

INTIMACY IN FRIENDSHIP AMONG PORTUGUESE AND ANGOLAN 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 Angola, 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 595 adolescents. Three hundred and sixty-six were Portuguese and 229 came from Angolan families. The results showed a higher level of intimacy in the relations of friendship among adolescents originating from Angolan families, girls, believers/regular attendees, persons currently in love. The strongest predictors of intimacy in friendship in both ethnocultural groups were gender and loneliness.

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Key words: adolescents, gender, intimacy, migration.

Introduction

Intimacy in friendship

Prager (1995) considers as the definitions of intimacy samples of several different theories of personality and interpersonal relations, each of which has 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. Pinto & Neto (2003) note that intimacy is confused with concepts such as friendship, love, closeness, support, union, inclusion, affection, cohesiveness and sexuality. A good definition of intimacy then must facilitate perception of conceptual attachments between intimacy in daily interactions and intimate relations.

Pinto (2009) suggests that the superordinate concept of intimacy be parcelled into two basic concepts: intimate interactions and intimate relationships. The intimacy is thus a dynamic structure that will evolve over time, determining the way we perceive others in different contexts. Analyzed psychologically and socially, the concept allows

us to understand how the adolescent feels and reacts in interpersonal relationships. Sharabany (2000) states that intimacy influences the behaviour of adolescents in family, school and groups of friends, helping to determine the course in which the individual will live life and face the future.

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 Angolan immigrant families living in Portugal to those of Portuguese adolescents who have never gone through an acculturation process.

Angolans in Portugal

At present Portugal is simultaneously an emigration and immigration country (Neto & Mullet, 1998; Neto, 2008; Pinto & Neto, 2008). The Angolan people began to emigrate in strength to Portugal in the 1980s, seeking better living conditions, because Angola was in a state of political-military instability.

According to the Foreigners and Borders Service (SEF) in 2007, 435,736 foreigners lived legally in Portugal. Of these there were 32,728 Angolans, with 17,610 men and 15,118 women, representing 8% of the foreign population in Portugal. The most representative ages were between 25 and 34 years, the most representative in all age groups were men between 0 and 44 years. After 45 there was a reversal of values and women became more representative with values of 54.3% (45-49 years of age) and 70.9% (over 65 years of age). Overall, this focused on the districts of Lisbon, Setúbal and Faro.

The Angolan community is one of the few that recorded a decrease in the number of citizens living in Portugal. The data refers to a period of one year (2005-2006), according to a report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Among the 32,728 Angolan immigrants registered in 2007, just over half (61%) were integrated in the labour market (SEF). In January 2004 there were 2,790 Angolans registered in Employment Centres (IEFP). Concerning integration in the labour market most Angolan women, are classified as "non-qualified". Young people who study and work in Portugal face difficulties of integration in the world of work and are subject to representations that hinder their inclusion in society (Pinto, 2009).

In the last general census of population (INE) in 2001 60.4% of Angolans were stated as having basic schooling, 17.8% had a diploma of secondary education 9.7% could read and write with no schooling and 8.2% were illiterate. Only 3.9% had higher education.

There are associations made up of Angolans of reference: the National Association of Medical Angolans in Portugal (ANMAP), the League of Friends of Africans and Africa (LIÁFRICA), The House of Angola and the Angolan Federation of Associations in Portugal.

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 Angolans 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. 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).

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 can 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/him 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 Angolan 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 595 adolescents. Three hundred and sixty-six (166 boys and 200 girls) were Portuguese and 229 (97 boys and 132 girls) were from Angolan families residing in Portugal. The ethnocultural groups were not significantly associated with gender ($X^2=.51$, $df =1$, $p = .49$). Participants were aged between 16 and 19 years, with an average age of 17.66 ($SD = 1.15$). The teenagers from Angolan immigrant families ($M = 17.80$, $SD = 1.10$) had a higher average age than Portuguese adolescents ($M = 17.58$, $SD = 1.18$), $F (1, 594) = 5.18$, $p < .05$. 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 ANCOVA (covariate, age) was performed. There were ethnocultural group differences on intimate friendship $F(1, 594)=8.8, p<.05, \eta^2 =.02$. Angolan adolescents ($M=175.8$) showed higher scores on intimate friendship than Portuguese adolescents who did not go through an acculturation process ($M=168.2$). These findings do not support our first hypothesis.

Gender. There were gender differences on intimate friendship, $F(1, 594)=89.3, p<.001, \eta^2 =.13$. Girls ($M=180.5$) showed higher scores on intimate friendship than boys ($M=159.2$). Thus these findings concerning gender support our second hypothesis.

Religious involvement. There were religious involvement differences on intimate friendship ($F(2, 594)=5.6, p<.01, \eta^2 =.02$). The believers/regular attendees ($M=177.3$) showed more intimate friendship than the nonbelievers/non attendees ($M=167.2$).

Currently in love. There was a significant effect of being in love $F(1, 593)=20.6, p<.001, \eta^2 =.03$. Participants "currently in love now" ($M=174.7$) showed higher intimate friendship than those "not currently in love now" ($M=162.7$). Thus these findings concerning religious involvement and currently in love support 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		
Portuguese	365	168.2a
Angolan	229	175.8b
Gender		
Males	262	159.2a
Females	332	180.5b
Religious involvement		
Believers/regular attendees	140	177.3a
Believers/non attendees	287	171.6ab
Non believers/non attendees	167	165.2b
Currently in love		
Yes	420	174.7a
Non	173	162.7b

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

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 Angolan ($r=-.21, p<.01$) and Portuguese adolescents ($r=-.18, p<.01$).

To ascertain the contributions of socio-demographic factors and loneliness, intimate friendship was regressed separately for Angolan 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 Angolan adolescents four predictors contributed significantly to the model, explaining 18% of the variance: gender, loneliness, currently in love, and age. For the Portuguese adolescents three predictors contributed significantly to the model, explaining 21% 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
Angolans					
1	Gender	.29	.08	.29	4.49***
2	Loneliness	.35	.12	-.20	-3.25**
3	Currently in love	.40	.16	.19	3.10**
4	Age	.42	.18	.13	2.16*
Portuguese					
1	Gender	.41	.17	.41	8.62***
2	Loneliness	.44	.19	-.15	-3.08**
4	Currently in love	.45	.21	.13	2.71**

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

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 Angolan immigrant families in comparison with 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 Angola had a higher level of intimacy in the relations of friendship between friends of the same sex than Portuguese adolescents. These results are therefore not in line with our first hypothesis that predicted no differences between the two groups. In addition, to explain these results, there may be variables related to the process of acculturation, it is noted that young people from immigrant families come from a more collective culture than those of Portuguese (Neto, 2008). It has been pointed out that in collective cultures there is a tendency to have fewer relationships, but those who do have intimate relationships, and in the individualistic cultures there is a tendency to have relationships with very low intimacy (Triandis, 1994). These assumptions at the level of interpersonal relationships in individualistic and collective cultures are to some extent in line with the results of this study. However, 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 (Bukowski et al. 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 confirmed that religious involvement and being in love influence friendship. Adolescent believer practitioners demonstrated higher scores of friendship with a friend of the same sex than non-believers and non practitioners. Markstrom (1999) found that religious involvement (a religious practice, participation in Bible study groups and involvement in groups of young people) is associated with the psychosocial development of adolescents, increased self-esteem and satisfaction with life.

The results 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.

It was also confirmed the fourth hypothesis raised in this study, 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. More statistically significant variables appear to explain the friendship in adolescents from immigrant families than in Portuguese adolescents. Four variables were significant in the regression model for young people from immigrant Angolan families and three in the model of the young Portuguese. Of these four predictors, three were common to both groups: gender, loneliness and being in love. Both for young people from immigrant families and for the Portuguese the strongest predictor was of gender. This study therefore suggests that gender is a key variable in the understanding of intimacy in relations of friendship: the girls showed higher values of friendship to the boys

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