

Gender Segregation in Peer Relationships and its Association with Peer Reputation

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Abstract

Background: Segregation by gender when relating to peers is a well-known phenomenon, with important implications for the development of children and adolescents. The objective of this study was to deeply analyze the intra and intergender relationships that young people establish with their peers, as well as the link that these relationships have with social reputation. **Method:** 593 youngsters (50.1% girls) from 5th and 6th years of Primary Education, and 1st and 2nd years of Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE) completed a sociometric test and a social reputation test. **Results:** The main results indicate that girls had a higher number of positive reciprocities with other girls, whereas boys tended to have conflictive intragender relationships. We confirmed that the relationships between the different sociometric indices and social reputation were different in boys and girls. Thus, for example, aggression and sociability were differently related to the establishment of intergender relationships in boys and girls. **Conclusions:** The results related to previous research are discussed, and some possible educational implications are noted.

Keywords: Gender segregation, sociometric indices, peer relationships, social reputation; gender differences.

Resumen

La Segregación por Género en las Relaciones Entre Iguales y su Relación con la Reputación Social. Antecedentes: la segregación por género a la hora de relacionarse con los iguales es un fenómeno conocido, y que tiene importantes repercusiones en el desarrollo de niños/as y adolescentes. El objetivo de este trabajo es profundizar en el análisis de las relaciones intra e intergénero que los/as jóvenes establecen con sus compañeros, así como el vínculo que dichas relaciones tienen con la reputación social. **Método:** 593 jóvenes (50,1% chicas) de 5º y 6º de primaria, y 1º y 2º de la ESO completaron un test sociométrico y una prueba de reputación social. **Resultados:** los principales resultados señalan que las chicas tienen un mayor número de reciprocidades positivas con otras chicas, mientras que los chicos tienden a tener relaciones intragénero conflictivas. Se comprueba que las relaciones que mantienen los diferentes índices sociométricos con la reputación social son diferentes en chicos y chicas. Así, por ejemplo, la agresividad y la sociabilidad se relacionan con el establecimiento de relaciones intergénero manera diferente en chicos y chicas. **Conclusiones:** se discuten los resultados en función de la investigación previa, y se apuntan algunas posibles implicaciones educativas.

Palabras clave: segregación por género, índices sociométricos, relaciones entre iguales, reputación social, diferencias de género.

Together with families, schools are the main contexts in which socialization occurs (Shaffer, 2002; Trianes et al., 2007) and also one of the most important scenarios in which peer interactions take place. These horizontal relationships play an essential role in the cognitive, affective, social, and moral development of youngsters and adolescents (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Rabaglietti et al., 2014), hence the interest in this field of research. Two of the most commonly used variables are sociometric status and social reputation because they are usually measured through tests based on peer nominations, such as sociometric testing and descriptive matching techniques, respectively, which have high ecological validity (Cillessen & Bukoski, 2000; Muñoz et al., 2008). The procedures used to perform sociometric classifications are based

on the count of peer choices and rejections of a classmate, while descriptive matching tests consist of peers pointing out which classmate or classmates best match several behavioral characteristics (Díaz-Aguado, 2006; Masten et al., 1985; Muñoz et al., 2008). Two of the aspects that have aroused the most research interest have been the analysis of gender differences and the stability in the two variables throughout schooling (García-Bacete et al., 2008; Plazas et al., 2010).

Studies that have analyzed gender differences in social reputation have found consistent results, as girls tend to have a more positive social reputation and are described as more sociable and mature than boys, who are often described as more aggressive, disruptive, and immature (Crapanzano et al., 2011; Martín, 2016; Muñoz et al., 2008; Rose & Rudolph, 2006). In terms of sociometric status, research has indicated gender differences because the rejection and controversial sociometric types are more common in boys, whereas the average and ignored types are more prevalent in girls (García-Bacete et al., 2008). Concerning their stability throughout schooling, both sociometric status and social reputation seem to remain stable over time, with only small variations observed in the

case of girls (García-Bacete et al., 2008; Martín, 2016; Martín & Muñoz de Bustillo, 2009a).

Sociometric status and social reputation are closely related, as the former is determined by behavioral characteristics. Thus, receiving many positive nominations is associated with sociability and maturity, whereas receiving many rejections is often associated with aggression. The rejected status has aroused the most research interest, as it predicts problems of personal, school, and social adjustment, and its relationship with social reputation is full of nuances. García-Bacete et al. (2010) stated that there are different subtypes of rejected students and, whereas rejected boys have a prototypical profile defined by high levels of aggression and immaturity, rejected girls fall into the medium subtype, characterized by low levels of aggressiveness and by isolation. Other authors (Martín, 2016; McEachen & Snyder, 2012; van de Schoot et al., 2010) have found that aggressiveness does not predict rejection in boys, but it does so in girls. This is probably because aggressiveness is more widespread in males and does not involve peer rejection in all cases, as it is a characteristic that can be considered positive for certain competitive activities (Freitas et al., 2019; Martín & Muñoz de Bustillo, 2009a). In contrast, aggressiveness is a less common feature in girls, where it is strongly associated with rejection (McEachen & Snyder, 2012). However, the relationship between aggressiveness and peer rejection seems to be modulated by the kind of aggression. Lee (2009) found that, in the case of boys, the kind of aggression most related to rejection is verbal aggression, whereas, in the case of girls, it is relational aggression.

Another aspect that has aroused interest is that of gender segregation in the establishment of friendships because it also has important implications for development at all levels. Research in this field (Card et al., 2005; Dijkstra & Berger, 2018; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; Mehta & Strough, 2009) concluded that gender segregation when establishing friendships is a widespread phenomenon, which is maintained throughout the life cycle. Although romantic relationships appear with the arrival of adolescence, for other aspects, such as friendship, study, or leisure, both boys and girls still prefer to establish intragender relationships. Thus, for example, when seeking help for academic tasks, they tend to turn to peers of the same gender (Martin et al., 2014), and requests for help among girls are the most common (Amemiya & Wang, 2017; van Rijsewijk et al., 2016; Zander et al., 2019). The review of Mehta and Strough (2009) concluded that there are several causes for this segregation, such as behavioral compatibility, communication styles, or even institutional barriers that make it difficult for intergender relationships to be established.

Some studies have shown that gender segregation can have different effects on boys and girls. Thus, establishing relationships with boys can be a risk factor for the appearance of behaviors such as substance use in the case of girls, whereas establishing relationships with girls can be a protective factor in the case of boys (Mrug et al., 2011). In this sense, Ciarrochi et al. (2017) found that boys with high levels of empathy tended to establish a greater number of intergender relationships, which was not the case for girls.

As gender segregation in peer relationships is a relevant phenomenon with important implications for the personal, school, and social development of young people, and it is modulated by complex psychosocial processes (Mehta & Strough, 2009; Mrug et al., 2011), this work aims to deepen our knowledge, and we established three objectives for this purpose.

The first is to analyze whether there are differences between boys and girls when receiving intra- and intergender sociometric nominations, both choices and rejections, as well as in the reciprocities established between peers.

The second objective is to determine whether these nominations vary in the different grades, both in boys and girls.

And finally, we examine the relationships between sociometric rates and social reputation, analyzing whether those relationships are the same or different in the two genders.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample, which included 593 students (50.1% girls) of fifth and sixth grades of Primary Education and first and second grade of Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE), with an average age of 12.2 years ($SD = 0.976$) was used. All participants belonged to 18 public and concerted schools. The distribution of boys and girls (see Table 1) in the different grades is homogeneous, $\chi^2(3) = 2.603, p = .457$.

Instruments

A *Sociometric Test* was used to analyze the nominations received. Nominations were limited to a maximum of three, with the class group being the population of potentially eligible persons. The test consisted of two questions: “Who are the three boys or girls in your class that you like to work with the most?” and “Who are the three boys or girls in your class that you like to work with the least?” This test obtained high test-retest reliability rates, between .77 and .97, as well as significant correlations with other behavioral measures (Cheng et al., 2005).

The Perceptual Attribute Mapping test, originally designed by Díaz-Aguado (2006), and subsequently adapted by Martín and Muñoz de Bustillo (2009b), was used to measure social reputation. This instrument is part of the so-called descriptive matching test group, by which students are asked to point out which classmates best match a given behavioral description (Muñoz et al., 2008). Specifically, 15 attributes are used, which are grouped into three factors: aggressiveness, sociability, and isolation. These factors obtained acceptable reliability indices, with values between .73 and .82 (Martín & Muñoz de Bustillo, 2009b), and are similar to those found in studies conducted with these tests (Masten et al., 1985; Zeller et al., 2003).

Procedure

First, the provincial educational administration was contacted to request the necessary permission to conduct the research.

Table 1
Distribution of Boys and Girls in different Grades

	Girls	Boys
	N (%)	N (%)
5th Grade Primary Education	81 (50.9)	78 (49.1)
6th Grade Primary Education	81 (45.3)	98 (54.7)
1st Grade Compulsory Secondary Education	84 (53.5)	73 (46.5)
2nd Grade Compulsory Secondary Education	51 (52)	47 (48)

Once this permission was obtained, the school headmasters were contacted by letter, requesting their collaboration and explaining the objective of our study. With those who agreed to collaborate, test application was scheduled. This was done after the end of the first semester of the academic year, to ensure that the students knew their classmates well. We explained the purpose of the research and how to complete the tests to the students, with particular care in fifth and sixth grades of Primary Education to ensure their adequate comprehension. The students were ensured at all times of the anonymity of the information collected.

After the tests had been completed, the data from all the classrooms were analyzed. In the case of the Sociometric Test, and following the proposal of Rodríguez and Morera (2001), the following sociometric indices were extracted for each student: number of choices received, number of rejections received, number of positive reciprocities (when you choose someone who also chooses you), number of negative reciprocities (when you reject someone who also rejects you,) and opposite feelings (when you choose someone who rejects you or vice versa). We also took into account whether the nominations had been intra- or intergender, so each student had scores in ten sociometric indices and three social reputation factors. The scores were standardized to counteract the effect of the different Ns of the classrooms.

Data analysis

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed, including the gender and grade variables as independent variables. All sociometric indices were treated as dependent variables. The variance homogeneity hypothesis was rejected using Box’s M (Box’s $M = 1068,800, F = 2.615, p < .001$). Taking this result into account, and following the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidell (2019), we chose to use Pillai’s Trace, which showed significant effects for gender [Pillai’s Trace = .11, $F(10, 576) = 6.936, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$] and grade [Pillai’s Trace = .10, $F(30, 1734) = 2.041, p < .001, \eta^2 = .03$] but not for the interaction between the two variables [Pillai’s Trace = .06, $F(30, 1734) = 1.170, p = .241, \eta^2 = .02$]. Because of these results, bivariate analysis was chosen. Specifically, Student’s t -test was used to analyze the differences between boys and girls in the different sociometric indices. Cohen’s d was used to calculate the effect size, where

values lower than .20 indicate negligible effect sizes, between .20 and .50 small sizes, between .51 and .79 moderate sizes, and equal to and greater than .80 large sizes (Cohen, 1988). To analyze the differences between grades, a one-way ANOVA was performed, using the Bonferroni test for the a posteriori contrasts. Although Pillai’s Trace indicated that there was no interaction effect, a one-way ANOVA was performed for the boys and another one for the girls. Finally, to analyze the relationship of sociometric indices with social reputation, analysis of Pearson’s correlations (r) was performed for each gender, using the procedure recommended by Lee and Preacher (2013) to compare correlations, according to which Z -values greater than 1.96 indicate significant differences. For all other analyses, the SPSS version 24 program was used.

Results

The first objective of this work was to analyze possible differences between boys and girls in the different sociometric indices. Table 2 shows the average scores of girls and boys in these indices. Girls only obtained scores significantly higher than boys in the intragender positive reciprocity index, albeit with a negligible effect size. For their part, boys obtained significantly higher scores than girls in the rates of rejections received, both intra- and intergender, and also in the negative reciprocities and intragender opposite feelings, with a small effect size in these four indices. In the rest of the variables, no significant differences were found, with negligible effect sizes for all these cases.

The second objective was to analyze possible differences depending on the academic grade. The results of one-way ANOVA performed for each gender are shown in Table 3. As can be seen, no significant differences were found in the case of boys but there were differences in the case of girls. Thus, there was an increase in rejections received by other girls in 1st grade of CSE compared to the last primary education grade. There was also a significant increase in positive reciprocities with boys in sixth grade compared to fifth grade of Primary Education. In the case of negative reciprocities with other girls, in the sixth grade of Primary Education, the score was significantly higher than that of the first grade of CSE. Finally, we also found that the score in the opposite feelings index with other girls was significantly higher in the fifth grade of Primary Education than in higher grades.

Table 2
Differences between Boys and Girls in Sociometric Indices

	Girls	Boys	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	M (SD)	M (SD)			
Choices received (intragender)	.08 (.99)	-.03 (1.03)	1.296(591)	<i>ns</i>	.1073
Choices received (intergender)	.01 (1)	-.03 (.95)	.543(591)	<i>ns</i>	.0435
Rejections received (intragender)	-.17 (1.03)	.18 (1.02)	-4.154(590,959)	***	.3483
Rejections received (intergender)	-.2 (.86)	.19 (1.12)	-4.812(554,063)	***	.3942
Positive reciprocities (intragender)	.09 (.98)	-.1 (.96)	2.366(591)	*	.1889
Positive reciprocities (intergender)	-.20 (.78)	.21 (1.16)	-.188(591)	<i>ns</i>	.0435
Negative reciprocities (intragender)	-.19 (.87)	.24 (1.14)	-5.072(514,463)	***	.4115
Negative reciprocities (intergender)	-.08 (.76)	-.02 (.98)	.224(591)	<i>ns</i>	.0171
Opposite feelings (intragender)	-.19 (.87)	.24 (1.14)	-.116(551,578)	***	.4252
Opposite feelings (intergender)	-.08 (.76)	-.02 (.98)	.841(591)	<i>ns</i>	.0608

Note: *t(df)* = Student’s t (degrees of freedom); p = probability; *ns* = nonsignificant; d = Cohen’s d . * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$

Table 3
One-way Analysis of Variance for different Sociometric Indices depending on the Grade for Boys and Girls

		5th PE (a) Z (SD)	6th PE (b) Z (SD)	1st CSE (c) Z (SD)	2nd CSE (d) Z (SD)	F (df = 3)	Bonferroni
Choices received (intragender)	Boy	.08 (1.18)	-.01 (1.08)	-.10 (.92)	-.14 (.79)	.616	
	Girl	.16 (.94)	-.5 (.91)	.14 (1.14)	.43 (.9)	.771	
Choices received (intergender)	Boy	-.17 (.75)	.08 (.99)	-.1 (.83)	.07 (1.29)	1.276	
	Girl	-.11 (.87)	.16 (1.04)	.01 (1.17)	-.04 (.78)	1.034	
Rejections received (intragender)	Boy	.05 (.84)	.23 (1.09)	.26 (1.22)	.16 (.76)	.624	
	Girl	-.17 (.96)	-.42 (.54)	.1 (1.35)	-.22 (1.02)	3.704*	c > b
Rejections received (intergender)	Boy	.158 (1)	.21 (1.17)	.16 (1.25)	.26 (1.03)	.099	
	Girl	-.14 (.99)	-.06 (.88)	-.34 (.72)	-.32 (.78)	1.881	
Positive reciprocities (intragender)	Boy	-.07 (.92)	-.1 (.99)	-.19 (.96)	-.02 (1.02)	.33	
	Girl	.13 (.99)	.001 (.91)	-.01 (1)	.31 (1)	1.342	
Positive reciprocities (intergender)	Boy	-.169 (.59)	.22 (1.39)	.02 (1.04)	.04 (1.24)	1.803	
	Girl	-.18 (.9)	.29 (1.1)	-.02 (.85)	.01 (.92)	3.300*	b > a
Negative reciprocities (intragender)	Boy	.06 (1.02)	.33 (1.17)	.1 (1.22)	.36 (1.26)	1.277	
	Girl	-.17 (.75)	-.43 (.21)	.00 (1.06)	-.23 (.74)	4.562**	c > b
Negative reciprocities (intergender)	Boy	-.05 (.88)	-.05 (.9)	-.12 (1)	-.05 (1.87)	.126	
	Girl	-.02 (1.02)	.09 (1.07)	-.19 (.83)	-.08 (.76)	1.263	
Opposite feelings (intragender)	Boy	.23 (1.17)	.16 (1.1)	.2 (1.1)	.45 (1.26)	.729	
	Girl	.17 (1.29)	-.36 (.49)	-.29 (.68)	-.33 (.62)	6.668***	a > b, c, d
Opposite feelings (intergender)	Boy	-.05 (.81)	-.06 (1.08)	.08 (1.12)	-.07 (.79)	.34	
	Girl	-.15 (.67)	.01 (.87)	-.04 (.82)	-.19 (.6)	1.006	

Note: P = Primary Education, CSE = Compulsory Secondary Education; Z = standardized score; SD= Standard Deviation; df = degrees of freedom. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

The third objective of this work was to determine whether the relationships of the different sociometric indices and social reputation differ between boys and girls. Table 4 shows the correlation indices with the gender-differentiated social reputation factors. No noteworthy differences were found between boys and girls in intra- and intergender choice rates, as they maintained significant and positive correlations with the sociability factor and negative and significant correlations with the aggressiveness and isolation factors. There were also no differences in the intragender rejection indices, and in both cases, they maintained significant and positive correlations with aggressiveness and isolation, and significant and negative correlations with sociability.

There were differences between boys and girls in intergender rejections. Although in both cases, they had significant and positive correlations with aggressiveness and isolation, the magnitude of those correlations was significantly greater for boys. Significant differences were also found in the correlations of some reciprocity indices both for boys and girls. Thus, the relationship of the index of intragender positive reciprocities with aggressiveness was significant and negative in the case of girls but not for boys. There were also significant differences in the correlations between intergender positive reciprocities with sociability. In this case, whereas for girls it was practically null and nonsignificant, for boys, it was significant and positive. Finally, significant differences were also found in the correlations of intragender negative reciprocities with aggressiveness because, although they were significant and positive in both genders, the magnitude was greater for boys.

Table 4
Correlations of Sociometric Indices with Social Reputation Factors for Boys and Girls

		Aggressiveness	Sociability	Isolation
Choices received (intragender)	Boy	-.13*	.45***	-.28***
	Girl	-.16**	.47***	-.22***
Choices received (intergender)	Boy	-.15*	.46***	-.18**
	Girl	-.08	.38***	-.19**
Rejections received (intragender)	Boy	.47***	-.32***	.37***
	Girl	.55***	-.24***	.30***
Rejections received (intergender)	Boy	.52***	-.30***	.45***
	Girl	.26***	-.22***	.26***
Positive reciprocities (intragender)	Boy	-.06	.26***	-.13*
	Girl	-.18**	.30***	-.13*
Positive reciprocities (intergender)	Boy	-.08	.26***	-.09
	Girl	-.06	.09	-.09
Negative reciprocities (intragender)	Boy	.22***	-.19**	.17**
	Girl	.36***	-.11	.24***
Negative reciprocities (intergender)	Boy	.26***	-.14**	.20***
	Girl	.18**	-.12*	.13*
Opposite feelings (intragender)	Boy	.14*	-.06	.16**
	Girl	.23***	-.07	.19**
Opposite feelings (intergender)	Boy	.12*	-.05	.12*
	Girl	.05	-.13*	.1

Note: Correlations with significant differences, with a z-score > 1.96, are represented in bold. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Discussion

This work established three objectives. The first was to analyze whether there are differences between boys and girls in the different sociometric indices taking into account the gender of the nominator, as well as the reciprocities. The results show, firstly, that boys receive more rejections than girls, both intra- and intergender. These results are in line with what research has indicated: rejection is a phenomenon that mostly affects boys (García-Bacete et al., 2008; Martín, 2016; McEachen & Snyder, 2012; Plazas et al., 2010). Differences are also observed when analyzing reciprocities. Thus, girls have a higher number of positive reciprocities with other girls, compared to those established by boys with other boys. Instead, boys obtain a higher score than girls in negative reciprocities and intragender opposite feelings. Possibly the differences in social reputation, which indicate that girls are more sociable and boys are more aggressive and immature (Crapanzano et al., 2011; Martín, 2016; Muñoz et al., 2008; Rose & Rudolph, 2006), underlie this different way of relating to peers of the same gender. Also, the fact that girls tend to choose cooperative activities more than boys, who choose competitive activities such as personal challenges may influence this outcome (Mehta & Strough, 2009). Another explanation could be drawn from the results of Freitas et al. (2019), which point out that, for boys, having conflicts with peers could be perceived as a positively valued quality.

The second of the objectives of this work was to determine whether sociometric indices change depending on the academic grade and whether they change equally in boys and girls. The results generally corroborate those found in previous investigations and point to clear temporal stability (García-Bacete et al., 2008; Martín, 2016). However, some differences were found in the case of girls, which mostly occur in negative indices with other girls: rejections received, negative reciprocities, and opposite feelings. A possible explanation lies in the differences between boys and girls when establishing friendships because, while relationships between boys are more extensive and superficial, in the case of girls, they are more intense and exclusive (Baines & Blatchford, 2009), so when girls break up, this can generate conflicts. Also, in the case of girls, there is a considerable decrease in positive reciprocities with boys in the change from Primary Education to CSE, a change that usually also leads to changing classmates.

The third and final objective of this work was to examine the relationships of peer nominations with social reputation, analyzing whether these relationships are the same or different according to gender. For this purpose, correlation analyses were carried out for boys and girls between the sociometric indices and the three factors of social reputation. A first result is that the relationships of social reputation with the choices received, regardless of the nominator's gender, are similar in boys and girls, finding negative correlations with aggressiveness and isolation and positive correlations with sociability. As far as the rejection indices received are concerned, their relationships with social reputation go in the opposite direction, that is, they correlate positively with aggressiveness and isolation and negatively with sociability. These results are in line with those of previous research (García-Bacete et al., 2010; Martín, 2016). However, the magnitude of the correlations is significantly greater when girls reject boys than for the opposite direction (i.e., boys rejecting girls). This result could be explained by the fact that girls tend to get together with other classmates to perform cooperative activities (Mehta & Strough, 2009), which would lead

to a greater rejection of behaviors that hinder this type of activity, which are more frequent in boys.

Significant differences were also found in the case of intragender positive reciprocities. Thus, whereas in the case of boys, there is no relation with aggressiveness, in the case of girls, it is negative. A possible explanation for why this relationship is not observed in the case of boys may be that certain aggressive behaviors can be positively valued by their classmates (Freitas et al., 2019; Martín & Muñoz de Bustillo, 2009a; Mehta & Strough, 2009), which is not the case for girls, who choose to perform activities that are incompatible with aggressiveness (Mehta & Strough, 2009). In the intergender positive reciprocities, there are also differences between boys and girls. Thus, whereas for girls, there is no relationship with sociability, for boys, there is a positive and significant correlation. These results go in line with those found by Ciarrochi et al. (2017), indicating that high levels of empathy in boys favor the establishment of intergender friendships, which is not the case in girls. On the other hand, Mrug et al. (2011) found that having relationships with girls promotes sociability in boys, acting as a protective factor against the development of risky behaviors. Statistically significant differences also appear in the correlations between intragender negative reciprocities and aggressiveness. Although in both cases, they are positive, the magnitude is significantly greater in the case of girls. Card et al. (2005) found that there is more consensus among girls when nominating each other as aggressive because relational aggression predominates among girls, whereas, in boys, physical aggression, which is not as reciprocal as relational aggression, is more common. This could explain the differences in the magnitude of the correlations.

We reach two main conclusions through this work. The first is that gender-segregated relationships are different for boys and girls. Thus, girls tend to establish more positive relationships with other girls, and this may vary slightly throughout schooling. In contrast, boys tend to have more conflictive relationships with each other, a feature that tends to remain stable throughout schooling.

The second conclusion is that the relationships of sociometric indices with social reputation are different in boys and girls. Thus, it is established that, for girls, the absence of aggression seems to be a requirement to be able to establish relationships with other girls. On the other hand, for boys, sociability seems to be a requirement to establish relationships with girls, but aggressiveness does not hinder the establishment of relationships with other boys and it can be positively valued in certain circumstances.

We do not want to conclude this work without commenting on some of its main limitations. Although statistically significant differences were found, we cannot ignore the fact that the magnitudes of the effect sizes and differences in the correlations are usually small, which means that the conclusions should be taken with caution. On another hand, the analysis of stability throughout schooling was done through a cross-sectional design, so in the future, it is recommended to analyze the stability of the target variables with longitudinal designs. One last limitation is that this work has focused on the recipients of the nominations, not the issuers. In this sense, it might be interesting in future research to analyze whether the results found in this work vary depending on the profile of the issuer. For example, would a girl who has a profile closer to the male gender in social reputation nominate similarly to boys or would she still be in line with her gender?

However, despite these limitations, we consider that the results of this work are of particular interest to deepen knowledge of the

interpersonal relationships that boys and girls establish with each other. Thus, these findings point to the desirability of fostering relationships with peers of the opposite sex, especially in the case of boys, as a means to enhance their prosociality and adjustment, both

personal, school, and social. In this sense, the Education System faces an important challenge to minimize the risks that gender segregation has in young people. Rethinking the design of activities, as well as how and how often equality is addressed, could help.

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