



Editorial

Friendship in Latin American Social Comparative Studies

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Abstract

Friendship has been traditionally investigated in the field of interpersonal relationships using different theoretical frameworks and approaches. This paper discusses the possibility of investigating friendship from a comparative Latin American perspective, based on a wide literature review on the subject. Based on the theoretical proposals of Hinde (1997) for the investigation of interpersonal relationships, the paper considers that friendship involves several levels of complexity and affects and is affected by distinct dimensions of Latin American society. The paper recognizes that comparative studies have placed the importance of friends and friendship in areas such as economy, health, education, and migration, among others. As expected, Latin American comparative studies are more frequent in some disciplines, mainly those based on censuses data, and theoretically related to social-economic and demographic concepts, including social networks and social capital. The possibility of developing a Latin American perspective for the study of friendship requires not only the need of empirical but also theoretical advances, as well as scientific cooperation and innovation. Friendship is seen as relevant for the constitution of the social tissue of Latin American society, being affected and affecting different areas and levels. In the social economic dimension, friends are relevant, specifically in Latin America, to themes such as poverty and social vulnerability. Some future possibilities for investigation are discussed.

Keywords: friendship, comparative studies, Latin America

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In the tenth anniversary of *Interpersona*, we have considered important to present some considerations on scientific investigation, innovation and cooperation in Latin American studies on interpersonal relationships. We assume that interpersonal relationships have social relevance and that investigating relationships may contribute to understand the structure and functioning of societies in Latin America. In order to promote the scientific development of Latin American studies on interpersonal relationships, regional cooperation is highlighted, connecting different disciplines and approaches to create an integrated Latin American perspective. This effort needs to incorporate different levels of social complexity, starting at single interactions and moving toward long lasting relationships, societal structures and dynamics, as well as culture. Recently, the concepts of social networks and social capital have been discussed in the light of major social, political and economic aspects. On the other hand, some authors have proposed a more integrated approach to address researches on interpersonal relationships. Hinde (1997), for instance, has proposed that these should be investigated as a complex system formed by interactions, relationships, groups and society, along with environment and social and cultural structure. This paper discusses the recent Latin American literature on friendship from a comparative perspective.

Comparative studies held in Latin America approach friendships as complex systems that should be investigated in several levels. They usually try to compare social situations and processes in different countries, and friends are usually considered along with social networks and their role in different social fields. Literature on the participation of friends in Latin American societies is restricted to a few studies, usually based on theoretical approaches related to social capital and social networks. We highlight the importance of investigating micro and macro social aspects related to interpersonal relationships, particularly in friendships.

For the present review, references related to friends and friendship from a comparative perspective in Latin America published in the 21st century that were available in different indexing databases (including Psycinfo, Redalyc, Dialnet, Psycodoc, Latindex, DOAJ and Google Scholar) were considered. Friendship as well as other relationships (e.g. couple and family relations) is the subject of a wider effort that assesses comparative investigations on interpersonal relationships in Latin America. It is also necessary to create a regional agenda to foster not only the investigation of such social phenomena, but also highlight the importance of scientific cooperation in the region. The following text is divided in three sections, addressing economic, health and other social aspects, based on the number of publications on each topic.

Friendship and Economy

The most recurrent citations of friendship in comparative Latin American studies refer to economic analyses, usually related to social networks. They refer to attempts to overcome poverty and economic behavior, among other related issues. Some authors have associated collectivism and the significance of friends for Latin Americans. According to [Husted \(2002\)](#), Latin American collectivism is reflected in the relevance given to family and close friends and their influence in the individual decision-making process regarding one's life. In Latin America, informal networks include individuals who transfer resources to friends and family members ([Uthoff & Beccaria, 2008](#)).

Concerning economic behavior, some authors mention the preferences of Latin Americans to establish friendship before engaging in business transactions ([Ogliastri, 1997](#)). Latin Americans prefer to negotiate with friends and would rather establish friendship networks before engaging in business matters. [Gannon and Rajnandini \(2013\)](#) also refer that business relationships must be preceded by a solid friendship in Latin America.

The concept of social capital plays an important role to explain the relationship between society and friendship. [Forni \(2005\)](#) considers three types of social capital, including intensive levels of social capital, as those among family members or close friends. Closer ties are considered as bonding social capital, based on the mutual affect and care in socially close relations.

[Filgueira \(2001\)](#), in an analysis of opportunities and social vulnerability, concludes that social capital results from the participation in an informal structure of relationships, based on mutual obligation and rules of reciprocity among friends. A community of friends generates opportunities. If other conditions remain the same, the larger the number of members in the friendship network, the lesser effect of one person leaving the network on opportunities and contacts that could help getting a job, for instance.

Investigations about the participation of friends in the efforts against poverty are frequent in Latin American literature. [Rosas \(2015\)](#) reported that social networks, including friends, have an important role against poverty in the life of men and women living in extreme poverty. Some of the most important texts on friends as part of social capital

used to face poverty have been published in “Social Capital and Poverty Reduction in Latin America and the Caribe: in search of a new paradigm” (Atria, Siles, Arriagada, Robison, & Whiteford, 2003). Uphoff (2003), for instance, associates social capital with friends, and points out that the word “social” comes from the Latin word for friend. Social capital is seen as a stock producing a flow of benefits and collective actions mutually beneficial. He describes friendship as an economic relationship, and the well-being of friends affecting one’s own well-being. Friends are important so that people invest socially and emotionally in their friends. According to the author, diverse family and friend networks create expectations of cooperation.

In that same publication, Fukuyama (2003) describes social capital as “rules or values shared which promote social cooperation” (p. 37). The author reminds us that the strongest confidence bonds are between family members and a few intimate friends in Latin American companies. Friends are also related to social capital and political corruption, as the social norms demand public workers to help family and friends before taking care of the general public interests.

Similarly, Robison, Siles, and Schmid (2003) relate social capital and friendship in several levels. Social capital and favors obtained are different as we distinguish solidarity feelings of a friend from their favors. It may last for a long period since friendships go on for a long time or even for life. Most people consider that services available by social capital are valuable, as we value the interest and approval of our friends. Social capital is flexible as we consider the services of our friends as valuable in distinct situations. Such capital may be transferable, for instance, in situations in which we ask a friend to help another friend of ours whom he/she is not acquainted to. Social capital may replace or complement other forms of capital, such as when friends help us improving services we obtain. Friends are also related to social-emotional goods and friendship could become a serious problem if institutions are run for one own benefit or the benefit of friends, generating *amiguismo* (cronyism) and corruption.

According to Durston (2003), friendship may become instrumental in moments of opportunity, need or risk, when friends and family members are recruited to start an enterprise. The feeling of belonging, identity and duty associated to family to assume mutual help and confidence could be extended to friends. This would be reinforced by new relationships similar to familial patterns, resulted from baptism, marriage and other social bonds. On the other hand, such social ties may lead to corruption and cronyism (*amiguismo*).

Sunkel (2003) informs that the idea of social capital has been recognized by the World Bank as relevant for poverty solution. Poor people depend mainly on their direct friends to get a job. The first job is usually at the same place where a family member or a friend works. According to Espinoza and Canteros (2001), poor people depend mainly on contact with friends to get a job, and as friends occupy homogeneous economic position, their opportunities are usually scarce. According to Sunkel (2003), the main interest in Latin American researches are on social networks serving as subsistence networks of poor people. These networks involve family members, neighbors and friends living in the same area and sharing the same situation of poverty. Hintze (2004) also relates social capital and survival of the poor, indicating that developing social capital allows changing *contingent relationships* (e.g. neighbors and family members) into *necessary and elective relationships*, including friendship.

Katzman (2001) also recognizes the importance of individual social capital concerning poverty and social isolation in Latin American urban areas. The workplace is a privileged place to build friendship networks, allowing the flow of resources, such as contacts, information and easier access to some services. Bebbington (2005) also considered social capital as a means to overcome poverty. Friends are included in the social capital, which includes the most intimate and close bonds. According to Pereira (2001), solutions regarding poverty and social exclusion are better

supported through informal and voluntary solidarity, a strategic resource, which involves family, neighbors and friends.

Flores and Rello (2003) relate social capital and cooperation in activities, such as seeding, harvesting and others, involving family and friends, in their research about the rural context in Latin America. In rural settings, David and Malavassi (2003) also note that social networks are usually alliances with family members, neighbors and friends, but they may outspread alliances with other groups due to common interests. Lugo-Morin (2011) identified the influence of context in the relationships in rural areas, including negotiation, subordination and conflicts, but also relationships of friendship, kinship, solidarity, cooperation and neighborhood.

Some other papers have discussed social capital in Latin American comparative studies, which consider the participation of friends. Arriagada (2003), for instance, includes friendship as a precursor of social capital, which should to be fostered. Furni, Siles, and Barreiro (2004) have described friends and acquaintances as information sources. Raczynski and Serrano (2005) listed friends as members of group social capital. Kessler and Roggi (2005) included friends as community social capital. Longo (2003) says that social capital may be acquired in relationships within the family, with friends or workmates. Familial and friendship networks are the main resources to find or change a job. Friendship networks are an informal support source for young people in Latin America (Elizalde, 2003) and interpersonal confidence is an aggregating element in Latin America societies in times of crises (Searing, 2013). Social capital (family and friends networks) can be used as a measure against social vulnerability (Busso, 2001).

In sum, comparative investigations that address friendship in Latin America often aims at economic activity, mainly on poverty suppression. The leading theoretical approach found in these investigations is the concept of social capital. The dialogue among economic approaches to Latin American friendships and social and psychological investigations could provide a wider reference framework to understand friendships as phenomena affecting different social areas or complexity levels. These could consider quantitative data, such as the size and composition of friend networks as well qualitative data, as the content and historical information exchanges.

Friendship and Health

Friendship and health is the second most important relationship investigated in comparative studies in Latin America. The participation of friends has been considered relevant in different processes related to health promotion in Latin American comparative studies. Sapag and Kawachi (2007) described the relations between health conditions and close friends as horizontal social capital. In a study in seven Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico), family and friends also provide relevant information related to drug addiction, especially concerning perceived protective and risk factors (Silva et al., 2009). The authors concluded that families and friends are indispensable in innovative and culturally relevant strategic responses for substance abuse prevention and suggest that future research should further investigate the issue.

Friendships may also affect feeding habits according to Jiménez-Benítez, Rodríguez-Martín, and Jiménez-Rodríguez (2010). These authors analyzed social determinants of malnutrition in Latin America, recognizing that our feeding habits are socially structured by influence of family and friends, and educational and cultural systems. The participation of friends has also been noted by several references regarding social aspects of health in Latin America, specifically related to chronic diseases. Sapag, Lange, Campos, and Piette (2010) regarded informal care of

family members and friends as strategies to improve the health care of patients suffering from chronic diseases, for example. According to [Jofré and Mendoza \(2005\)](#), family and friends may be a fundamental source of support for these patients to improve care. Women have especially played an important role in this sense in Latin America, mostly when caring for their husbands and children, as well as other community members. [Vega Angarita and González Escobar \(2009\)](#) report that social support from friends have a positive influence on the experience of caring for chronic illnesses, regarding informational, material, emotional, and affective support.

Friendship and the Latin American Society

Although comparative investigations have analyzed mainly the participation of friends in economic and health matters, other investigations obtained important data about the participation of friends in other social relevant phenomena, such as social care and migration. The idea of support networks is frequently found in the literature on Latin American relationships. [Guzmán, Huenchuan, and Montes de Oca \(2003\)](#), for instance, indicated that the elderly face a weakening in their network losing partners, friends and companions. Friendship has different meanings for older men and women. While women keep dynamic and closer relations with friends for a long time and make new friends with age, men keep relationships that are more superficial and usually related to work. Community networks are also different since men are more dependent on family and for women, on the other hand, friendship, neighborhood and social groups are more important as a source for and object of support. The authors also inform that the participation in community networks is important for elders once they give and receive non material support, consolidating company and friendship. These authors also conclude that it is necessary to foster the extension of support network including community and friends. They consider that elders in Latin America need the support of familial and friends network, neighbors and the wider community to increase their level of well-being.

[Montes de Oca \(2000\)](#) has observed in the Latin American context that when institutional support diminishes, the informal support networks are activated and vice-versa. However, in serious crises, when family and friends also suffer extreme problems concerning their own resources, elders are left in a precarious situation.

Some other areas are also affected by the participation of friends, like migration and education, for example. [Vázquez, Baqueiro, and Díaz \(2007\)](#) discussed the participation of friends in the migration from Mexico to the USA, and [Bassarsky \(2007\)](#) analyzed social networks in migration from Latin America to France. The use of demographic data to understand social and friends' network should be extended as they could contribute to improve life conditions and opportunities. Besides care and migration, investigations of friendship in educational institutions would also profit from a more structured and complex framework to identify how different social levels and areas are affected and affect friendship relations.

Making friends is a way to be integrated in the community. According to [Durstun \(2003\)](#), in rural education, it is important for the teacher to be accepted as a friend within the community. Educational institutions are responsible for the establishment of important friendship networks in order to increase social capital. The neighborhood and friends are necessary to develop social capital. Bridge social capital is an extension of individual, group and community social capital, allowing the group to contact people and institutions far away.

International Cooperation and the Participation of International Organizations

Some characteristics of the literature comparing social phenomena involving friends and friendship in Latin America should be highlighted. Such literature refers to data from different countries and two aspects have been investigated in these studies, namely international cooperation and the participation of international organizations.

Based on international co-authorship as an indication of international cooperation, it is interesting to note, from references reviewed in the present study, seven of them had a single author: [Arriagada \(2003\)](#), [Bassarsky \(2007\)](#), [Husted \(2002\)](#), [Katzman \(2001\)](#), [Lugo-Morin \(2011\)](#), [Rosas \(2015\)](#), and [Searing \(2013\)](#). Six were authored by two or more collaborators and had all authors from the same country: [Espinoza and Canteros \(2001\)](#), both from Chile; [Jofré and Mendoza \(2005\)](#), both from Chile; [Sapag and Kawachi \(2007\)](#), both from Brazil; [Vega Angarita and González Escobar \(2009\)](#), both from Colombia; [Jiménez-Benítez, Rodríguez-Martín, and Jiménez-Rodríguez \(2010\)](#), all from Spain; and [Vázquez, Baqueiro, and Díaz \(2007\)](#), all from Mexico. In the above mentioned studies, international cooperation is not observed if we use international co-authorship as criteria. In one case ([Guzmán, Huenchuan, & Montes de Oca, 2003](#)), two authors, Guzmán and Huenchuan, are identified as members of the Economic Commission for Latin America (CEPAL, in Spanish) and a third, Montes de Oca, from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). In only two references, authors were from different countries, as in [Sapag, Lange, Campos, and Piette \(2010\)](#), which had three from Chile and one from the USA; and, in [Silva et al. \(2009\)](#), which was the result of international cooperation involving seven Latin American countries: Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, Mexico, and Ecuador. Although comparative social investigations in Latin America involve data from several countries, few publications we found were based on international cooperation.

Whole books and chapters were also quite important on this topic. Several books were related to projects of CEPAL, which is one of the five regional commissions of the United Nations (UN), headquartered in Santiago, Chile. The first book was edited by [Arriagada and Miranda \(2003\)](#), from CEPAL, and published in Chile by the United Nations (CEPAL). Two chapters used in this review have been written by Argentinian authors ([Elizalde, 2003](#) and [Longo, 2003](#)). A second book edited by [Arriagada \(2005\)](#) was also published in Chile by the UN. In this case, three chapters have been cited: [Bebbington \(2005\)](#), a consultant from the University of Manchester at CEPAL, [Kessler and Roggi \(2005\)](#) from Argentina, the first author a consultant at CEPAL; and [Raczynski and Serrano \(2005\)](#), both from CEPAL, Chile. Both books are about social capital. The UN has also published a third publication in Santiago de Chile which had both editors from CEPAL ([Uthoff & Beccaria, 2008](#)). A fourth, and one of most important books, was a joint publication by the Michigan State University and the Economic Commission for Latin America, United Nations ([Atria, Siles, Arriagada, Robison, & Whiteford, 2003](#)). Editors were from CEPAL (Atria and Arriagada) and from Michigan State University (Siles, Robison, & Whiteford). Seven chapters were relevant for this review, and several authors were from CEPAL, Chile ([David & Malavassi, 2003](#); [Durstun, 2003](#); [Sunkel, 2003](#)), and from the USA ([Fukuyama, 2003](#); [Robison, Siles, & Schmid, 2003](#); [Uphoff, 2003](#)). In one case, authors were respectively from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in Italy, and from UNAM, in Mexico ([Flores & Rello, 2003](#)). In these cases, an international organization (CEPAL) has played a central role to promote comparative social studies in Latin America.

Other books and chapters resulted mainly from national cooperation, as in [Gannon and Rajnandini \(2013\)](#), both from the USA, for example. The chapter written by [Hintze \(2004\)](#) was published in a book edited by Danini, another fellow Argentinean, in Buenos Aires. [Montes de Oca \(2000\)](#), a Mexican author, also had a chapter published in Mexico. [Pereira \(2001\)](#), had a chapter published in [Pereira and Bravo \(2001\)](#), both from Brazil. Finally, five conference papers have been analyzed ([Busso, 2001](#); [Filgueira, 2001](#); [Forni, 2005](#); [Forni, Siles, & Barreiro, 2004](#); [Ogliastri, 1997](#)) and only one of them ([Forni, Siles, & Barreiro, 2004](#)). resulted from international cooperation between two authors from Argentina and one from the USA (Michigan State University). These data reveal that international cooperation is still small and that international organizations have a relevant role in these investigations and analyses.

Discussion

Comparative studies analyzing the participation of friends in Latin American societies are mainly related to social networks and social capital, especially in the economic and health realms and are still scarce. Friendship relations are part of a complex social system inside contemporary societies, providing a wide field for investigations and requiring the development of more complex theoretical frameworks. Although comparative studies are traditionally more economic in a macro perspective, further studies in the micro dimensions of friendship are also recommended. In this paper, the social importance of friendship is highlighted as relevant for economic and health behavior, together with family relations, affecting the life of Latin American people in their survival conditions, access to resources and opportunities. This social complexity also suggests that friendships, as part of the social tissue, should be further investigated. As part of political, social, economic, and cultural systems such relationships contribute to the use of data from different scientific disciplines, as demography, population studies, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, developmental psychology, economy, and family studies to endorse a complex reference system for investigating friendships.

The relevance of systemic approaches to the investigation of interpersonal relationships have already been stressed by [Hinde \(1997\)](#), who proposed the importance of considering different levels of complexity in the investigation of relationships. Hinde included social groups and societies as levels above interactions and relationships. We should also mention [Adams and Blieszner \(1994\)](#), who integrated psychological and sociological dimensions in a theoretical model for the investigations of friendship.

This paper aimed at contributing to widen and deepen the investigation of friendship as a complex system affecting society, focusing on comparative Latin American studies. This means that friendship, beyond affecting psychological and social dimensions, also affects economic activity and job market, health promotion, migration and its outcomes, as well as other aspects of society. In these studies, Latin American cultural aspects are also revealed, as peculiar social, political and economic contexts. Further comparative studies on cultural products about friendship in Latin America are also necessary. These may also require wider and more complex theoretical models and frameworks. Friendship is also relevant for social organization and democracy, since friends may cooperate or help each other.

The development of comparative studies in Latin America, including social networks and friendship, would profit from the development of scientific cooperation in the continent, as proposed by [Garcia, Acevedo-Triana, and López-López \(2014, 2015\)](#). Further information on social networks and friendships would contribute to the under-

standing of cultural, historical and social elements related to social organization and structure. This would also contribute to the development of a more integrated science of social relationships, fostering the comprehension of how different contexts play a role in such phenomena and help national and local governments and international organizations to develop different actions for a more equalitarian and just society in Latin America. One based on democratic political and social relationships, including friendships.

Final Remarks

Interpersonal relationships are at the basis of the social structure and dynamics and should be analyzed in several levels of complexity. In this paper, Latin American social studies from a comparative perspective involving friends, usually as part of social networks, were presented and discussed. We highlighted the relevant participation of friends in Latin American society, and how cultural, political and historical contexts affect friendships. Further investigations should contribute to increase knowledge on friendships from a Latin American perspective, also encouraging a deeper integration of different scientific disciplines to promote the expansion of studies on friendships and to integrate micro and macro approaches.

Competing Interests

The first author (Agnaldo Garcia) is the Editor of *Interpersona*. The last author (Fábio Nogueira Pereira) is an Associate Editor of *Interpersona*.

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