate friendship and loneliness in Indian ($r=-.46, p<.001$) and Portuguese adolescents ($r=-.23, p<.001$).

To ascertain the contributions of socio-demographic factors and loneliness, intimate friendship was regressed separately for Indian and Portuguese participants. This was done in order to see whether there were differences in factors accounting for intimate friendship among the different ethnocultural groups (Table 2). For the Indian adolescents three predictors contributed significantly to the model, explaining 28% of the variance: loneliness, currently in love, and gender. For the Portuguese adolescents these three predictors contributed also significantly to the model, explaining 24% of the variance: gender, loneliness, and currently in love.

Table 2 Multiple Regression Analyses of Variables Predicting Intimate Friendship among Ethnocultural Groups

Step	Variable	R	R ²	Beta	t
Indians					
1	Loneliness	.46	.21	-.46	-6.50***
2	Currently in love	.50	.25	-.20	-2.84***
3	Gender	.53	.28	.18	2.51*
Portuguese					
1	Gender	.43	.18	.43	8.16***
2	Loneliness	.47	.22	-.19	-3.77**
4	Currently in love	.48	.24	-.13	-2.54*

* $p<.05$; ** $p<.01$; *** $p<.001$.

The beta and *t* values are for the step at which the variables entered.

DISCUSSION

This study approached the degree of intimate friendship among adolescents from Indian immigrant families in comparison to Portuguese adolescents who did not go through an acculturation process, and factors that may be related to the level of intimate friendship among them. Four hypotheses were put forward, and most of them were supported. Before presenting the findings, they should be interpreted cautiously since our conclusions are bound by several limitations in our data. First, the basic design of investigation consisted of cross-sectional sampling of the population. A different shortcoming concerns generalisations of these results to settings culturally different from ours; they should proceed cautiously. The roles of acculturation factors may vary in other contexts. However the results of this study replicate earlier findings and demonstrate some of the network of background and psychological variables in which intimate friendship is embedded.

The adolescents whose families were from India had similar level of intimacy in the relations of friendship between friends of the same sex to Portuguese adolescents. These results are therefore in line with our first hypothesis that predicted no differences between the two groups. These results are in agreement with the conclusion that the majority of immigrants fit well, despite the difficulties they may encounter in response to cultural changes and the fact that they live at the confluence of two or more cultures (Neto, 2002).

In this study the variable gender influences the relations of friendship, and girls have higher scores (H2). Boys showed lower levels of needs for intimacy, they may not meet the requirements of girls for a close friendship. Moreover, since the girls are more energetic in the maintenance of relationships, these girls can easily meet the needs of friends. For girls the quality of friendship will be higher within the friendships of the same sex than with the opposite sex. This finding is also consistent with another study (Bukowsk, Sippola & Hoza 1999) which concluded that girls in relation to boys prefer the intimate relations of friendship with other girls.

As regards the third hypothesis, it was not confirmed that religious involvement influence in intimacy friendship; however, the results supported that being currently in love influences friendship. The findings suggest that adolescents who were also lovers expressed greater friendship in their relations. People who experience love can live in a world better in interpersonal relationships than those who do not. It may be that people in love perceive the world through rose coloured glasses.

The fourth hypothesis raised in this study was also confirmed because young people with stronger relations of friendship feel less lonely. Cutrona (1982) found that participants were more alone if they felt unable to make good friends. This is consistent with another study. Shechtman (2000) which says that teenagers who do not establish close relations of friendship do not have support in their social development. The same study indicates that these individuals with ineffective social behaviours have a positive correlation with loneliness. Duck (1991), says that later, these adolescents may have difficulties in re-establishing levels of intimacy in relations with a friend and a romantic pair.

We also sought to know if each ethnocultural group was affected by a different set of variables for friendship. The results suggest that the regression models which describe the level of friendship in both ethnocultural groups were relatively similar. Three variables were significant in the regression model for young people from immigrant Indian families and in the model of the young Portuguese: gender, loneliness and being in love.

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