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Informal Status among Hungarian Early Adolescents

**Popularity, Coolness, and Acceptance from a Mixed
Methods Perspective**

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Science**

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PhD Thesis

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1. Introduction

1.1. Informal status among adolescents

Peer relations are one of the most central aspects of adolescents' lives. Teachers, parents, policy makers, and adolescents themselves are all greatly concerned with the challenges and impacts of such interpersonal and group-level relations as friendships, popularity, rejection, or bullying. This high level of interest is understandable as both personal experience and an extensive body of scientific research demonstrate that these relationships have a huge impact on a wide variety of factors including emotional well-being, mental health, psychological development, school adjustment, academic performance, as well as the inclination to be engaged in different forms of risk behaviour such as aggression, substance use, early sexual experience, or juvenile delinquency (Parker et al., 2006; Rubin et al., 2015). One's position in the informal status hierarchy among peers seems to have particular importance for adolescents in many cultural contexts (see for instance Coleman, 1961b), which in turn heavily impacts the other forms of peer relations such as the possibility of obtaining the desired friendships or romantic relationships, as well as the probability of general acceptance or rejection, and even the chances of becoming a perpetrator or a victim of bullying (e.g. de Bruyn et al., 2009). Research among American children and adolescents has found that the importance of popularity (one form of status) is the highest in early adolescence, frequently prioritized over personal relationships and academic goals (e.g. LaFontana and Cillessen, 2010). Nothing demonstrates better the ubiquity and salience of informal peer hierarchies than its prevalence in popular culture including several best-selling books and films, such as the American teen comedy *Mean Girls*, which was largely based on Rosalind Wiseman's book *Queen Bees and Wannabees*, or the Hungarian novel *A Pál utcai fiúk* (The Paul Street Boys) by Ferenc Molnár.

This dissertation investigates informal status among Hungarian early adolescents, more specifically among primary school students in grades five and six (age 11-13). When children enter formal schooling (in most countries at the age of six or seven), the number of their peer contacts increases significantly, which substantially transforms their peer experience. As they progress towards adolescence, the salience and amount of time they spend with their peers also increases sharply (Parker et al., 2006). By the time they reach secondary school, (American) adolescents may spend up to a third of their waking

hours with peers, even after discounting classroom instruction, which is more than twice the time they spend with parents and other adults (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984, cited by Parker et al., 2006). For most kids, this means primarily time spent with their classmates/schoolmates, in particular in the case of schools which are predominantly attended by pupils from the same residential area. Consequently, studying informal peer dynamics among classmates seems a natural choice, and indeed the empirical literature has almost exclusively investigated informal/peer status in the school context. Focusing on early adolescents provides the benefit of focusing on a developmental period when the salience of peer status is often the highest. Our sample provides the opportunity to investigate the first years of early adolescence, when pupils start to distinguish reputation (e.g. popularity) from social preference (liking or disliking someone).

In spite of the ubiquity of status hierarchies in human societies, the meaning of *status* is somewhat muddled as different scholars have conceptualized it somewhat differently (Leary et al., 2014). Nevertheless, it is generally understood as the *prestige* or *esteem* individuals enjoy relative to the prestige or esteem individuals at a different level of the status hierarchy have (e.g. Anderson et al., 2015; Leary et al., 2014; Ridgeway, 2014). Furthermore, there is a shared understanding that people who obtain a high position in the status hierarchy are more influential and powerful than people in lower status positions. In this dissertation, I understand status in line with these traditions and will refer to it as *informal* or *peer status*, in order to distinguish it from other applications of the term *status*, for instance from socio-economic status. The peer relations literature typically conceptualizes (informal) status as a multidimensional construct and makes a distinction between a *reputational* dimension, which is related to power, prestige, and visibility within the peer group, and a dimension that is related to *social preference* (Cillessen and Marks, 2011). The reputational dimension is most frequently measured by the construct of (perceived) *popularity*, while social preference is measured by the constructs of *acceptance*, *likeability*, or *preference*.¹ Empirical evidence extensively supports the argument that, starting from early adolescence, these two status dimensions

¹ Technically, the sociometric tradition of peer relations research calculates *acceptance/likeability* from the positive (like) peer nominations and *preference* from the difference between the positive (like) and negative (dislike) nominations (see Cillessen and Marks, 2011; Coie et al., 1982). However, in several studies preference is used synonymously to acceptance/likeability. Additionally, the qualitative (ethnographic) tradition often uses the terms *status* and *popularity* synonymously. Chapter 3 of this dissertation discusses the conceptualization and measurement of these constructs in more details.

are only moderately correlated distinct constructs and, as students progress towards late adolescence, this distinction gets stronger, in particular for girls (van den Berg et al., 2020). In addition to *popularity*, some researchers have started to experiment with alternative constructs to capture the reputational dimension of peer status. Most prominently, the concept of *coolness* has been used as an alternative, which, these scholars argue, is the ‘embodiment of some combination of attributes that wins approval or earns the attention of others’ (Jamison et al., 2015: 384). My research, in line with the majority of the empirical literature, understands peer status as a multidimensional social construct and will investigate the affective dimension with *acceptance* and the reputational dimension with *popularity* and *coolness* (for details about the popularity/coolness distinction see Chapter 2).

In the empirical literature, peer status has been associated with a wide range of behavioural and personality correlates including athleticism, aggression, prosociality, risk behaviour, academic performance, academic engagement, physical attractiveness, involvement in romantic relationships, leadership abilities, and extraversion. In spite of the fact that the quantitative (sociometric) and the qualitative (ethnographic) literature have sometimes reached divergent results, there is a general consensus that among adolescents athleticism, prosociality, physical attractiveness, and extraversion are positively associated with both popularity and acceptance; aggression is positively associated with popularity but negatively with acceptance, some forms of risk behaviour (e.g. substance use) are positively associated with popularity but typically not associated with acceptance, whereas the other correlates show significant context-specific and cross-cultural variation.² In addition to these general tendencies, there are important gender and ethnic/racial differences to consider. First, gender segregation in childhood is widely documented. Several theorists propose that due to the predominantly same-sex interactions at this age, distinct playing and interaction styles develop, which in turn results in the development of distinct peer cultures, where children are socialized into different expectations and behaviour regarding relationships (Underwood, 2007). For instance, boys typically play in larger groups and are engaged in more competitive activities than girls (Rose et al., 2011). Although these theoretical approaches primarily intend to account for gender differences in friendship and behaviour, they could also be adapted to

² For a detailed overview of the theoretical and empirical literature related to peer status see Chapter 3.

peer status. In early adolescence, a developmental period when cross-sex interactions begin to increase, we could expect ‘gender-typical’ behaviour to increasingly predict peer status, while ‘gender-atypical’ behaviour to predict unpopularity/rejection (Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019; Rose et al., 2011). Indeed, the available evidence suggests that athleticism and overt aggression are more strongly associated with boys’ peer status, whereas prosocial behaviour, relational aggression, and physical attractiveness may be more strongly associated with girls’ status (see Chapter 3 for more details). Second, racially and ethnically segregated friendships, which are often observable even in desegregated schools (Moody, 2001), may also lead to the development of distinct peer subcultures. For instance, some evidence suggests that in certain settings popularity may be more strongly associated with aggression (e.g. Luthar and McMahon, 1996; Meisinger et al., 2007) and academic disengagement (e.g. Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Fryer and Torelli, 2010) for Black American students than for White Americans. It is conceivable that similar racial/ethnic differences in informal status may be present in other cultural contexts, for instance between Roma and non-Roma students in Hungary.

Importantly, the vast majority of the empirical literature on peer status comes from North America and Western Europe, in particular from the United States and the Netherlands. The available literature from other cultural contexts underlines the salience of cross-cultural comparison. For instance, research among Chinese adolescents have showed positive association between academic achievement and popularity (Li et al., 2012a; Niu et al., 2016), an association which is not typical in the ‘Western’ context. Similarly, cross-country comparisons have found the association between prosociality and popularity to be stronger for Chinese than for American (Li et al., 2012a) or Australian (Owens et al., 2014) students. The authors explain this difference with the collectivist cultural context in China, which puts larger emphasis on social harmony. Empirical findings from other ‘non-Western’ contexts could contribute to the greater understanding of cross-cultural differences in peer status. Formerly socialist Central and Eastern European countries (e.g. Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, or the Czech Republic) could provide one such context. For instance, according to Hofstede and colleagues’ cross-country comparison of cultural dimensions, Hungary has similarly low scores on power distance and high scores on individualism as the Northwestern European and

‘Anglo’ countries (e.g. US, UK, Canada), while in ranks much higher on uncertainty avoidance and restraint scores, closer to most Asian countries (Hofstede et al., 2010).

The dissertation intends to address the gaps outlined above. First, it wishes to contribute to the understanding of cross-cultural differences in informal status (popularity, coolness, and acceptance) among early adolescents by investigating status dynamics in a context that is arguably different from both the typical ‘Western’ and the Asian context. Second, it intends to address interethnic and gender differences in a sample with a large proportion of ethnic Roma students (approximately one third of the sample, see Chapter 2). Third, it also wishes to make some methodological contribution to the investigation of peer relations. Although James Coleman relied on both surveys and interviews in the research reported in his classic book *The Adolescent Society* (Coleman, 1961b), subsequent research on peer status largely separated to a quantitative and a qualitative strand. The quantitative tradition predominantly relies on surveys containing sociometric peer nominations, whereas the qualitative tradition primarily applies ethnographic methods. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, research that involves multiple methods is rare (for an exception see Eder and Kinney, 1995; Garner et al., 2006). This relative absence of mixed research is understandable to some degree considering the multiple challenges that mixed methods integration poses (see Chapter 2). Possibly, the fact that the qualitative strand has primarily employed ethnographic methods further inhibited the application of mixed research. Although ethnographic studies produce in-depth high-quality data that provide a very deep understanding of peer dynamics, they also imply the researcher spending a substantial amount of time (months or even a year) in *one* school, whereas survey methods typically require data collections from several schools in order to create a sample large enough for meaningful statistical analysis. In the dissertation, I will present a possible framework for the integration of the analyses of survey and interview data. My qualitative data come from group interviews, which admittedly provides a less in-depth insight than ethnographic research would; nevertheless, I will show that this form of data can also add valuable contributions to the analysis. Furthermore, interviews are much more compatible with surveys as they can also easily be conducted in multiple schools. The research goals outlined in this paragraph will be revisited in section 1.3., after a brief overview of the Hungarian context (education system and prior research on peer relations) in the following section.

1.2. The Hungarian context

1.2.1. The Hungarian education system

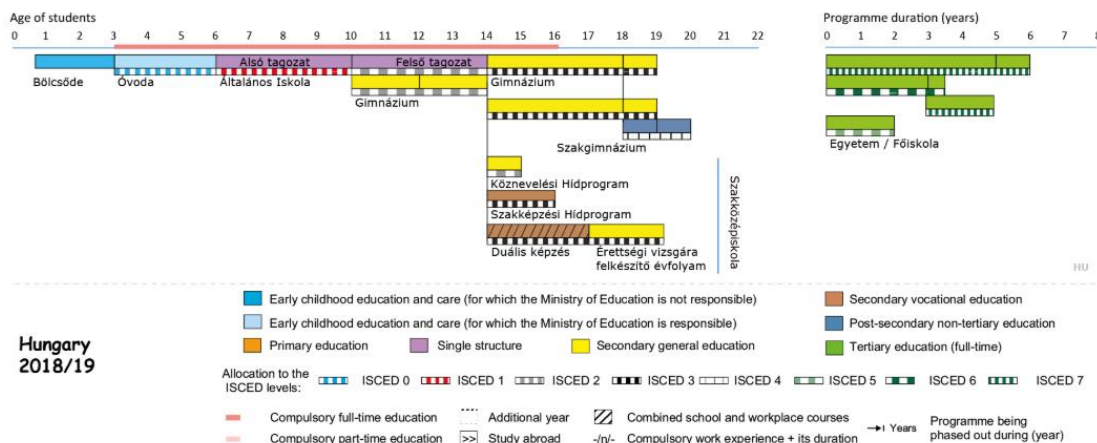
As the research presented in this dissertation is embedded in the school context, it may be useful to provide a brief overview of the Hungarian education system (Figure 1 below provides a visual overview of the different educational levels and tracks). In Hungary, the vast majority, approximately 90 per cent, of children attend public sector institutions (Eurydice, n.d.). Currently, these institutions are maintained by the state at the primary and secondary school levels, while kindergartens are maintained by local authorities.³ Additionally, legal entities such as churches or foundations can also establish and maintain educational institutions. Since 2015, the second phase of early childhood education, kindergarten (*óvoda*), is compulsory from the age of three and lasts until the age of six when children enter primary education.⁴ Following the first four years of primary education (*alsó tagozat*), different educational tracks are available: students can either continue their primary education until the eighth grade (*felső tagozat*), or they can enrol to an eight-year secondary school following the fourth grade or to a six-year secondary school following the sixth grade. Those who finish the first eight grades in primary schools have three secondary school tracks to choose from: a general secondary (*gimnázium*), a vocational secondary (*szakgimnázium*), and a vocational training (*szakközépiskola*) track.⁵ The general secondary and vocational secondary tracks normally last four years at the end of which students can take the so-called maturity exams (*érettségi*), which enable them to enrol to higher education. The vocational training track lasts three years and does not end with the maturity exams, however, students can enter a two-year program at the end of which they can take the maturity exams. Education is currently compulsory until the age of 16. The post-secondary and tertiary levels of education, due to the focus of the dissertation, will not be described here.

³ The state took over the maintenance of schools from municipalities in 2013.

⁴ Prior to 2015, only the last year of kindergarten was compulsory. Before 2020, children could start primary education either at the age of six or seven, depending on the decision of the parents, kindergarten teachers and the month of birth. However, a government decree issued in 2019 restricted the possibilities of starting primary education at the age of seven.

⁵ The names of the school types were changed in 2016. Prior to that, schools in the vocational secondary track were called *szakközépiskola* and schools of the vocational training track were called *szakmunkásképző*. Simultaneous with this change, in schools with the vocational secondary track (*szakgimnázium*), the ratio of vocational to general subjects has changed in favour of vocational subjects.

Figure 1: An overview of the Hungarian education system (source: Eurydice, n.d.)⁶



The major challenges facing the Hungarian education system are related, similarly to many other countries, to the problems of *quality* and *equity*. Several scholars and practitioners from the pedagogical field have argued that the content, pedagogical methods and environment, as well as the structure of the education system are not fit to meet the needs and challenges of the 21st century (see for instance Civil Közoktatás Platform, 2016; Csapó, 2008, 2019; Lannert, 2018).⁷ Indeed, Hungary shows constant underperformance in the OECD PISA competence-based educational surveys (Csapó et al., 2019; OECD, 2016, 2019), while on the more curricula-based IEA TIMSS and PIRLS surveys, the country performs around average or in some cases above average (Csapó et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2016; Mullis et al., 2016, 2017). With regards to equity, the first important point is that the Hungarian educational system is highly selective (Radó, 2018), which means that most of the educational inequalities can be explained by inter-school differences (contrary to an integrative school systems, where most of the variability in educational performance could be explained by intra-school differences). Importantly,

⁶ Currently, early childhood education and primary and secondary education belong to the Ministry of Human Capacities, while higher education, vocational training and adult education to the Ministry of Innovation and Technology. Since 2010, contrary to what is written in the legend of the graph, there is no Ministry of Education, but a State Secretariat for Public Education within the Ministry of Human Capacities which is responsible for the second phase of early childhood education (*óvoda*) and for primary and secondary education, while the State Secretariat for Family and Youth Affairs within the same ministry is responsible for the first stage of early childhood education (*bölcsőde*).

⁷ A heated debate has re-emerged recently about the content of education after the publication of the New National Curricula (Magyar Közlöny, 2020) in January 2020.

this selectiveness shows strong associations with social background: students with disadvantaged social background are much more likely to receive lower quality education and follow less advantageous educational tracks (see for instance Berényi, 2016, 2018; Fejes and Szűcs, 2018; Radó, 2018). This strong connection between social background and educational outcomes is also shown by the OECD PISA results (Csapó et al., 2019), which consistently find this association to be one of the highest among the developed countries, as well as by studies of intergenerational educational mobility (e.g. Róbert, 2019). Additionally, the education system not only tends to concentrate students with similar socio-economic background into the same institutions, but the segregation of ethnic Roma students is also widespread (see e.g. Havas et al., 2002; Kertesi and Kézdi, 2012; Zolnay, 2016). This high level of social and ethnic segregation might be surprising considering the facts that most students attend free public schools and Hungarian laws explicitly forbid educational segregation (Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities Act, 2003). Sociologists and educational researchers have identified multiple factors and dynamics behind this process, most importantly the free choice of schools (e.g. Berényi, 2018; Hricsovinyi and Józsa, 2018; Kiss, 2016), the great variety of educational tracks offered even at an early age (e.g. Hajdu et al., 2014), and the increasing proportion and role of church schools (e.g. Ercse, 2018, 2019; Ercse and Radó, 2019).

The widespread segregation of ethnic Roma students cannot be understood only in terms of disadvantaged social background. On the one hand, the Roma, who are the largest ethnic minority of the country, do have (on average) much lower levels of education, household income, labour market participation, and worse housing conditions than the non-Roma population (e.g. Bernát, 2019; Kemény et al., 2004). On the other hand, they also face the widespread prejudice of their non-Roma peers in the school (e.g. Váradi, 2014) and the wider society (Keresztes-Takács et al., 2016), simultaneously with labour market discrimination (e.g. Pálosi et al., 2007) and residential segregation (Ladányi and Virág, 2009).

1.2.2. Prior research on Hungarian peer relations

A significant portion of the current Hungarian sociometric peer relations literature comes from two longitudinal researches conducted by the MTA TK ‘Lendület’ RECENS Research Group at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences: a secondary school (2010-2013) and a primary school panel data collection (2013-2017). In both samples, ethnic Roma students were overrepresented relative to their proportion in the national education system, thus these databases provide the possibility to also model interethnic relations, which, consequently, was in the focus of many of the related studies. Besides their empirical contribution to the scarce Hungarian literature, the network approach many of these studies take also contributes to our theoretical understanding of the complexities of peer dynamics and ethnicity. While most empirical research considers race and ethnicity as ‘fixed’, unambiguous individual attributes, a growing body of literature has emphasized the (occasional) ‘fluidity’ and ambiguity of these categories, dependent on the social context, identity and classification processes, the situational salience of ethnicity, and some other factors (e.g. Barth, 1969; Jiménez, 2010; Saperstein and Penner, 2012; Wimmer, 2008). In particular, both in the Hungarian (Csepeli et al., 2014; Csepeli and Simon, 2004; Ladányi and Szelényi, 2001) and the international literature (e.g. Telles, 2002; Telles and Lim, 1998; Telles and Paschel, 2014) studies have demonstrated that self-identification and different external classifications show a great degree of ‘fluidity’. Studies on the RECENS secondary school database contribute to this literature by comparing self-identification and peer-classification, taking a social network perspective. The results show that ethnic majority students dislike those peers that they perceive as ethnic minority, regardless of these students’ self-identification, while ethnic minority students dislike those peers whom they perceive as Roma but who do not self-identify as Roma (Boda, 2015; Boda and Néray, 2015). With regards to friendships, interethnic friendships seems to be of lower quality, less characterised by trust and spending the free time together than intra-ethnic friendships, both in the case of self-identification and ethnic perception (Kisfalusi, 2016b). Another study (Néray, 2017) emphasizes that negative ties describe interracial segregation better than friendships; and indeed, a study on bullying (Kisfalusi et al., 2018) shows that both self-identified Roma and non-Roma students are more likely to bully peers they perceive as Roma, while self-identified ethnicity was not associated with victimization. Importantly, peer ethnic classification

depends on a variety of factors, including interethnic acceptance, the number of ethnic majority and minority friends, and peers', in particular friends', judgement about one's ethnicity (Boda, 2018). Additionally, majority students tend to select friends whom they perceive as members of the majority, while minority students tend to categorize their existing friends as minority pupils (Boda, 2019). This preference for same ethnic peers is also underlined by the observation of interethnic dating (Lőrincz, 2016).

Studies on the secondary school database also contribute to our understanding of status perception and attribution. Pál and colleagues (Pál et al., 2016) studied the dyadic characteristics of status perception through the comparison of direct (looking up/down on someone) and indirect (others looking up/down on someone) status attributions. Their results show that students are more likely to dislike those peers whom they look down on as well as those peers whom they do not look up to but they perceive that their peers do. Importantly, they also tend to dislike peers whom they do not look down on but perceive that their peers do. While it is often customary in network research to deduce status from friendship nominations, the meta-analysis of Vörös and colleagues (Vörös et al., 2019), which includes the RECENS secondary school database, shows that there is only moderate correlation between friendship nominations and status attribution, which underlines the importance of direct and indirect status attribution measures. Finally, ability attributions to peers might also be influenced by characteristics that are related to status differences in the wider society, such as gender or ethnicity. Grow and colleagues (Grow et al., 2016) found that both Roma and non-Roma respondents were less likely to nominate Roma peers as 'smart', even after controlling for friendship and academic achievement, while no such tendency was observable in the case of gender. Interestingly, a study of the same attributions on the RECENS primary school database (Kisfalusi et al., 2019) found that respondents were more likely to nominate their in-group peers as 'smart' both in terms of gender and ethnicity (with the exception of boys, who were as likely to nominate girls and boys as clever).

Studies addressing the question of peer status on the RECENS primary school database tend to apply measures of social preference based on friendship nominations, the combination of friendship and antipathy nominations (Habsz and Radó, 2018), or the combination of friendship nominations and direct and indirect status attributions (Havelda, 2016; cf. also Mandácskó and Panyik, 2014 on the secondary school database),

while only one study (Pethes, 2015) involves the direct nomination of perceived status (conceptualized as ‘coolness’).⁸ Pethes found that students who owned smartphones and those who were considered as ‘smart’ had both more friends and were perceived as cooler, while academic performance had no impact on either of these dimensions (Pethes, 2015). Aggression was negatively associated with the number of friends, while it had no association with perceived coolness. On average, boys were considered cooler than girls, while Roma students were considered both cooler and had more friends in classes with Roma majority. Another study on the primary school database (Havelda, 2016) has found that academic competition had a negative impact both on friendship nominations and direct status attribution (looking up on someone), while competition in sports was positively associated with negative status attribution (looking down on someone). In the secondary school database, Mandácskó and Panyik (2014) found that smoking was positively associated with both the number of friends and indirect status attribution (others looking up on someone). The RECENS research group also conducted a smaller scale secondary school research in 2009-2010 in preparation for the larger four-year secondary school research. One study on this database (Boda and Vörös, 2013) found negative association between diligence and the direct nominations of popularity.

We have seen earlier that a significant portion of the Roma population in Hungary is socially marginalized, facing educational, residential and labour market segregation and discrimination. Such conditions might be ideal ‘breeding grounds’ for the emergence of an ‘oppositional culture’ (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986), where well-achieving and academically engaged Roma students would face negative sanctions from their same-ethnicity peers. Two studies have already tested the ‘acting White’ hypothesis on the RECENS primary school database, one of them (Habsz and Radó, 2018) observing the association between social preference (calculated from friendship and adversary

⁸ Similarly to the international literature, the terminology used in these studies may be somewhat confusing, as all of these studies claim to investigate ‘popularity’ (with the exception of the ‘looking up/down’ status attributions), whereas some of them investigate the affective dimension of status calculated from friendship and antipathy nominations, while Pethes in fact investigates *coolness* (for the confusion about the usage of the term ‘popularity’ in the international empirical literature see Chapter 3). In a previous study (Bocskor and Havelda, 2019), we also used the term ‘popularity’ when in fact we calculated the reputational status dimension from coolness nominations (for the justification of asking pupils to nominate ‘cool’ peers instead of ‘popular’ peers in the primary school database, see Chapter 2). In this dissertation, in order to clarify the terminology, I will use the term *popularity* when I refer to measures calculated from the direct nomination of popular peers, *coolness* for measures calculated from the direct nomination of ‘cool’ peers, and *acceptance* for measures calculated from the ‘like’ nominations.

nominations) and academic performance, while the other (Kisfalusi, 2018) between bullying and academic performance; however, neither of the two found support for the presence of an ethnic ‘oppositional culture’. Similarly, another study on a larger primary school sample (Hajdu et al., 2019), including schools from the 75 towns with the largest Roma population in Hungary, found no evidence of an ethnic oppositional culture. Hajdu and colleagues (2019) found that for non-Roma students there was an association between school grades and friendship and adversary nominations, while Roma students’ nominations were not sensitive to academic performance, thus well-performing Roma students actually had more non-Roma friendship and fewer adversary nominations, while the number of their Roma friends and adversaries was unaffected by their grades. However, one vignette experiment in the last two waves of the RECENS primary school database found that Roma students rated a hypothetical peer with good GPA as ‘less cool’ in classrooms with high ethnic diversity (Keller, 2020).

1.3. Research goals and questions

After providing an overview of the Hungarian education system and prior research on peer relations among Hungarian adolescents, we are going to revisit now the research goals already presented briefly in the first section of this dissertation. In that section, I illustrated the need for cross-cultural comparison with the relationship between prosociality, academic achievement, and peer status in China. Contrary to findings from ‘Western’ countries, in China academic achievement has been found to be positively associated with popularity (Li et al., 2012a; Niu et al., 2016) and prosociality to be more strongly associated with peer status than in some ‘Western’ countries (to my knowledge, there are two cross-country comparisons available in English, which compare China to the United States (Li et al., 2012a) and Australia (Owens et al., 2014)). The authors of these studies attribute the difference to the higher value Chinese society puts on academic achievement and to the (more) collectivist culture, which puts larger emphasis on social harmony. Although the literature on peer status outside North America and Western Europe is scarce, the limited available evidence suggests that cross-cultural differences could be worth investigating. Similarly to China, the Central and Eastern European region could provide another, so far under-researched, cultural context. Therefore, my first

research goal is to explore the correlates of informal status among Hungarian early adolescents.

We have seen above that some Hungarian peer relations researchers have already investigated certain aspects of peer status. However, these studies measured the affective status dimension with friendship nominations (Havelda, 2016; Mandácskó and Panyik, 2014; Pethes, 2015), with a preference score calculated from friendship and antipathy nominations (Habsz and Radó, 2018), or with direct status attributions (looking up/down on someone) (Havelda, 2016; Mandácskó and Panyik, 2014; Pál et al., 2016; Pethes, 2015). To my knowledge, no one has investigated social *acceptance* (calculated from peers' 'liking' nominations). Similarly, the reputational dimension of status has been mostly measured by indirect status attributions (others look up/down on someone) (Mandácskó and Panyik, 2014; Pál et al., 2016; Pethes, 2015) and only in one study also by coolness nominations (Pethes, 2015). In order to facilitate cross-cultural comparison, I will use the same conceptualizations of the affective (acceptance) and reputational (popularity, coolness) dimensions as the majority of the international literature. Additionally, prior Hungarian literature mostly had a different focus, for instance Pál and colleagues (2016) investigated the relationship between status attributions and disliking, while Habsz and Radó (2018) tested the 'acting white' hypothesis, and none of the studies investigated a wide range of status correlates simultaneously. Finally, all these studies present quantitative analyses, thus the qualitative perspective in the Hungarian peer status literature has been so far absent.

Related to this last point, I also argued in the first section that the dissertation could provide some methodological contributions. In spite of James Coleman relying on both surveys and interviews in his classical research (Coleman, 1961b), in the more recent peer status literature the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is extremely rare (see Eder and Kinney, 1995; Garner et al., 2006 for exceptions). Arguably, both quantitative and qualitative techniques have salient strengths that could be capitalized on in the investigation of such a complex phenomenon as peer status. For instance, interviews can provide in-depth data about adolescents' understanding of informal status and its functioning in the peer group, while surveys can collect a larger amount of standardized data that can be rigorously analysed with statistical techniques. Importantly, interviews can also provide respondents the opportunity to add salient factors that were

not included among the closed-ended questions of the survey as well as to provide their own perspectives, for instance by telling examples from school life that illustrate how informal status, in their understanding, works in the peer group. Although the application of multiple research methods is not new in the social sciences, contemporary mixed methodologists are particularly concerned with the *systematic* integration of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including integration at the philosophical, design, data collection, interpretation, and reporting levels (for a detailed overview see Chapter 2). Therefore, my second research goal is to experiment with a mixed methods integration framework, which is so far largely missing from the peer status literature.

RG 1: Exploring the correlates of informal status (acceptance, coolness, and popularity) among Hungarian early adolescents.

RG 2: Applying a mixed methods integration framework to the primary school data (survey and focus group interviews) to test its applicability in peer status research.

With regards to the first research goal, I identified three related research questions. First, my empirical findings need to be positioned in relation to the research findings from other cultural contexts. As we have seen above, according to the research conducted by Geert Hofstede and his colleagues, Hungary has similar scores on the cultural dimensions of power distance and individualism as the Northwestern European and ‘Anglo’ countries, whereas along the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and restraint Hungary (similarly to several other Eastern European countries) is closer to most Asian countries (Hofstede et al., 2010). Since the individualism-collectivism dimension was attributed particular attention in explaining differences between China and some ‘Western’ countries, it may be similarly important in the Hungarian case. If so, we could expect behaviour that is related to competition (e.g. athleticism, aggression) to be similarly important in Hungary as it is in Western Europe and North America, while behaviour that is related to social harmony (e.g. helping others, being kind) to be somewhat less emphatic than in China. However, sports have particularly high social salience in the United States (Coleman,

1961a), therefore we could expect its association with peer status to be somewhat weaker in our own sample.

Second, we have also seen above that gender segregation in childhood leads to distinct interaction and playing styles between boys and girls, which in turn leads to the development of different expectations and behaviour regarding relationships (Underwood, 2007). These differences are then transferred into same-sex and cross-sex interactions in adolescence. With regards to informal status, it has been hypothesized that ‘gender-typical’ peers are the most likely to obtain high status in adolescence. Since Hungary scored similarly to most Asian countries on Hofstede’s indulgence-restraint dimension, we could expect Hungarian pupils to experience stronger pressure to adhere to strict social norms than their Western peers. Among Hungarian adults, a survey by the Eurobarometer has indeed found the level of gender stereotypes to be one of the highest within the European Union (European Commission, 2017: 5–7). Therefore, the association between ‘gender-typicality’ and peer status could be expected to be higher among Hungarian than ‘Western’ pupils.

Third, the international literature provides some evidence for racial/ethnic differences in status dynamics. Although some Hungarian studies have already tested the ‘acting white’ hypothesis on ethnic Roma pupils, research using sociometric peer nominations has found no such results (Habsz and Radó, 2018; Hajdu et al., 2019; Kisfalusi, 2018), in spite of the variety of measures used (friendship nominations, adversary nominations, victimization). Nevertheless, one vignette experiment asking about the ‘coolness’ of *hypothetical* peers found some evidence for the presence of an ethnic ‘oppositional culture’, but only in classes with high levels of ethnic diversity (Keller, 2020). Therefore, it is conceivable that research using coolness peer nominations would also find some evidence for an ethnic oppositional ‘culture’. Additionally, other ethnic differences may also be plausible between Roma and non-Roma students, due to the marginalized social position of the Roma population, which can lead to the emergence of alternative peer cultures. For instance, aggression may be differentially associated with peer status (similarly to the differences found between African and White American students).

RQ 1: Are the correlates and their associations with the affective (acceptance) and reputational (popularity, coolness) dimensions of peer status similar to the ‘Western’ literature? In case there are differences, how can these differences be positioned relative to the ‘Western’ and Chinese findings?

RQ 2: To what extent are the correlates of peer status different for boys and girls? How does it relate to the findings of the international literature?

RQ 3: Are there differences in the correlates of informal status between Roma and non-Roma students? How do these differences (or the lack of them) relate to the findings of the international literature?

Finally, the last research question relates to the second (methodological) research goal. In line with the scarce earlier research applying multiple methods, we could see to what extent the quantitative and qualitative results converge, diverge, or complement (add new information/insights to) each other. Furthermore, we could conduct a more *systematic* comparison by applying a recent mixed methods integration framework for data analysis, the ‘exploratory bidirectional’ framework (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017 for more details see Chapter 2)

RQ 4: To what extent do the qualitative and quantitative results converge, diverge, or complement each other? Can a mixed methods integration framework be applied to the investigation of informal status?

1.4. Overview of the dissertation

The dissertation is organized around the extended and revised versions of one theoretical (Chapter 3) and three empirical (Chapters 4-6) manuscripts that have been submitted to peer-reviewed journals. Chapter 2 presents the data, the research methods, and the analytical strategy used in the dissertation. The quantitative data comes from the first four waves of the RECENS primary school database, collected between 2013 and 2015 when students were in grades five and six, and the qualitative data from transcripts of the focus

groups conducted in the spring of 2015 (after wave four) in ten school classes of the RECENS sample. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the theoretical approaches to informal/peer status and a systematic review of the empirical literature related to the most frequently used status dimensions (acceptance, coolness, and popularity). In chapter 4, I present the results of the thematic analysis of the focus group interviews and the multilevel regression analysis of the wave four survey data. In this chapter, I also experiment with the ‘exploratory bidirectional’ framework of mixed methods integration. Chapter 5 further explores the quantitative data by involving all four waves and adopting a relatively novel panel regression technique, the within-between random effects model (Bell et al., 2019). Although a few questions that are important to my research were only added to the survey in wave four and thus cannot be involved in the panel regression (see the description of the variables in the next chapter), the decomposition of the effects of within-individual changes and between-individual differences can add valuable contribution to our understanding of peer dynamics. Chapter 6 conducts an in-depth discourse analysis of the qualitative data, focusing on gender differences in popularity discourses and also touches upon the intersections of gender and ethnicity. Due to their salience in the international literature, the empirical chapters put high emphasis on the investigation of ethnic and gender differences. The last chapter (Chapter 7) summarizes and integrates the findings of the empirical chapters and revisits the research goals and questions described above. It also outlines the potential scientific and policy implications of the dissertation as well as the possible directions for future research.

2. Methods and data

2.1. Data

2.1.1. The RECENS primary school database

The quantitative analyses presented in the following chapters relies on the first four waves of the RECENS primary school database. The data collection originally followed up a pool of students in Northern and Central Hungary who started the fifth grade in the autumn of 2013 until the end of the sixth grade in the spring of 2015, collecting data once per semester. These four waves were subsequently extended on a smaller subsample by two additional waves in the springs of 2016 and 2017, when students attended the seventh and eighth grade respectively. Two of the main goals of the research were to explore ethnic segregation in the social relations of students and to examine the interrelated status hierarchies and social dynamics in school classes. Therefore schools with a higher proportion of ethnic Roma students were overrepresented in the sample. The author of this dissertation took part in the data collection of waves three, four, and five.

The sample consisted 1183 students in 61 classes in the first wave and 1054 students in 53 classes in the fourth wave. The combined panel database of the first four waves includes 4441 observations for 1313 students. For the cross-sectional mixed methods analysis presented in Chapter 4, a limited version of the wave four database was used (see section 4.3.2). Table 1 below shows some basic socio-demographic information about each wave.

Table 1: Basic socio-demographic information of the RECENS primary school data

Wave	N of students	N of classes	% Boys	% Roma (self-reported)	% low SES
First	1183	61	54 %	31 %	35 %
Second	1131	57	54 %	34 %	44 %
Third	1073	53	52 %	33 %	29 %
Fourth	1054	53	51 %	35 %	31 %
Combined panel (waves 1-4)	1313 (4441 obs.)	61	53 %	36 %	35 %

Respondents completed the self-administered surveys on tablets during regular classes under the supervision of trained research assistants. The data collection in each

classroom took a maximum of 45 minutes. As respondents were underaged, parental consent was obtained in the case of every respondent. Parental consent rate was 87 per cent in wave one, 92 per cent in wave two, 96 per cent in wave three, and 97 per cent in wave four. In addition to the student questionnaire, end-of-semester grades were obtained from schools, and form teachers also completed a questionnaire about the pupils in each wave. Both the student and the teacher questionnaires of wave four are attached in the Appendix.⁹

2.1.2. The focus group data

Following wave four in the spring of 2015, a focus group research was conducted in ten of the RECENS classes in May and early June. The research was planned and led by the author of the current dissertation with the help of trainees and former trainees of the research group, who all participated in the survey data collection of waves three and/or four. Although the research was planned by me, members of the RECENS Research Group, and in particular the four co-moderators, all contributed to the final version of the interview guide (attached in the Appendix).¹⁰ The interview guide contains the interview questions (bolded) and detailed instructions for the moderators and note takers about the tasks before the interview, moderators' introduction to the group, and comments and explanations for most of the questions (in brackets and smaller fonts following each question). The guide is shared in its original form (without any 'cosmetics') in the Appendix, the way we created and used it as moderators. Due to the proximity of the summer holiday, conducting an extensive pilot research did not seem plausible; however, we did plan the three focus groups in our first class to be the pilot interviews. Consequently, we planned a two-week break between these interviews and the next class,

⁹ The questionnaire used in wave four contains a few additional questions compared to the questionnaires of the previous three waves. What is important from the perspective of peer status is that wave four was the first wave when students were asked to nominate those classmates whom they considered to be good at sports and whom they perceived as the "teachers' favourite". Thus, the variables created from these peer nominations were only used in the cross-sectional analysis (Chapter 4), while the panel regression (Chapters 5) used teacher nominations of athletic abilities and other teacher-reported measurements of school engagement.

¹⁰ Once again, I would like to express my gratitude to the four co-moderators: Katalin Szilasi, Ágnes Pásztor, Pálma Mogyorósi and Csongor Fényes for their valuable insights in the preparation and post-interview discussions, as well as for the time they devoted to the research (as co-moderators and note-takers). I would also like to thank Imola Koncz for taking up the role of the note-taker in one of the focus groups.

which would have allowed us time to discuss our experience and adjust the questionnaire accordingly. Surprisingly, the pilot interviews were among the most successful ones, thus we decided not to change the questionnaires, and I decided to also include these groups in the subsequent analyses. Nevertheless, we did revise and extend some of the comments and instructions in the interview guide based on the experience of these pilot groups.

During the research, 21 group interviews were conducted with altogether 144 students, which is 84 per cent of the 171 students who attended the ten classes. The interviews were conducted during regular classes in the school premises (unused classrooms or library room), took a maximum of 45 minutes, and parental consent was obtained for each participant. We asked the participating students before the interviews to form their own groups in order to minimise any problem that could arise from arbitrary grouping made by the researchers or teachers (we also assumed that students would be more at ease if they could be together with their friends during the interview). Importantly, this way pupils could take control over one important aspect of the research. The main focus of the interviews was to explore pupils' perspectives on popularity dynamics in their class as well as to observe how popularity is constructed and interpreted in these small-group discussions. Since the research complemented the RECENS survey data collection, a few questions about ethnicity, friendship, and competition were also involved, and students could also express their opinion about the RECENS survey (the 'tablet' research). Nevertheless, the vast majority of the discussion time was devoted to popularity in each group.

The interviews started with a warm-up session where each participant could express their opinion about the RECENS questionnaire. Then students were asked to individually write those characteristics that they believed made someone popular in the class on a post-it note (one characteristic per note), and after a few minutes the moderator collected these notes. These characteristics were then ranked and discussed by the whole group. There was a list of characteristics (being good at sports, having good/bad grades, having cool gadgets, drinking alcohol and smoking) that moderators were asked to discuss in case any of them did not come up during ranking. This section was followed by the questions about ethnicity and, in case there was any time left, the conceptualizations of friendship at the end of the interviews.

2.2. Research methods

2.2.1. Mixed methods research

Since understanding the potential contribution of a mixed approach to peer status research is one of the research goals of this dissertation, it seems useful to briefly review the main concepts and challenges of mixed methods research (MMR). As a broad, general definition, it can be said that MMR is the type of research where elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches are combined ‘for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration’ (Johnson et al., 2007: 123). Importantly, as most MMR theorists would emphasize, the mixed approach is not limited to the mixing of different methods in the narrow sense, but also involves integration at the philosophical, design, data collection, interpretation, and reporting levels (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017). Not surprisingly, most of the challenges facing mixed research is related to this integration at different levels in order to exploit the ‘integrative potential’ (Bazeley, 2016; Fetters and Freshwater, 2015). In fact, the concept of integration itself is somewhat ambiguous and controversial, and there is no widely agreed upon definition for it (Fetters and Molina-Azorin, 2017). Fetters and Molina-Azorin define integration in the mixed methods context as ‘the linking of qualitative and quantitative approaches and dimensions together to create a new whole or a more holistic understanding than achieved by either alone’ (Fetters and Molina-Azorin, 2017: 293) and they distinguish 15 dimensions for MMR integration. Whereas integration along several of these levels/dimensions seems reasonably executable (e.g. research design or data collection), there are at least two levels where it is more controversial, and which consequently have been in the centre of the MMR community’s attention: integration at the philosophical level and integration at the analysis/interpretation level. In the former case, the reconciliation of different epistemological and ontological positions, which are typically (but not exclusively) related to the traditional quantitative-qualitative divide, poses the main challenge, while in the latter case the main challenge is the meaningful comparison of different forms of data.

For the resolution of conflicts resulting from different philosophical positions, four major approaches/paradigms have been proposed by MMR researchers so far:

pragmatism, dialectical pluralism, critical realism, and the transformative paradigm.¹¹ The *pragmatist approach* to MMR (Morgan, 2007, 2014) argues that ‘all our attempts to understand and act in the world are inherently contextual, emotional, and social’, therefore ‘all aspects of research inherently involve decisions about which goals are most meaningful and which methods are most appropriate’ (Morgan, 2014: 6). Consequently, pragmatists are not concerned with ontological and epistemological questions, but concentrate on the solution of context-specific, actual problems instead, putting a large emphasis on the researcher and the research process itself (Morgan, 2007, 2014). As Morgan explains: ‘*both the experiences we bring to research and the changes we hope to produce are context bound, embodied and emotional, and thoroughly social in nature*’ (Morgan, 2014: 7). Another approach is taken by the proponents of *dialectical pluralism*, which is often labelled as a ‘metaparadigm’ (Johnson, 2017). According to this approach, researchers should ‘*carefully listen to, consider, and continually dialogue with qualitative and quantitative perspectives/epistemologies/values/methods and learn from the natural tensions between these while developing a workable solution for each mixed research study*’ (Johnson, 2017: 6). Research relying on dialectical pluralism ‘synthetizes and capitalizes on’ the insights gained through this process (Johnson, 2017). The third approach, *critical realism*, maintains ‘*an ontological realism (there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories, and constructions) while accepting a form of epistemological constructivism and relativism (our understanding of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint)*’ (Maxwell 2015: 5 cited by Schoonenboom, 2019: 286). Finally, the *transformative paradigm* (Mertens, 2007, 2010) puts its focus on the issues related to power, social justice and human rights. The underlying ontological assumption of this approach is that reality is socially constructed ‘*with a conscious awareness that certain individuals occupy a position of greater power and that individuals with other characteristics may be associated with a higher likelihood of exclusion from decisions about the definition of the research focus, questions, and other methodological aspects of the inquiry*’ (Mertens, 2010: 216). Thus, the central questions to the inquiry are how reality is defined, who defines it, whose reality is given privilege, and what the social justice implications of accepting that reality are (Mertens, 2010). In addition to these major approaches/paradigms, Schoonenboom

¹¹ These paradigms are described in more details in (Shannon-Baker, 2016) and (Schoonenboom, 2019).

(2019) proposes a *performative paradigm*, which is in many sense similar to the pragmatist approach; however, it does assume a constructivist ontology and epistemology, that is, ‘the existence of multiple realities that can be known and investigated in various ways’ (Schoonenboom, 2019: 289).

Integration at the design and data collection levels is usually more straightforward. Fetters and colleagues (2013) distinguishes three basic integrative designs for MMR: exploratory sequential, explanatory sequential, and convergent/concurrent. In an *exploratory sequential design*, first qualitative data is collected that informs the subsequent quantitative data collection, while in an *explanatory sequential design* it is the other way round. In the convergent/*concurrent* design the qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analysed during ‘a similar timeframe’ (Fetters et al., 2013). With regards to data collection and analysis, the authors argue that integration can happen through *connecting* (databases linked through sampling), *building* (one database informs the other data collection), *merging* (the two databases are brought together for analysis and comparison), or *embedding* (data collection and analysis are linked at multiple points) (Fetters et al., 2013). Integration at the interpretation and reporting level can be reached through *narrative*, *data transformation*, or *joint displays* (Fetters et al., 2013). Integration to narrative can follow the *weaving* and the *contiguous approach*, the former involves presenting quantitative and qualitative findings on a theme-by-theme basis, while in the latter the qualitative and quantitative findings are reported in different sections (Fetters et al., 2013). There are three possible outcomes from the comparison of results: convergence, complementarity, and divergence (Morgan, 2019). Moseholm and Fetters (2017) provide a taxonomy for merging in concurrent MMR studies which distinguishes five such integration frameworks: explanatory unidirectional, exploratory unidirectional, simultaneous bidirectional, explanatory bidirectional, and exploratory bidirectional (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017). In the two unidirectional frameworks, ‘the completed analysis of one type of data frames the merging of the two types of data’ (p. 5), while in the bidirectional approaches both the qualitative and the quantitative analysis frame merging. If merging goes from the quantitative to the qualitative strand, it is labelled ‘explanatory’, while if it goes from the qualitative to the quantitative, it is called ‘exploratory’ (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017). In the simultaneous approach ‘the researcher

uses results from the quantitative and qualitative strands to look at each other and structure the merged findings based on both' (p. 5).

2.2.2. Multilevel regression models

Multilevel models are used when the data is hierarchically structured, for instance when respondents are nested within larger organizational units (e.g. school classes) or when repeated measurements on the same subjects are available (panel data). In these cases, individual observations typically cannot be assumed to be independent from one another, and the different multilevel techniques aim at controlling for their clustered nature in order to provide unbiased estimates. Chapter 4 applies a cross-sectional multilevel analysis on the wave four data of the RECENS database, while Chapter 5 applies a relatively novel model, the within-between random effects (REWB) model (Bell et al., 2019) on the combined panel data of the first four waves. Since multilevel models in general (e.g. Hox et al., 2017) and panel regression models in particular (e.g. Brüderl and Ludwig, 2015; Wooldridge, 2016) are well-known and widely discussed in the literature, the present section will only focus on the REWB model.

Bell and colleagues (2019) assert that REWB models should be more widely used in the social sciences, since, they argue, these models combine the strengths of the fixed-effects and random-effects models and, contrary to the more 'traditional' random effects models, REWB models are able to effectively decompose the effects of within-individual changes and between-individual differences of time-variant explanatory variables.¹² Equation (1) below provides a schematic overview of the model:

$$y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1W}(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i) + \beta_{2B}\bar{x}_i + \beta_3 z_i + v_{i0} + v_{i1}(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i) + \epsilon_{it} \quad (1.)$$

where y_{it} denotes the time-variant dependent variable of individual i at time t , x_{it} is a time-variant explanatory variable for the same time and individual, and z_i is a time-invariant independent variable (e.g. gender) for this individual. The important point is that for time-variant independent variables (e.g. GPA) both the difference from the individual average ($x_{it} - \bar{x}_i$) and the individual-level average (\bar{x}_i) are included in the

¹² Of course, the model can be applied to other types of multilevel data, not only to panel data.

model. Thus, β_{1W} is the estimate of the average within effect, i.e. the effect of within-individual changes, while β_{2B} is the estimate of the between effect, that is the effect of between-individual differences. β_3 is the estimated effect of the time-invariant characteristic. v_{i0} is a random effect attached to the intercept (β_0) and v_{i1} is a random effect attached to the within slope, while ϵ_{it} is the idiosyncratic error term. Since β_{1W} is the estimate of the within effect, it yields the same estimate as the fixed effects regression would on the same data (Bell et al., 2019: 1058–1059).¹³

2.2.3. Thematic and discourse analysis

The qualitative parts of the dissertation apply thematic analysis (Chapter 4) and discourse analysis (Chapter 6). In general terms, *thematic analysis* can be defined as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). Braun and Clarke argue that it is a flexible research tool, which can be considered as a method on its own right, compatible with both essentialists and constructivist paradigms (Braun and Clarke, 2006). They further argue that it is a ‘poorly branded’ method, often not even explicitly claimed as the methods of analysis, while actually a lot of qualitative analyses are thematic in their essence. In a more recent work (Braun et al., 2018) they distinguish three main (groups of) approaches to thematic analysis, the ‘coding reliability’ approach, the ‘codebook’ approach, and the ‘reflexive’ approach. The ‘coding reliability’ approach emphasizes the need for ‘accurate’ and ‘reliable’ data coding, often based on the agreement between different coders who apply a codebook that contains the relevant pre-defined codes and definitions during the coding process. Braun and colleagues label this approach as ‘partially qualitative’. The ‘codebook’ approach is similarly structured but typically without the use of coding reliability measures, while it also has a ‘broadly qualitative’ underlying philosophy (Braun et al., 2018). Finally, the reflexive approach, the one preferred by Braun and colleagues, conceptualizes themes as meaning-based patterns, and coding is conceptualized as an iterative process that evolves throughout the coding process with the aim of providing ‘a coherent and compelling interpretation of the data, grounded in the

¹³ We have discussed the fixed effects, random effects, and REWB regression models in more details in the Appendix of Bocskor and Havelda (2019).

data' (p. 848), instead of looking for the one 'accurate' coding and interpretation. Braun and Clark argue that researchers have to make several choices, and make them explicit, during thematic analysis, such as the definition of what counts as a 'theme' in the given analysis, whether they follow an inductive or a theoretically-driven analysis, whether they are looking for semantic or latent themes, as well as the clarification of the epistemological position (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The other qualitative method used in the dissertation is *discourse analysis*. Even though discourse is one of the widely used concepts of linguistics and the social sciences, it has multiple definitions and interpretations, therefore it is not easy to define what discourse analysis is. As a general definition, we can say that discourse analysis is 'concerned with the ways in which language constructs and mediates social and psychological realities' (Willig, 2014: 341). Consequently, contrary to thematic analysis, discourse analysis has a strong epistemological position rooted in constructivism. Discourse analysis '*challenges the idea that the accounts people provide of their thoughts, feelings and experiences are comparable to a mirror image of what is going on inside of them, in their hearts and minds*' (Willig, 2014: 341). Critical approaches to discourse analysis (e.g. van Dijk, 2015) put the focus on power inequalities and the ways these inequalities are reproduced, maintained, legitimized, or camouflaged through discursive and social practices. Besides critical linguists, some sociologists and social theorists have also put the concept of discourse and the reproduction of social inequalities through language in the centre of their investigations (e.g. Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1981; Habermas, 1984). For instance, Foucault and scholars conducting Foucauldian discourse analysis take a historical perspective and consider discourse participants as historical subjects who are constructed through and positioned within discourse (Willig, 2014). Since the discourse analytical approach taken in Chapter 6 draws on the ideas of Foucault, the main concepts of the Foucauldian approach (or at least one possible interpretation of them) will be presented in the Methods section of that chapter.

2.3. Variables used in the quantitative analyses

2.3.1. Peer nominations

Acceptance score. Students were provided with a list of all their classmates and were asked to indicate their relationship with each of them on a five-point scale including ‘I would never be friends with him/her’ (-2), ‘I do not like him/her’ (-1), ‘He/she is neutral to me’ (0), ‘I like him/her’ (1), and ‘He/she is my friend’ (2). I created a binary variable from these nominations coding the two positive answers as 1 and all the others as 0. Incoming nominations on this binary variable were summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class.

Coolness score. Students were asked to select those peer from the list of their classmates whom they considered ‘cool’. Incoming nominations were summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class.

Hit score. Students were asked to select those peers from the list of their classmates who regularly hit, pushed or kicked them. Incoming nominations were summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class.

Looks score. Students were asked to select those peers from the list of their classmates whom they considered pretty/handsome. Incoming nominations were summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class.

Mock score. Students were asked to select those peers from the list of their classmates who regularly mocked or made fun of them. Incoming nominations were summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class.

Smart score. Students were asked to select those peers from the list of their classmates whom they considered smart. Incoming nominations were summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class.

Sports score (wave four). Students were asked to select those peers from the list of their classmates whom they considered to be good at sports. Incoming nominations were

summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class. This nomination was not included in the student questionnaire of the first three waves.

Teacher's favourite score (wave four). Students were asked to select those peers from the list of their classmates whom they considered the 'teacher's favourite'. Incoming nominations were summed and divided by the number of respondents in the class. This nomination was not included in the student questionnaire of the first three waves.

2.3.2. Self-reports

Boy. Pupils were asked to indicate their sex. I recoded boys as 1 and girls as 0.

Roma. Students were asked to indicate which ethnic group they belonged to: 'Hungarian', 'Roma', 'both Hungarian and Roma', 'member of another ethnicity'. I coded those pupils as Roma (1) who identified as either 'Roma' or 'both Hungarian and Roma', while the other students were coded as non-Roma (0). In the cross-sectional analysis, missing wave four data was imputed from the previous waves: in case pupils reported in any of the previous waves that they were Roma, they were coded as Roma for wave four, otherwise they were coded as non-Roma. In the panel analysis, those pupils who selected 'Roma' or 'both Hungarian and Roma' at least once during the four waves were coded as Roma (1) and the others as non-Roma (0). Selection of the 'another ethnicity' option was rare, less than three percent of the respondents selected it in each wave.

Smoking. Students were asked whether they smoked and could select from the following four options: 'Yes, regularly', 'Yes, but only in company', 'No, but I have tried it', 'No never'. I created a binary variable from this coding the first two options as 1 and the others as 0.

2.3.3. Teacher nominations

Disadvantaged social background. According to the Hungarian Child Protection Act (Child Protection Act, 1997), children are considered 'disadvantaged' if their parents

have low educational level or are long-term unemployed, or if they live under insufficient housing conditions or in a segregated environment. Those children who meet more than one of these criteria are considered ‘multiply disadvantaged’. In the teacher questionnaire, form teachers were asked to select disadvantaged and multiple disadvantaged pupils from the list of all students. I created a new binary variable and recoded those students who were selected for either of the two categories as socially disadvantaged (1).

Engagement score. In the teacher questionnaire, form teachers were asked to select those pupils who had official written laudation, who had official written warning,¹⁴ who had unjustified school absences, and those whom they considered hardworking. Four binary variables were created along these dimensions (laudation, warning, absences, hardworking), coding students selected for the respective dimension as 1 and the others as 0. I created a composite school engagement variable from these binary variables by adding the laudation and hardworking scores and deducing the warning and unjustified absences scores. Thus, the composite engagement variables ranges from -2 to +2.

Sports binary (panel data). In the teacher questionnaire, form teachers were asked to select those pupils whom they thought were good at sports. Selected students were coded as 1, the other as 0.

2.3.4. Grades

Behaviour grade. In the Hungarian school system, the ‘behaviour’ of students is evaluated on a four-point grading scale ranging from 2 to 5 (since it is not a subject, failure is not possible). Although conceptually it could be expected to provide an overall measurement of pupils’ in-school behaviour (aggression, prosociality, etc.), in our data it was more strongly correlated with the diligence grade and GPA than with peer-reported aggression (see Tables 18-19 in the Appendices), which made it somewhat unclear what this grade actually measured. Therefore I decided not to include it in the analyses.

¹⁴ In the Hungarian school system subject teachers, form teachers, and principals can register ‘honour’ and ‘warning’ notices in students’ report book. While the former is largely symbolic and serves to praise a student for some achievement or behaviour, the culmination of the latter can lead to the dismissal from the institution.

Diligence grade. In the Hungarian school system, the ‘diligence’ of students is also evaluated on a four-point grading scale ranging from 2 to 5 (since it is not a subject, failure is not possible). Although conceptually it could be expected to provide an overall measurement of pupils’ attitude/effort, in our data it was very highly correlated with the GPA (see Tables 18-19 in the Appendices), which suggests that this indicator measures actual performance rather than efforts per se. In addition to the statistical problems with multicollinearity, this also makes this variable theoretically redundant. Therefore it was not included in the analyses.

Grade point average. End-of-semester grades were obtained from the schools. I calculated the GPA from the grades students obtained at the end of the previous semester for the following four subjects: Hungarian language, Hungarian literature, mathematics, and history. The Hungarian school system uses a five-point grading scale ranging from 1 (fail) to 5 (excellent).

Grade point average deviation. For each class, the average GPA was calculated (see below). I created an additional variable by deducing this class average from the individual GPA. Pupils who have a positive value on this variable are above the class GPA, while those students who have a negative value are below the class average.

2.3.5. Contextual variables

Class GPA. The class-level average GPA was calculated as the average of the individual GPAs in that class.

Disadvantaged proportion. The proportion of disadvantaged students was calculated for each class based on the *disadvantaged social background* variable (see above).

Roma proportion. The proportion of Roma students was calculated for each class based on the *Roma* variable (see above).

2.4. Limitations

The empirical analyses presented in the following chapters have, of course, several limitations. These limitation can be divided into three main groups: 1- limitations related to conceptual issues (such as the measurement of peer status or ethnicity); 2- limitations related to the available data; 3- limitations related to the methods used for data analysis. With regards to the first group, it is important to note that *coolness*, *popularity*, and *acceptance* are three widely used constructs to measure the reputational and affective dimensions of peer status. However, there are other conceptualizations of status; for instance, we have seen above that the majority of the prior Hungarian peer relations literature used friendship nominations and status attributions (looking up/down on someone). Similarly, this dissertation uses *ethnicity* as a fixed attribute, even though we have seen above that it is, in many cases, a fluid, multidimensional category. However, peer nominations of ethnicity can be better used in network than regression models, and in the primary school database self-reported ethnicity (if dichotomized as Roma and non-Roma) rarely changed.¹⁵ The different conceptualizations of the reputational status dimension in the quantitative (coolness) and qualitative (popularity) data also require some attention. Preceding the RECENS primary school data collection, members of the research group conducted some group interviews with the students in preparation for the survey research. These interviews unveiled that pupils at that age did not really understand the concept of ‘popularity’, while they had a good understanding of the concept of ‘coolness’. Approximately two years later, when my focus groups were conducted, most students already had an idea about the meaning and functioning of popularity in the peer group. Even though these are two slightly different constructs, they approximately measure the same underlying dimension (reputational status).

The second group of limitations is related to the data used. First, neither the RECENS nor the focus group samples are representative of the Hungarian early

¹⁵ In wave one there were 84 students who were coded as ‘non-Roma’ but were coded as ‘Roma’ in at least one other wave, in wave two there were 61, in wave three 71, and in wave four 54 such students. Changes between the ‘Roma’ and the ‘Roma and Hungarian’ categories were more frequent. On the other hand, a significant portion of students did not report ethnic-identity in some of the waves: in wave one there were 255 missing answers (22% of total respondents), in wave two 162 (14%), in wave three 104 (10%), and in wave four 111 (11%). However, after imputing ethnicity from other waves, almost all missing answers were eliminated.

adolescent population or schools with disadvantaged and/or ethnic Roma students. However, peer relations research is rarely representative (for a few exceptions see the next chapter) and researchers tend to put much higher priority on being able to investigate entire or nearly entire closed groups. We have seen above that both the qualitative and the quantitative sample I used had a high level of parental consent and response rates. Additionally, since one of the main goals of the RECENS data collection was to explore ethnic segregation in students' social relation, representativeness could not be fully achieved even theoretically, as the precise proportion of ethnic Roma students in a given school, as well as nationwide, is unknown in Hungary. Nevertheless, when comparing my results to the (similarly non-representative) international literature, it will be useful to reflect on this limitation. Second, whereas in the case of an anonymous survey we can assume that pupils answer the questions honestly and to the best of their abilities/comprehension, in the case of group interviews group composition, group dynamics, and the sociodemographic characteristics of the moderators (sex, age, ethnicity) clearly influence the results. As the focus of our group interviews was a reputational dimension (popularity), group composition and group dynamics may not be particularly problematic (dominant students probably also take over more submissive peers when class-level status hierarchies are constructed and negotiated); however, reflection on the characteristics of the moderators will be necessary during the discussion of these results. Additionally, we asked students to form the groups themselves, which hopefully minimized the inhibiting effects of unfortunate group compositions (e.g. when some members are very hostile to one another). Third, the fact that the focus of the RECENS primary school survey was on interethnic and negative relations poses some limitations for the analysis of peer status. Most importantly, prosociality is not measured in the survey with peer nominations, even though it has been found to be an important correlate of both dimensions of peer status. Similarly, athletic ability (being good at sports) is only measured with peer nominations from wave four, whereas for the first three waves only teacher nominations are available. Finally, acceptance can be calculated from a five-point scale of social preference in the RECENS database (described in the previous section), which is different from most of the international literature that uses single-item peer nominations. In spite of these limitations, the RECENS database has a remarkable

potential for the investigation of peer status as it contains a wide array of relevant correlates, as can be seen from the description of the variables above.

The third group of limitations is related to the methods used for data analysis in this dissertation. Whereas every method has its limitations, the most important aspect here is that the quantitative analysis applies multilevel regression models, not social network analysis. Although, as we have seen earlier, multilevel regression can control for some of the dependencies in the data (e.g. autocorrelation or effects of higher-level clusters), peer influence and in particular the impact of close peers are not taken into account by regression. It is reasonable to assume that network characteristics (e.g. triadic dependence) influence one's judgement about coolness and acceptance. It is certainly an important task for future research to investigate whether social network methods yield the same results as the regression models presented in this dissertation. Additionally, network methods could better take into consideration the fluidity and multidimensionality of ethnicity described above.

3. Theoretical overview: Informal status among adolescents¹⁶

Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a systematic review of the literature related to informal (or peer) status among adolescents. First, the most important sociological, developmental, and evolutionary perspectives on informal status are presented, followed by a review of the behavioural and personality correlates most widely discussed in the empirical literature. These correlates are athleticism, aggression, prosocial behaviour, risk behaviour, academic performance, academic engagement, physical attractiveness, involvement in romantic relationships, leadership abilities, and the Big Five personality traits. Since the bulk of the empirical literature comes from the educational context, where adolescents spend the largest portion of their daily lives, this literature and its most frequently used status dimensions (acceptance, coolness, popularity) are in the focus of the chapter. The review pays special attention to ethnic and gender differences in status dynamics while also acknowledges the importance of different cultural contexts. For this reason, whenever possible, the primarily West European and North American literature will be complemented with findings from other cultural contexts, in particular from China and Hungary.

3.1. Introduction

Status among adolescents has gained significant scholarly attention in the last few decades. An extensive body of research has demonstrated that adolescents who have high status among their peers, and popular adolescents in particular, are profoundly influential in setting the norms of the group and have huge influence on the behaviour of their groupmates (Balsa et al., 2011; Brechwald and Prinstein, 2011; Dijkstra and Gest, 2015; Juvonen and Ho, 2008; Sandstrom, 2011). Additionally, research suggests that certain forms of peer status, such as popularity or coolness, as well as the desire to attain them, predict later engagement in risk behaviour and academic adjustment problems (e.g. Allen et al., 2014; Mayeux et al., 2008; Prinstein et al., 2011; Sandstrom and Cillessen, 2010;

¹⁶ This chapter is a substantially extended and revised version of a manuscript submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, which is currently under review. Some changes have been made to the manuscript to meet the formal requirements of the dissertation.

Schwartz et al., 2006; Schwartz and Hopmeyer Gorman, 2011). Similarly, even peer acceptance, a form of status typically associated with positive adjustment and outcomes, can carry some risks if peer norms support negative behavioural patterns (Allen et al., 2005). On the other hand, unpopular and rejected children and adolescents also face a heightened risk of mental health problems, involvement in risk behaviour, and academic adjustment problems (Parker et al., 2006; Platt et al., 2013; Rubin et al., 2015). Additionally, research has unveiled that status differences in the wider society, such as the ones related to gender, race, or physical appearance, are often rapidly reproduced and maintained in small group interactions (e.g. Berger et al., 1980; Ridgeway et al., 2009). Consequently, research contributing to the greater understanding of status dynamics among adolescents also has important practical implications. For instance, a growing body of evidence demonstrates that anti-bullying intervention programs can effectively influence and change negative peer dynamics (see, for instance, the following meta-analyses Gaffney et al., 2019; Ttofi and Farrington, 2011). Similarly, intervention programs can be designed to change group dynamics in a way that reduces the effects of irrelevant status characteristics such as race or gender (Berger et al., 1980).

In the empirical literature, peer status has been associated with a variety of behavioural and personality correlates involving athleticism, aggression, prosociality, risk behaviour, academic engagement, physical attractiveness, leadership abilities, agreeableness, and extraversion. However, the quantitatively-informed (primarily sociometric) and the qualitatively-informed (primarily ethnographic) literature have produced divergent results on several issues, for instance regarding the magnitude of gender differences (for an overview, see Rose et al., 2011). Additionally, the cultural context has also been shown to matter; for instance, some research on Chinese adolescents has found a positive association between academic achievement and popularity (Li et al., 2012a; Niu et al., 2016); an association which is typically not present in the North American and West European literature. Therefore, the review will pay particular attention to ethnic and gender differences, while also complement the predominantly 'Western' literature with findings from other cultural contexts; I will cite Chinese and Hungarian studies, whenever possible, in order to provide some cross-cultural perspectives as well. Since the research on peer relations, to my knowledge, is carried out almost exclusively in the school context, this will be the focus of the review as well. When

children enter formal schooling, the size of their peer contacts increases drastically, and as they progress towards adolescence the time they spend with their peers also increases substantially (Parker et al., 2006). The importance of the educational context is also demonstrated by some research that has found that, even after discounting classroom instruction, high school students spend almost the third of their waking hours with peers, which is more than double the time they spend with parents and other adults (Csikszentmihalyi and Larson, 1984, cited by Parker et al., 2006).

In the following sections, I will first provide an overview of the theoretical approaches to informal status, which will be followed by the discussion of the behavioural and personality correlates most frequently associated with peer status in the empirical literature. I will focus on the status dimensions most frequently applied in this literature (acceptance, popularity, coolness). The review ends with the discussion of contextual effects including peer norms, group composition, and the wider social context. Throughout the paper, I will refer to status among peers as informal or peer status in order to distinguish it from other applications of the term *status*, for instance from socio-economic status.

3.2. Theories of informal status

Status is generally understood as the *prestige* or *esteem* individuals enjoy relative to the prestige or esteem other individuals at a different level of the *status hierarchy* have (e.g. Anderson et al., 2015; Leary et al., 2014; Ridgeway, 2014). Status and the status hierarchy can be related to small, face-to-face groups (e.g. a school class or a workgroup), larger groups, and to the wider society as well. Importantly, individuals possessing a higher position in the status hierarchy are assumed to have larger influence or power than their peers in lower status positions. Due to the prevalence and importance of status differences in small and large groups as well as in the wider society, social scientists, psychologists, and biologists have long been interested in the reasons and dynamics behind the emergence and maintenance of these differences. The following sections will present a brief overview of the most important sociological, social psychological, developmental, and evolutionary accounts of status with a focus on small, face-to-face groups and the peer context.

3.2.1. Sociological and social psychological perspectives

Since the investigation of social stratification has been one of the most central concerns for sociological research, research related to social status has a long tradition in this field. As is well-known, Max Weber distinguished social status from social class as a distinct form of social stratification, and defined status as ‘an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive and negative privileges’ typically based on *lifestyle* and *prestige* (Weber, 1978: 305–306). He defined ‘status order’ as the way in which ‘social honour’ is distributed in a community between different status groups (p. 927). In the decades after Weber, many sociologists gave a predominantly functionalist account of the differential distribution of status/prestige among individuals or social positions. For instance, Davis and Moore argued that the relative rank of a position depends on its functional importance to society and the scarcity of the skills required for the position (Davis and Moore, 1945). Parsons argued that the differential value ranking of individuals is based on the following six dimensions: 1- membership in a kinship unit, 2- personal qualities (e.g. sex, beauty, strength), 3- achievements, 4- possessions, 5- institutionally recognized authority, 6- (noninstitutionalized) power to influence others (Parsons, 1940). However, he argued that (in the United States) *achievement* was the main criterion for obtaining status. Critical, conflict, and feminist theories (among others) have extensively challenged the main functionalist assumptions and argued that social inequalities along such dimensions as class, race, or sex are maintained and reproduced through different social practices that benefit the advantaged groups while also legitimize and naturalize the existing inequalities for both the advantaged and the disadvantaged groups (see for instance Bourdieu, 1984; Collins, 1971; Dahrendorf, 1959; Tumin, 1953 among many others). These social practices are, to a great extent, related to the development of status beliefs about differences between social groups with regards to their overall worth and capacities, which in turn creates and maintains status-based group differences, in particular in societies that otherwise value meritocracy and formally constrain explicit discrimination (Ridgeway, 2014).

Theories related to status development in small, face-to-face groups reproduce many of the macro-level arguments described above. For instance, Peter Blau, in his *theory of social integration*, argues that social interactions may be considered as exchange

processes, where individuals with qualities that enable them to provide valuable services to the group receive 'the respect and deference' of others, which grants them 'superordinate status' in exchange for providing these services (Blau, 1960: 555–56). On the other hand, a person who cannot offer such services will obtain a lower position and, in exchange for the acceptance of others, will conform to group norms. Blau also argues, based on Goffman's work about 'impression management' (Goffman, 1956), that a person who intends to obtain an integrated (high status) position in the group (in most cases) tends to present himself/herself to the others as an 'attractive associate' (pp. 546–47). However, this action has to be subtle, since in case the others suspect him of deliberately 'putting up a front' they will not consider his action as reliable and will have an unfavorable impression of him (p. 547). Social psychological approaches to status also often reach similar conclusions. For instance, Leary and colleagues argue that status is related to perceived instrumental social value, i.e. status is accorded to people 'to the extent others believe that they possess resources and/or personal characteristics that are important for the attainment of collective goals' (Leary et al., 2014: 160).

Expectations states theory (Berger et al., 1972, 1980; Webster and Driskell, 1978) provides a theoretical account of how external status differences, unrelated to the task in question, are reproduced and maintained in task-oriented face-to-face groups (an observation demonstrated by several classical social psychological experiments, e.g. Sherif et al., 1955). The underlying assumption of the theory is that individuals develop expectations about their peers' future performance, which are not only based on group interactions but also on prior beliefs about the characteristics of group members who are different in external status. In order for a characteristic to become a *status characteristic*, it is necessary that different states of this characteristic are evaluated differently with regards to esteem, honour, or desirability and that they are associated with 'distinct moral and performance expectations' (Berger et al., 1980: 482). These status characteristics can be *specific* if they are associated with different performance expectation in a specific situation (e.g. reading ability) or *diffuse* if they are associated with general different performance expectations. The salience of perceived status characteristics also depends on structural factors (e.g. race may only become salient in case of a mixed-race group). Group members are looking for cues when formulating their performance expectations and, according to the theory, they will formulate these expectations along status

characteristics that are perceived to be salient *as if they were* relevant, unless proven otherwise (i.e. they reverse the traditional ‘burden-of-proof’ process). Overviewing decades of empirical research, Berger and colleagues argue that sex, race, and physical attractiveness are all diffuse status characteristics in American society (Berger et al., 1980).

Status construction theory (Ridgeway, 1991; Ridgeway and Balkwell, 1997) further elaborates these ideas by outlining the macro-level conditions and local contexts in which such status beliefs are created and spread in a population. The macro-level conditions assume a situation where the unequal distribution of an exchangeable resource (e.g. material wealth) is correlated with the distribution of a nominal characteristic (e.g. race) in a population, and where individuals tend to interact more with others of similar resource levels. These macro-level conditions give rise to different types of micro-level interactions among individuals who are either similar or different along the resource and/or the nominal characteristics. The theory posits that interactions where participants differ both in resource levels *and* the nominal characteristic give rise to independent status associations with the nominal characteristic. Differences in resource levels create different performance expectations, however, these performance expectations will be associated with the nominal characteristic and eventually, as individuals carry their status beliefs to further interactions, these micro-level associations will diffuse and create macro-level consensual beliefs associating one category with greater general competence and worthiness than the other. Webster and Hysom propose replacing ‘exchangeable resources’ with ‘goal objects’ (socially preferred and non-preferred outcomes in a particular situation) in order to account for how a wider range of attributes (e.g. sexual orientation) can become diffuse status characteristics (Webster and Hysom, 1998).

Expectations states theory and status construction theory could both predict that individuals belonging to the higher status groups in society (e.g. men, whites, physically attractive individuals) would have a larger chance of obtaining high status in face-to-face groups *both* among peers with high and low status characteristics. For these assumptions to be true, however, a general acceptance of this status order is needed by *both* the dominant and the subordinate groups. In case the subordinate group(s) challenge the status order, based on theories of intergroup conflict, we could predict in-group

favouritism in the attribution of status (see, for instance, social identity theory, Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

In the sociological tradition of adolescent peer relations research, *popularity* is the most frequently used social construct that represents status within the peer group (e.g. Adler and Adler, 1998; Coleman, 1961b; Eder, 1985). These sociological works emphasize that both the precise meaning of popularity and the factors that make someone popular depend on the given peer group and culture (see for instance Coleman, 1961b: 43; Eder, 1985: 155–56). Consequently, this line of research generally relies on participants' construction of popularity, i.e. ethnographic studies intend to understand students' interpretation of popularity, survey research asks explicitly about popularity and popular peers. However, in spite of the important empirical contributions, hardly any sociological theory addresses directly the acquisition and functioning of popularity (status) among adolescents. Nevertheless, theories about the acquisition and maintenance of informal status (such as the small group theories presented above) generally intend to provide models applicable to a variety of contexts, and many of them explicitly list schools as such important contexts. In line with these theories, Pál and colleagues argue that in the school context high status peers are the ones who make decisions for the group, while low status students are expected to adjust their opinions to the group and decrease their participation in decision making (Pál et al., 2016: 806).

Recently, William Bukowski has provided a contextual (sociological) approach to popularity (Bukowski, 2011). He argues that in order to understand popularity and the way it functions in a group, we need to understand the context in which it is embedded. He identifies four layers of context that need to be considered: 1. the level of individualism or collectivism (see also Hofstede et al., 2010; House et al., 2004); 2. group norms; 3. socioeconomic status (SES); 4. the level of secularization and the existence of a pluralistic value system. He argues that groups that are high in *individualism* ascribe popularity to members who are self-assertive and excel at achievement-related tasks, while groups high in *collectivism* ascribe it to members that are caring and trustworthy. Since he considers popularity as an achievement, he argues that it is more important in the individualistic context. Additionally, popularity is assumed to have higher importance in the *middle-class context* than in the low-SES context, and in the *pluralistic secular*

context than in the non-secular one, where cohesion is already strengthened by a shared political or religious value system.

Additionally, theoretical proposals addressing differences in peer experience between specific social groups can also be drawn on. For instance, *the 'acting white' hypothesis* (Fordham, 1988; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1992) proposes that members of 'involuntary' ethnic/racial minorities in a subordinate social position consider certain activities, such as good academic performance, to be the 'prerogatives' of the White majority. Consequently, academically well-performing members are seen as becoming acculturated into the White American 'cultural frame of reference', at the expense of one's own minority culture (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986: 182–183). As a result, academic success can be 'resisted' both socially and psychologically, and students who are thought to be 'acting white' can receive a variety of sanctions (ranging from disapproval to physical violence) from the same-ethnicity peer group. In order to cope with the 'burden of acting white', academically successful minority students are assumed to adopt a variety of strategies including becoming the class clown, pretending not putting much effort into getting good grades, excelling in other areas such as athletics, aligning themselves with bullies, 'putting brakes' on academic performance, or even developing a 'raceless persona' (Fordham, 1988; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Although the theory was developed to account for Black students' school experience in the United States, it may be extended to other socially disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups in other contexts (see the review of the empirical literature below). Similarly, Paul Willis in his famous ethnographic study documented how the white working-class boys (the 'lads') he observed developed a '*counter-school culture*' (Willis, 1977). He argues that the school was the arena where these boys developed (some sort of) class-consciousness which led them to rebellion against authority and the rejection of conforming to school values, which eventually resulted in the reproduction of the social structure by ending them up in working-class jobs. Nevertheless, these boys could gain high peer status within their group by adhering to the often violent, counter-school values of this subculture. Finally, the theory of *sexual double standards* (Reiss, 1960 cited by Crawford and Popp, 2003) can be applied to explain why romantic and sexual behaviour may have different effects on the peer status of adolescent boys and girls. As the name suggests, the theory proposes that there are different, gender-specific norms that define the 'appropriate' romantic and

sexual behaviour, including the number of sexual partners or the reasons for engaging in sexual activity (e.g. the level of affection or the length of the relationship) (Kreager and Staff, 2009). While male sexual permissiveness is assumed to be tolerated or even rewarded by peer status, female sexual permissiveness is expected to contribute to damaged reputation and status (Kreager and Staff, 2009).

3.2.2. Developmental perspectives

Peer relations have been extensively studied by developmental scientists. Developmental approaches focus on the ways peer relations shape children's and adolescents' social, cognitive, and emotional development and adjustment, interpreting these changes and dynamics in the context of the relevant developmental stage ranging from early childhood to late adolescence (Newcomb et al., 1993; Parker et al., 2006; Rubin et al., 2015). In this field, a variety of theories exist that touch upon the area of peer interactions, including personality theories, developmental constructivist approaches, cognitive-social learning perspectives, and interpretive approaches (for an overview of these approaches see Parker et al., 2006). However, while some forms of peer relations (e.g. friendships) are extensively covered by these theories, there are only a few developmental theories of peer status (Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019). In this section, I will cover three such theories, the gender prototypicality theory of adolescent peer popularity (Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019), the popularity-socialization hypothesis (Allen et al., 2005), and the maturity-gap theory (Moffitt, 1993). Additionally, I will also review Antonius Cillessen's model of popularity (Cillessen, 2011) and the 'two cultures' approach to gender differences, which can also be adapted to informal status. Similarly to the sociological perspectives, developmental approaches also interpret peer status among adolescents most typically through the construct of *popularity*; however, the interpretation of popularity in this field requires some explanation.

Traditionally, (developmental) psychological research conceptualized and constructed the different peer status groups in relation to the extent one is liked or disliked by their peers. A well-known and formerly widely used taxonomy proposed by Coie and colleagues distinguished five status groups: 1- popular children (who are widely liked); 2- rejected children (who are widely disliked); 3- neglected children (who are neither

liked nor disliked); 4- controversial children (who are both liked and disliked by many); 5- average children (Coie et al., 1982). As can be seen, this line of research conceptualized *popularity* as being liked by many and disliked by only a few. However, research from the late 1990s demonstrated that youngsters who are perceived as popular by peers are not necessarily the same ones who are categorized as popular by the sociometric method described above, and the distinction between ‘sociometric’ and ‘perceived’/‘reputational’ popularity as two distinct forms of status was proposed (e.g. LaFontana and Cillessen, 1998, 1999; Parkhurst and Hopmeyer, 1998). In order to clarify terminology, several researchers suggested using the term *popularity* when talking about the ‘reputational’ status dimension that is related to power, prestige, and visibility within the peer group and the term *acceptance*, preference, or likeability, when referring to the ‘sociometric’ status dimension that is related to social preference (Cillessen and Marks, 2011). Empirical findings extensively support the argument that the two status dimensions are, starting from early adolescence, only moderately correlated distinct constructs, and this association gets weaker towards late adolescence, in particular for girls (for a meta-analysis of 20 years of empirical research see van den Berg et al., 2020).

Gender differences in peer relations are extensively documented in the literature (for an overview see Rose et al., 2011; Rose and Rudolph, 2006). For instance, boys have been found to play in larger groups, be engaged in activities that are more competitive and in higher rates of overt aggression (Rose et al., 2011). A primarily developmental approach, the ‘*two cultures*’ perspective has been widely used to explain some of these differences. It relies on the widely documented gender segregation in childhood and argues that play and interaction with predominantly same-sex peers leads to distinctive play and interaction styles, which in turn results in the development of distinct peer cultures, where children are socialized into different expectations and behaviour regarding relationships (Maccoby, 1998 cited by Underwood, 2007; Underwood, 2007). Although the primary focus of the theory is to account for gender differences in friendship and behaviour (e.g. aggression), it could also be adapted to popularity. In this case, we could expect gender-typical behaviour and communication to predict popularity, while a gender-atypical ‘style’ to predict unpopularity (Rose et al., 2011).

The *gender prototypicality theory* of popularity (Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019) addresses the issue of gender-typicality. It argues that popularity as a status dimension

distinct from social preference emerges in early adolescence as a ‘byproduct’ of intensifying cross-sex interactions and cross-sex attention. According to the theory, this developmental change explains why popularity gets disproportionately ascribed to those peers who are ‘gender-typical’ with regards to their appearance and behaviour (Jewell and Brown, 2014; Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019), as they are the most likely to attract opposite-sex attention. Importantly, the association between ‘gender-typicality’ and popularity has been found to be much stronger in the case of boys (Jewell and Brown, 2014).

Another developmental theory, *the maturity gap theory* (Moffitt, 1993), associates adolescent popularity with the increasing gap between biological maturity (‘biological adulthood’) and limited social opportunities in adolescence (Dijkstra et al., 2010b; Moffitt, 1993). According to this theory, youngsters ascribe popularity to those peers who can ‘close’ this gap by demonstrating biological maturity (e.g. through sports, physical attractiveness, or sexual activity) and/or independence from adult rules (e.g. through smoking, alcohol and other substance use).

The *popularity-socialization hypothesis* (Allen et al., 2005) focuses on ‘sociometric’ popularity (i.e. acceptance).¹⁷ The theory has two propositions: first, based on attachment theory, the authors argue that ‘sociometric’ popularity as a marker of adaptive social development in adolescence derives from and is associated with positive interactions within the family; second, they argue that ‘sociometrically’ popular adolescents are more strongly socialized by the peer group, thus they will be more likely to increase both positive and negative behaviour that receives approval by the group.

Finally, Antonius Cillessen proposes a tentative *theory of popularity* (Cillessen, 2011) in the closing chapter of the book *Popularity in the Peer System* (which is the first, and to my knowledge so far the only, edited volume summarizing the theoretical and empirical literature related to peer popularity). This proposal intends to synthesize the multiple approaches and research findings presented in the book. Cillessen argues that the acquisition and maintenance of popularity are two distinct processes and thus should be distinguished. He identifies four factors that can play a role in the *acquisition* of

¹⁷ The authors in the related empirical research measured popularity by asking respondents to nominate peers whom they would most/least like to spend time with on a Saturday night. In my understanding, this operationalization is much closer to the measurement of social preference (‘sociometric’ popularity) than to ‘perceived’ popularity.

popular status: 1- social attention-holding power, 2- motivation to be popular, 3- behavioural skills (a mixture of prosocial and antisocial skills, in particular relational aggression), 4- psychobiological factors (e.g. stress resistance). Cillessen argues that the ability to attract attention is essential as popularity implies visibility, which can be achieved through physical attractiveness (good looks or dressing well), achievement (academic, athletic, etc.), or behavioural ways (leadership, bullying, etc.). Clearly, the attention attracting characteristic has to be one that the peer group values. Additionally, Cillessen argues that an agentic orientation (independence, autonomy, leadership) and agentic, power and dominance goals are needed for becoming popular, while a communal orientation and communal, intimacy and affiliation goals are needed for becoming widely accepted/liked. He also identifies four factors that can play a role in the *maintenance* of popularity: 1- resource-holding power (successfully challenging others and defending one's position against other challengers), 2-self-awareness (the awareness of one's popularity), 3-social-cognitive skills (high levels of social intelligence), 4- flexible adjustment to the group. The last point includes understanding when a change of group goals and norms can happen and taking the lead in these changes. Although Cillessen points out that only very limited empirical knowledge about the developmental antecedents of popularity exists, this suggests that popularity is rooted in earlier relationships with parents and peers. Importantly, ego resilience (flexible but persistent adaptation to challenging situations) predicted later social preference for both boys and girls, while ego control (the ability to regulate emotions) predicted popularity for girls. In the case of boys, ego undercontrol (being dominant or forceful) predicted later popularity.

3.2.3. Evolutionary perspectives

Evolutionary psychological and biological approaches apply the Darwinian theory of evolution to human behaviour (Barkow, 2006). These approaches typically focus on sexual selection and reproduction as well as on the biological basis of group formation and competition (e.g. de Bruyn et al., 2012; Gilbert et al., 1995), while they also often directly compare human and non-human behaviour (e.g. Dunbar, 1988). According to these theories, the status hierarchy in groups emerges as a result of individuals challenging others for resources and defending their resources against other challengers

(Gilbert et al., 1995). Importantly, these interactions are guided by social comparison: individuals do not challenge others who are evidently more powerful than them, while they also submit to more powerful challengers (Gilbert et al., 1995). An important reward of high status is assumed to be more mating opportunities and consequently increased reproductive success (Barkow, 1989 cited by de Bruyn et al., 2012).

In the peer relations context, evolutionary theories consider status (popularity) among peers as a form of *social dominance*, which involves competition for such limited resources as friendships or cross-sex contacts (Hawley, 1999, 2003; Pellegrini, 2008). From this perspective, *aggression* is not considered as dysfunctional but, if used strategically, an important tool in the competition for these resources (Pellegrini, 2008; Pellegrini and Long, 2002). Once ‘group-level dominance hierarchies’ are constructed, the level of aggression is assumed to decrease, as the use of it would be costly both for the dominant and the subordinate individuals (Pellegrini et al., 2011). This hierarchy is assumed to be beneficial for the group members as within-group aggression is minimized and the risk of greater, group-destabilizing aggression is also reduced (Pellegrini et al., 2011).

3.3. Behavioural and personality correlates of peer status

This section provides an overview of the empirical literature related to the most frequently discussed behavioural and personality correlates of peer status. As we have seen above, peer relations research has typically distinguished an affective status dimension related to social preference and a reputational dimension related to social prestige and dominance. The former is most frequently measured by the construct of *acceptance* (preference, likeability), while the latter by (perceived) *popularity*. Additionally, some researchers have captured the reputational dimension through some alternative constructs, most prominently by *coolness* (e.g. Bellmore et al., 2007, 2011; Galván et al., 2011; Jamison et al., 2015; Juvonen and Ho, 2008; Kiefer and Wang, 2016; Wilson and Jamison, 2019).

These status dimensions can be measured by a variety of quantitative techniques including sociometric peer nominations, teacher nominations, and self-ratings. Although there may be some benefits of teacher nominations (e.g. cost-efficiency, avoiding the

problem of low participation rates), it is generally considered as less reliable and less methodologically robust than obtaining information from multiple respondents (van den Berg, Lansu, et al., 2015). Similarly, Mayeux and Cillessen found that self-ratings and peer-perception only moderately correlated in the case of popularity and this association was even nonsignificant in the case of preference for girls (Mayeux and Cillessen, 2008). An additional measurement issue may be the selection of the word for the reputational dimension in non-English-speaking countries. For instance, in Chinese there is no direct counterpart of the word *popularity* and Chinese peer relations researchers have used different terms to capture this concept (see Niu et al., 2016: 832). In other countries, the direct translation of the word may not carry the same social meanings and connotations. Finally, besides quantitative researchers, several ethnographers have also studied peer status. In addition to producing in-depth, qualitative data, the ethnographic approach also offers significant flexibility to reconsider data collection and interpretation during the research as well as to conduct additional observations and interviews (Merten, 2011). Similarly, group interviews can also provide valuable insights into pupils' conceptualization of informal status and interpretation of status dynamics.

The review below will focus on the three most widely used constructs (acceptance, popularity, coolness) including both qualitative and quantitative empirical findings. Unfortunately, to my knowledge, mixed methods research on peer status is rare (but see for instance Eder and Kinney, 1995; Garner et al., 2006), in spite of Coleman relying on both surveys and interviews in his classical research (Coleman, 1961b). In the quantitative literature, the vast majority of researchers applied sociometric peer nominations for data collection and traditional statistical methods (e.g. multilevel regression, structural equation modelling) for data analysis. I will only indicate the measurement and/or the method of analysis in the review below in case the study in question applies a different technique (e.g. social network analysis).

3.3.1. Athleticism

Practically all quantitative (e.g. Chase and Machida, 2011; Kennedy, 1995; Shakib et al., 2011), qualitative (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Adler and Adler, 1998; Eder and Parker, 1987; Francis et al., 2010), and mixed (Coleman, 1961b; Eder and Kinney, 1995) studies have found that athletic ability was one of the strongest predictors of reputational peer status

(popularity, coolness) for boys. Although many quantitative studies did not involve athleticism among their variables, those that did reached this conclusion in spite of the variety of measurement techniques they used including peer nominations (e.g. Buchanan et al., 1976; Dijkstra et al., 2009; LaFontana and Cillessen, 2002; Lease et al., 2002; Rodkin et al., 2000)¹⁸, self-rated popularity (Kennedy, 1995; Shakib et al., 2011), students' ranking (Buchanan et al., 1976; Chase and Dummer, 1992; Chase and Machida, 2011) or rating (Goldberg and Chandler, 1989) of characteristics/activities that made a girl/boy popular in their class, as well as open-ended questions asking about these characteristics (e.g. Closson, 2009; LaFontana and Cillessen, 2002; Xie et al., 2006). Some studies have also found a positive but weaker association between athleticism and popularity for girls (for an overview see Lindstrom and Lease, 2005: 228–230; Rose et al., 2011: 110). This is in line with the theoretical assumption that relates popularity to dominance, prestige, and visibility within the peer group, as sports participation provides visibility, while competitive sports can be related to dominance, which is traditionally considered as a masculine trait. This connection between sports and dominance is also supported by empirical findings that associate athleticism with higher levels of leadership and lower levels of social isolation, as well as with more aggressive and less prosocial behaviour (e.g. Vannatta et al., 2009). Additionally, the social visibility of male and female athletes may also differ. For instance, Eder and Kinney reported that in the school they investigated hundreds attended male sports events whereas there were never more than 25 viewers at female games (Eder and Kinney, 1995). Qualitative research also suggests that as girls enter adolescence, the tension between maintaining popularity and athleticism increases (Shakib, 2003). Similarly, quantitative research including more sports indicate that predominantly 'sex-appropriate' sports (e.g. football or wrestling for boys, gymnastics or volleyball for girls) contribute to higher status and more friendship and dating preference for both sexes (Eder and Kinney, 1995; Holland and Andre, 1994).

Kennedy (1995) and Shakib and colleagues (2011) investigated the association between (self-rated) popularity and athleticism on representative samples in the United States. Kennedy found that popularity had the strongest association with athletic status for all demographic groups (Black, White, Asian, Hispanic) among eighth graders, expect

¹⁸ Dijkstra and colleagues analyzed data from the TRAILS study, which is an ongoing longitudinal study on adolescent peer relations in the Netherlands. They measured popularity with the question 'Who do others want to be associated with?' Rodkin and colleagues measured popularity with 'cool' nominations.

for Black females, for whom it was second after academic status (Kennedy, 1995). Shakib and colleagues found in their sample, which included third to twelfth grade students, that regardless of race, gender, and SES, athletes reported higher popularity than non-athletes (Shakib et al., 2011). While Black athletes were *less* likely to report popularity than athletes from other racial/ethnic groups, there was no such gender difference. However, when students were asked what the most important criterion for male and female popularity was, sport was the most frequently selected option for boys but the least frequently selected one for girls (behind 1- being good looking, 2- money/clothes, 3- being nice/helpful, and 4- grades) (Shakib et al., 2011). Respondents from middle school were more likely to report sport being the most important criterion for male popularity than respondents from elementary or high school, while there were no grade level differences in the case of female popularity. Although several studies suggest that Black and low-SES students may consider sport more important than their White or higher-SES peers as it can provide a channel for upward social mobility (for an overview see Shakib et al., 2011), the two representative surveys imply that these differences are not manifested in popularity. Additionally, Chase and Machida found that Black students ranked the importance of sports lower than their White counterparts (Chase and Machida, 2011). They also suggest, after comparing their study to two earlier studies including the same status items and research design (Buchanan et al., 1976; Chase and Dummer, 1992), that the importance students attribute to sports has slightly decreased over the last decades.

Social acceptance has also been positively associated with athletic ability for both genders (e.g. Daniels and Leaper, 2006; Dijkstra et al., 2010b; LaFontana and Cillessen, 2002; Lubbers et al., 2006; Newcomb and Bukowski, 1983; Vannatta et al., 2009). When taking into consideration the gender of the nominator, Dijkstra and colleagues found in a Dutch sample of adolescents (TRAILS) that athleticism was more strongly associated with same-gender likeability for boys and cross-gender likeability for girls (Dijkstra et al., 2010b).

It is important to note that these findings come predominantly from the United States, where sports hold a particularly highly valued social position (Coleman, 1961a; Shakib et al., 2011). Nevertheless, research from other parts of the world seems to reach similar conclusions. Niu and colleagues found in a Chinese adolescent sample that

athletic skills were positively associated with both popularity and social preference for both genders (Niu et al., 2016). On the other hand, Dong and colleagues found no statistically significant association between popularity and athleticism (Dong et al., 1996).¹⁹ Hungarian research among early adolescents has also found that athletic ability was positively associated with both coolness and social preference (Pethes, 2015). Naturally, there are some peer contexts even in the United States, where the importance of sports is not as marked as found by most studies. For instance, Garner and colleagues present in their mixed research study an elite private school where sports were considered as of relatively low importance (Garner et al., 2006: 1028). Similarly, Zakin found in his quantitative study that the importance of athletic ability was minor among adolescents in the two schools he investigated (Zakin, 1983).

3.3.2. Aggression

Aggression has been extensively researched in relation to peer status. A large body of evidence suggests that it is positively associated with coolness/popularity and negatively with acceptance/preference (e.g. Bellmore et al., 2011; Cillessen and Mayeux, 2004; Kiefer and Wang, 2016; Parkhurst and Hopmeyer, 1998; Prinstein and Cillessen, 2003; Rodkin et al., 2000, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2006) (for a review of the literature see Mayeux et al., 2011). Newcomb and colleagues conducted a meta-analytic review of the earlier literature on the characteristics of the classical sociometric status groups (Newcomb et al., 1993). They found that ‘sociometrically’ popular children (i.e. those who are high on social preference) showed lower than average level of aggression, while the rejected and ‘controversial’ children showed higher than average levels. Since the ‘controversial’ status group contains pupils who are high on the dimension of social impact (both liked and disliked by many peers), this group may be closer (but naturally not identical) to our current understanding of popularity. Indeed, more recent research has distinguished two subtypes of (perceived) popular students: one that is high both on popularity/coolness and acceptance and one that is high on popularity/coolness but average or lower on acceptance (de Bruyn and Cillessen, 2006; Rodkin et al., 2000; van den Berg, Burk, et al., 2015). The two groups show distinct behavioural profiles: popular-accepted students are usually prosocial, academically engaged, and non-aggressive, while popular but not particularly

¹⁹ To my knowledge, other Chinese studies did not include athletic ability.

liked pupils tend to be aggressive and academically disengaged. Developmental changes may also be important: van den Berg and colleagues researched third to eight-grade Dutch students and found that the distinction between the two subtypes took place only in the eighth grade (age 14) (van den Berg, Burk, et al., 2015).

In order to provide a more refined picture about the relationship between aggression and peer status, it is important distinguish between different forms of aggression, such as *overt* (direct) and *relational* (indirect) aggression (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995) as well as *proactive* and *reactive* aggression (Dodge and Coie, 1987). Relational (or social or indirect) aggression refers to the behaviour that intends to damage another person's social relationships or social position through manipulation, for instance by sabotaging the target person's friendships or romantic relationships, spreading gossips, or by exclusion from activities (Card et al., 2008; Crick and Grotpeter, 1995). To my knowledge, one meta-analytic review investigated the association between indirect aggression and popularity (Casper et al., 2020), two reviews between indirect aggression and acceptance (Card et al., 2008; Casper et al., 2020), and one review between direct aggression and acceptance (Card et al., 2008). The results show that popularity is positively associated with indirect aggression, acceptance is negatively associated with direct aggression, while the negative association between indirect aggression and acceptance becomes nonsignificant if we control for direct aggression. Empirical studies have also found positive association between direct/overt aggression and popularity (see the literature review by Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019). However, some studies suggest that the effect of indirect/relational aggression is stronger (Cillessen and Mayeux, 2004; Prinstein and Cillessen, 2003), while other studies found that after controlling for relational aggression, the effect of overt aggression became nonsignificant (Rose et al., 2004; Waasdorp et al., 2013). With regards to reactive and proactive aggression, Stoltz and colleagues found that proactive (strategic) aggression was positively while reactive aggression negatively associated with popularity (Stoltz et al., 2016).²⁰ Prinstein and Cillessen combined the two dimensions and found that the strategic use of both direct and indirect aggression was positively associated with popularity, while reactive direct aggression was negatively associated with both popularity and acceptance (Prinstein and

²⁰ However, their survey questionnaire seems to have defined reactive aggression with a terminology that refers to acts of direct aggression (yelling, hitting), while proactive aggression with a terminology that refers to acts of both direct and indirect aggression (intimidating, manipulating, bullying) (p. 33).

Cillessen, 2003). The authors distinguished two forms of indirect aggression, *relational aggression*, which in their definition means aggression that intends to harm one's social relations and *reputational aggression*, which intends to harm social position. Interestingly, they found that reactive relational aggression and strategic reputational aggression were positively associated with both popularity and acceptance, while strategic relational aggression was only associated with popularity and reactive reputational aggression was not associated with either status dimension.

Bullying is a special form of aggression, which has been defined as 'a subtype of aggressive behaviour, in which an individual or a group of individuals repeatedly attacks, humiliates, and/or excludes a relatively powerless person' (Salmivalli, 2010: 112). It can be viewed as a form of instrumental, proactive aggression with the goal of attaining status and dominance (Pellegrini et al., 2011). There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that skillful bullies tend to have high levels of popularity and low levels of acceptance, while victims have both low levels of popularity and acceptance (e.g. Duffy et al., 2017; Pouwels et al., 2016; Pronk et al., 2017; Rodkin and Berger, 2008; Sijtsema et al., 2009; Veenstra et al., 2005). More refined analysis of the different roles has found that followers of bullying were also associated with higher levels of popularity and lower levels of acceptance, while defenders were associated with higher levels of acceptance and in some cases higher levels of popularity (see below) (Duffy et al., 2017; Pronk et al., 2017).

Important gender differences in the association between aggression and popularity/coolness have been found. Although an earlier literature review (Rose et al., 2011) suggests that significant gender differences were typically found by the ethnographic, but rarely by the quantitative literature, a more recent review (Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019) argues that overt and relational aggression contribute to boys' and girls' popularity differently.²¹ Indeed, some quantitative studies have shown the association between overt aggression and popularity/coolness to be stronger for boys (Waasdorp et al., 2013), while other studies only found significant association in the case of boys (Kiefer and Wang, 2016; Xie et al., 2003).²² Similarly, some studies suggest that relational

²¹ It is important to emphasize that the focus here is the *relationship* between aggression and peer status. Existing meta-analytic reviews have already demonstrated the higher *prevalence* of overt aggression among boys, in particular in the case of physical aggression (Archer, 2004; Card et al., 2008). However, the available meta-analyses have found no or minimal gender difference in the *prevalence* of relational aggression (Archer, 2004; Card et al., 2008; Casper et al., 2020).

²² Xie and colleagues measured social status with network centrality ('hanging out' with others).

aggression is more strongly associated with girls' popularity (e.g. Cillessen and Mayeux, 2004), while another study found the association between coolness and relational aggression to be only significant for girls (Kiefer and Wang, 2016). Additionally, popularity has been more strongly associated with bullying for boys (de Bruyn et al., 2009). When taking into consideration the gender of both the bully and the victim, Rodkin and Berger found that same-sex bullying contributed to popularity, boys bullying girls to unpopularity, while bullies were disliked regardless of whom they targeted (Rodkin and Berger, 2008). They also found one exception to the typical power imbalance behind bullying, unpopular boys did also target popular girls. Additionally, Veenstra and colleagues found that male same-gender bullying was positively associated with female acceptance (Veenstra et al., 2010). Finally, Duffy and colleagues found that defending was positively associated with popularity for girls, but not for boys (Duffy et al., 2017). The ethnographic literature also underlines the importance of physical strength and 'toughness', the ability to intimidate and dominate others, in boys' popularity, as well as the role of social manipulation and verbal intimidation in girls' popularity (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Eder, 1985; Merten, 1997).

Some research also suggests ethnic/racial differences in the association between aggression and peer status. For instance, some research on African American students has found a strong association between aggression and popularity in Black-majority schools, and a stronger association for African American than European American students in multi-ethnic settings (e.g. Farmer et al., 2003; Luthar and McMahon, 1996; Meisinger et al., 2007; Rodkin et al., 2000; Waasdorp et al., 2013). For instance, Luthar and McMahon found that African American students were overrepresented in the aggressive-popular group in a multi-ethnic urban high school. Similarly, Meisinger and colleagues found that in Black-majority classes, 'tough' and excluding, relationally aggressive behaviours were positively associated with higher levels of popularity, while in White-majority classes 'acting tough' (bullying and not following school rules) was negatively associated with popularity. On the other hand, Xie and colleagues investigated narrative accounts of popularity with semi-structured interviews in an African American sample from high-risk inner-city neighborhoods, but found no positive relationship between popularity and overt aggression (Xie et al., 2006). The intersections of ethnicity, gender, and social class also deserve some attention. For instance, Eriksen found the aggressive rejection of school

values and engagement in disruptive behaviour (including physical fights) among ethnic minority girls with immigrant background in a Norwegian secondary school (Eriksen 2019). This finding is similar to the ‘lad’ subculture Willis found among working-class English boys (Willis, 1977).

The empirical evidence showing association between some forms of aggression and popularity is in line with predictions of evolutionary theories, which propose that aggression is used strategically to gain and maintain status. In particular, ‘bistrategic’ youth (Hawley, 2003), i.e. pupils who use both aggression and prosocial behaviour, have been found to show the highest level of popularity (e.g. Closson and Hymel, 2016; Dijkstra et al., 2009; Hartl et al., 2020; Kornbluh and Neal, 2016; Puckett et al., 2008) (for an overview of primarily the evolutionary research see Pellegrini et al., 2011). Research by Faris and Felmlee also underlines the role of aggression in status competition; they measured peer status by social network centrality in friendship networks and found that increased network centrality predicted increases in aggression up to the highest levels of network centrality, where aggression decreased (Faris and Felmlee, 2011, 2014). Supporting the same argument, they also found that not only low status, but also high status peers got victimized. Evolutionary theories also propose that aggression (dominance) would positively impact cross-sex peer status and dating preference. We have already seen above that Veenstra and colleagues found that male same-gender bullying was positively associated with female acceptance (Veenstra et al., 2010). Similarly, Pellegrini and Bartini found that both affiliative (prosocial) and aggressive behaviour of early adolescent boys predicted girls’ dating preferences (Pellegrini and Bartini, 2001). Additionally, Pellegrini and Long found that aggression and physical attractiveness were associated with higher levels of cross-sex interaction in the case of *both* sexes among American middle schoolers (Pellegrini and Long, 2007).

In ‘non-Western’ cultural contexts, the relationship between peer status and aggression may be more controversial. Some research conducted with Q methodology among Chinese female high school students found that popularity was negatively associated with relational aggression (Owens et al., 2014; Xi et al., 2016), while another study using sociometric nominations found among Chinese middle schoolers that both overt and relational aggression were positively associated with popularity and negatively with social preference (Niu et al., 2016). Lu and colleagues investigated Chinese middle

and high school students (seventh to twelfth grades) and found that popularity was associated with overt aggression at all grade levels for both sexes, while relational aggression was positively associated with popularity in grades 8-10 for boys and grades 8-12 for girls (Lu, Jin, et al., 2018). Tseng and colleagues followed up Taiwanese primary school students from the fifth to the sixth grade and found that physical and relational aggression were negatively associated with both popularity and acceptance (Tseng et al., 2013). Schwartz and colleagues investigated third and fourth grade students in Hong Kong and found that popularity was positively associated with overt and relational aggression, while acceptance was negatively associated with both forms (Schwartz et al., 2010). In Hungary, Kisfalusi investigated bullying among sixth graders in the same database and found an inverted U-shaped relationship between physical and verbal bullying and coolness nominations among sixth graders: students were more likely to be nominated as perpetrators up to a certain level of coolness (Kisfalusi, 2018).

3.3.3. Prosocial behaviour

Prosocial behaviour is a critical aspect of social competence with peers (Aikins and Litwack, 2011). It is a voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others (Eisenberg et al., 1999; Wolters et al., 2014), which has been conceptualized by characteristics such as empathy, concern for others, and interest in enhancing personal relationships (Aikins and Litwack, 2011). It has been found to correlate strongly with both social acceptance and popularity (e.g. de Bruyn and Cillessen, 2006; Dijkstra et al., 2009; Kornbluh and Neal, 2016; LaFontana and Cillessen, 2002; Lease et al., 2002; Peters et al., 2010; Wolters et al., 2014). As mentioned above, peers using a mixture of prosocial and (strategic) aggressive behaviour tend to be the most popular, although non-aggressive prosocial students can also reach popularity. With regards to gender differences, qualitative studies have found that social competence (and thus prosocial behaviour) is critical to peer popularity for both sexes (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Read et al., 2011). However, these studies highlighted that, in addition to kindness and helpfulness, popular girls also used manipulative tactics and 'meanness' (indirect and verbal aggression) to maintain their status (e.g. Currie et al., 2007; Duncan, 2004; Merten, 1997; Wiseman, 2002), while popular boys were also engaged in demonstrations of physical dominance, ranging from pushing to physical fights (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Francis et al., 2010). Although an earlier

review (Rose et al., 2011) suggests that the quantitative literature did not find gender differences in this domain, Kornbluh and Neal found that popularity had a stronger positive association with prosociality for girls (Kornbluh and Neal, 2016). The finding that prosociality has a positive relationship with both forms of status sits well with developmental theories. Gender differences in the distinct forms of aggression ‘bistrategic’ boys and girls combine prosociality with, as well as Kornbluh and Neal’s findings about the stronger association between popularity and prosociality for girls, are in line with the gender prototypicality theory of popularity (Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019) as well as with gender socialization theories (e.g. the *‘two cultures’ perspective*).

Finally, the importance of cultural differences needs to be emphasized again. Sociometric studies among Chinese adolescents also found that both popularity and acceptance were positively associated with prosociality (Lu, Li, et al., 2018; Niu et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2019). Interestingly, those two studies that investigated both status dimensions showed that prosociality was more strongly associated with popularity than with acceptance (Lu, Li, et al., 2018; Niu et al., 2016), which Niu and colleagues attribute to Confucian principles prescribing morally responsible behaviour. Two studies that focused on students’ perception of popularity determinants and used samples from multiple countries found that Chinese students more strongly associated popularity with prosociality than American (Li et al., 2012a) or Australian (Owens et al., 2014) pupils. Owens and colleagues attribute this difference to the collectivist cultural context in China, which also puts larger emphasis on social harmony.

3.3.4. Risk behaviour

Several researchers have been interested in the relationship between peer status and different forms of risk-taking activities. Although this concept can cover a wide scope of behaviours, primarily aggression, substance use/abuse, and sexual behaviour have been discussed in relation to adolescent peer status (Schwartz and Hopmeyer Gorman, 2011). Since aggression has already been discussed above, we will not cover it in the current section. Overall, popularity has been positively associated with substance use (Franken et al., 2017; Hawke and Rieger, 2013; Killea-Jones et al., 2007; Mayeux et al., 2008; Prinstein et al., 2011) and sexual activity (Hawke and Rieger, 2013; Mayeux et al., 2008; Prinstein et al., 2003, 2011) at least for some groups of adolescents. Mayeux and

colleagues investigated the temporal relationship between popularity and risk behaviour among American adolescents (Mayeux et al., 2008). They found that popularity in grade 10 predicted alcohol use and sexual activity in grade 12, but not smoking, while in the case of boys smoking in grade 10 was predictive of later popularity. Otherwise, they did not find evidence that risk behaviour would predict later popularity. Prinstein, Choukas-Bradley and colleagues also took into consideration nonlinear relationships and found that popularity increases were associated with higher levels of cigarette use only for peers with average levels of popularity and for girls at lower levels of popularity, while at higher levels of popularity, increases in popularity were negatively associated with cigarette use for girls (Prinstein et al., 2011). For average and highly popular boys, increases in popularity predicted more sexual intercourse partners, while there was no such association for girls. Additionally, they also found that popularity predicted marijuana use for males. Further, Prinstein, Meade and Cohen found that although sexual activity was associated with higher levels of popularity among secondary school students, more sexual partner were associated with lower levels of popularity (Prinstein et al., 2003). Interestingly, Killea-Jones and colleagues found among grade 7 students, an age group where substance use is yet rare, that alcohol or cigarette use was associated with higher popularity in the fall semester; however, these pupils could keep their higher peer status in the spring semester even if they no longer reported substance use (Killea-Jones et al., 2007). Hawke and Rieger investigated a wide range of risk behaviours among Australian grade 9 students and found, in addition to the results described already, antisocial activities (vandalism, shoplifting, skipping classes, breaking school rules) to be typical for the high on popularity low on acceptance group of students, in particular boys (Hawke and Rieger, 2013). Social acceptance has not been associated with risk behaviour for most groups (Franken et al., 2017; Hawke and Rieger, 2013; Mayeux et al., 2008; Prinstein et al., 2003), although Franken and colleagues found that risk behaviour was negatively associated with acceptance for girls, while Hawke and Rieger found that boys with high levels of acceptance were the most likely to be engaged in sexual activity, whereas girls with high levels of acceptance were the least likely. The maturity gap hypothesis (Moffitt, 1993) can provide a good explanation for the positive relationship between risk behaviour and popularity. In particular in the case of those activities that are legal/accepted for adults but not so much for adolescents (tobacco and alcohol use, sexual activity), those peers

who engage in such activities can be seen as demonstrating independence and autonomy and thus closing the gap between biological maturity and (the lack of) social maturity.

3.3.5. Academic performance and engagement

Traditional sociometric research has extensively found that ‘sociometrically’ popular (i.e. accepted) students perform well academically (or more generally, they are high on cognitive abilities), while members of the ‘controversial’ group performed around average (Newcomb et al., 1993). As we have seen above, more recent research distinguished two subgroups of (perceived) popular pupils, one that is highly accepted, nonaggressive, and academically engaged, and another that is average or low on acceptance, aggressive, and usually academically disengaged (de Bruyn and Cillessen, 2006; Rodkin et al., 2000; van den Berg, Burk, et al., 2015). It may be due to this ambiguity that one quantitative study found a negative association between academic *performance* (GPA) and popularity among American adolescents (Hopmeyer Gorman et al., 2002), while another study on Dutch adolescents found no such association (Meijs et al., 2010). Boyatzis and colleagues conducted a vignette experiment about hypothetical peers among American ninth graders and found no association between popularity and good grades (Boyatzis et al., 1998). Additionally, LaFontana and Cillessen measured academic ability with peer nominations of smartness among American early adolescents (grades four to eight) and found it to be positively associated with both popularity and acceptance (LaFontana and Cillessen, 2002). The ethnographic studies by Adler and colleagues found that in the case of boys, both high and low academic achievement had a negative relationship with popularity (being labelled as ‘nerdy’ or ‘dummy’), whereas popular girls did not suffer any stigma for performing well academically (Adler et al., 1992; Adler and Adler, 1998). Other qualitative studies also confirmed that academically successful popular boys had to ‘balance’ popularity and school achievement. For instance, Francis and colleagues found that high-achieving popular boys were almost all good-looking and good at sports, and were engaged in ‘masculine’ activities (Francis et al., 2010). However, they also found that academically successful popular girls were also almost always good-looking, and both sexes put considerable effort into presenting their performance as ‘effortless achievement’. Although the association between grades and acceptance has typically been found to be positive (Wentzel, 2009), Meijs and colleagues

found no main effect of academic achievement on acceptance (Meijs et al., 2010). However, they found that in vocational classrooms the combination of high social intelligence and low achievement were associated with popularity, while in college-preparatory classrooms the combination of high social intelligence and high achievement.

Academic engagement is generally understood as a multidimensional construct that can be divided into subcategories such as behavioural (e.g. following the rules, involvement in learning), emotional (e.g. affective reactions in the classroom, sense of belonging and appreciation), and cognitive engagement (investment in learning) (Fredricks et al., 2004). Most studies have investigated the relationship between some aspects of behavioural engagement and peer status. For instance, some studies found among American high school students that popularity was positively associated with unjustified school absences for popular-aggressive students (Hopmeyer Gorman et al., 2002; Schwartz et al., 2006). Troop-Gordon and colleagues also found among elementary school children (grades 3-4) that perceived popularity predicted increases in (teacher-rated) school avoidance (Troop-Gordon et al., 2011). De Laet and colleagues analysed longitudinal data of a Belgian primary school sample (grades 5-6) and found that popularity predicted less behavioural engagement (on-task behaviour, homework attitude, attention in classroom) (De Laet et al., 2015). Although they observed an overall decrease in engagement, for accepted children this decrease was less steep. In another study, they found on the same sample that popularity predicted more teacher-child conflicts, which subsequently predicted higher popularity (De Laet et al., 2014). Similarly, Kiefer and Wang found among grade 6 students that coolness in the fall semester predicted increased disruptive behaviour and decreased involved behaviour in the spring semester (Kiefer and Wang, 2016). Engels and colleagues conducted a very refined analysis of the relationship between academic engagement and peer status on a Belgian sample from a large-scale longitudinal study (STRATEGIES), following up grades 7-9 students for two years (Engels et al., 2017). They measured engagement with 30 items, from which they created four dimensions: behavioural engagement, behavioural disaffection, emotional engagement (e.g. enjoying learning new things at class), and emotional disaffection. Similarly to the other studies, they found that behavioural engagement was negatively whereas behavioural disaffection positively associated with popularity, and these effects were stronger for the aggressive-popular students. However, the emotional dimensions

(which were not measured by the other studies) were not affected by popularity. Additionally, acceptance was positively associated with both emotional and behavioural engagement; however, the dimensions of disaffection were not associated with it. Finally, the developmental aspect also needs to be taken into consideration. For instance, Galván and colleagues found that increases in coolness were associated with increased academic engagement (raising hands, participating in class, following class rules) in grade five, but with increased disengagement (copying homework, coming to class late, getting in trouble in class) in grades 7-8 (Galván et al., 2011).

The gender differences in academic engagement found by the qualitative literature (but not so much by the quantitative literature) can be explained by theories of different socialization/expectations. For the racial and ethnic differences in performance and engagement, some explanations that connect these differences to cultural factors have been proposed.²³ Most prominently, the '*acting white*' hypothesis (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986) proposes that for many African American students academic success may be perceived as acculturating into the White American cultural frame of reference at the expense of one's own culture. This can lead both to the psychological resistance of academic success and sanctions from the same-ethnicity peer group. Although Fordam and Ogbu based their hypothesis on their in-depth ethnographic research in one inner-city school, other ethnographic studies at the time also found similar results (e.g. Miller, 1989: 181), while some more recent ethnographies studies (e.g. Horvat and Lewis, 2003; Tyson et al., 2005) and semi-structured interviews (Xie et al., 2006) did not. Additionally, quantitative studies using large national samples in the United States have also been contradictory, as some of them found support for the hypothesis (Fryer and Torelli, 2010; Fuller-Rowell and Doan, 2010), while others did not (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998; Cook and Ludwig, 1997; Wildhagen, 2011). Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) even found higher peer support for well-performing African American students. Importantly, these studies conceptualized social standing/sanctions differently including self-reported popularity (Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey, 1998; Cook and Ludwig, 1997), self-reported measurements of social acceptance (Fuller-Rowell and Doan, 2010),

²³ There is an extensive literature about the structural factors (e.g. unequal access to quality education) that contribute to the lower academic performance of disadvantaged ethnic minority students. While the effects of these factors may be more emphatic, given the focus of the current paper, cultural explanations that can account for the association between peer status and performance/engagement may be useful to consider.

friendship networks (Fryer and Torelli, 2010), and negative sanctions (Wildhagen, 2011). However, none of these studies analysed the relationship with peer-nominated acceptance or popularity/coolness. Even though the ‘acting white’ hypothesis was formulated to account for Black American students’ school performance/disengagement, the hypothesis has also been tested on other disadvantaged ethnic groups. For instance, Flores-Gonzales conducted an ethnographic study among Latin American high school students, but found no evidence of the ‘burden of acting white’, which she partly contributed to the institutional practices of the school she observed (Flores-Gonzalez, 2005). Stark and colleagues followed-up ethnic majority and minority students in Germany for three academic years (starting from grades 5-7) and investigated the relationship between their friendship networks and academic performance applying longitudinal social network analysis (Stark et al., 2017). They found only limited evidence for an ‘oppositional culture’: good grades were less important for friendship selection in the case of minority students (but well-performing peers were not rejected), whereas social influence with regards to academic performance was especially strong between same-ethnic friends. However, in these schools the academic performance of minority and majority students did not differ significantly, and both minority and majority students were equally likely to select friends with similar academic performance.

Similarly to earlier sections, the importance of cross-cultural differences needs to be emphasized. In the Chinese context, not only acceptance, but also popularity has been positively associated with academic achievement (Li et al., 2012a; Niu et al., 2016). As the authors argue, this reflects on the high emphasis and value Chinese society puts on academic performance. In Hungary, Boda and Vörös found a negative association between popularity and diligence among Hungarian secondary school students (Boda and Vörös, 2013). Two studies tested the ‘acting white’ hypothesis on ethnic Roma students in the RECENS primary school database, using a measurement of social preference (Habsz and Radó, 2018)²⁴ and victimization (Kisfalusi, 2018); neither of which found evidence for the presence of an ethnic oppositional culture. However, in later waves of the same longitudinal database (grades 7-8), Keller conducted a vignette experiment about hypothetical peers and found that Roma students in classes with *high ethnic diversity* rated students with good GPA as less cool (Keller, 2020). Hajdu and colleagues

²⁴ Habsz and Radó calculated social preference from friendship and antipathy nominations.

investigated the relationship between GPA, friendship, and adversary nominations in a larger sample of primary school students that involved the 75 towns with the largest Roma population in Hungary (excluding the capital) (Hajdu et al., 2019). They found that for non-Roma students GPA had a positive association with friendship nominations and a negative association with adversary nominations, while these nomination were not related to GPA for Roma students. Thus, well-performing Roma students actually had more non-Roma friends and fewer adversaries, while the number of their Roma friends and adversaries were not affected by their grades.

3.3.6. Physical attractiveness and involvement in romantic relationships

Qualitative studies have extensively demonstrated the strong relationship between *physical attractiveness*, being fashionable, and high status, especially in the case of girls (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Eder, 1985; Francis et al., 2010; Merten, 1997). Quantitative studies have found attractiveness to be positively associated with both popularity and acceptance for both sexes (e.g. Boyatzis et al., 1998; Dijkstra et al., 2010b; LaFontana and Cillessen, 2002; Lease et al., 2002; Vaillancourt and Hymel, 2006), while some studies found it to be more strongly associated with girls' popularity (e.g. Closson, 2009). However, what counts as physically attractive may differ for the two sexes: Wang and colleagues found that lower levels of popularity was associated with larger body shape for girls, while for boys both thin and heavier body shapes were associated with lower levels of popularity (Wang et al., 2006). They have found no link between preference and body shape. Similarly, the importance of romantic relationships, and at a more general level being 'at ease' in cross-sex interactions, have also been shown by several qualitative studies (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Eder, 1985; Francis et al., 2010). Quantitative research has also found that involvement in dating/romantic relationships was positively associated with popularity and acceptance (Carlson and Rose, 2007; Houser et al., 2015; Miller et al., 2009). Additionally, Dijkstra and colleagues found that popularity was more strongly associated with cross-sex acceptance than same-sex acceptance (Dijkstra et al., 2010b). One study among Chinese elementary school students (grade 5) found that cross-sex interaction was negatively associated with popularity (Li et al., 2012a), while another research among adolescents (grade 8) found that dating was positively associated with both popularity and acceptance (Niu et al., 2016).

3.3.7. Leadership abilities and the Big Five personality traits

There are several dimensions to personality and several taxonomies of personality traits in psychology. Although many of them may be relevant to peer status, there are relatively few studies that investigated the relationship between popularity, acceptance, and personality; and these studies almost exclusively used the *Big Five factors* (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism) (e.g. Ilmarinen et al., 2019; Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002; Lubbers et al., 2006; Mervielde and Fruyt, 2000; van der Linden et al., 2010; Wolters et al., 2014). A recent review suggests that out of the five factors extraversion is positively associated with both popularity and acceptance, agreeableness is positively associated with acceptance, neuroticism is negatively associated (in some studies) with both forms of status, while openness and conscientiousness is typically not associated with status (van Aken and Asendorpf, 2018 cited by Ilmarinen et al., 2019). Van der Linden and colleagues found that when all Big Five dimensions were tested simultaneously, most of the statistical significance was lost, which suggested that the dimensions had overlapping variance (van der Linden et al., 2010). They created a higher-order factor, the General Factor of Personality (GFP), to grasp this shared variance, and this factor was positively associated with both popularity and likeability. Wolters and colleagues simultaneously investigated behavioural, personality, and communicative predictors of the two status dimensions among adolescents (Wolters et al., 2014). Out of the two personality traits they investigated (extraversion and agreeableness), only extraversion was found to be a distinct predictor of popularity. Additionally, they found that prosocial behaviour only predicted popularity if it was associated with high levels of extraversion, while antisocial behaviour was also associated with higher levels of popularity in case of students high on extraversion. Besides the Big Five personality traits, some studies investigated the role of leadership abilities, in particular the extent to which it can moderate the association between popularity and relational aggression. Waasdorp and colleagues found that both popularity and acceptance were positively associated with leadership, and popular pupils who used relational aggression were more likely to be seen as leaders (Waasdorp et al., 2013). Puckett and colleagues found that leadership moderated the positive association between relational aggression and popularity, but not the negative association between relational

aggression and acceptance (Puckett et al., 2008), while Gangel and colleagues found that in the case of girls only those relationally aggressive peers were popular who were also high at perceived leadership ability (Gangel et al., 2017).

3.4. The effects of peer norms, group composition, and the social context

The previous sections provided a review of the most widely discussed behavioural and personality correlates of peer status (popularity/coolness and acceptance/preference) among adolescents. We have seen that the association between status and some of these correlates was fairly universal across gender, samples, and cultures (e.g. prosociality, physical attractiveness), while the relationship with other correlates was more controversial (e.g. academic performance) or subgroup- and context-dependent (e.g. aggression). Even in the case of more universal associations, the cultural context matters, as was shown for instance by the stronger association between prosociality and popularity among Chinese students. In this section, the effects of the local (peer norms and group composition) and the wider social context will be discussed.

It has been long established in social psychology that humans have a strong tendency to conform to majority group opinions and group pressure (e.g. Asch, 1956; Milgram et al., 1969). Among adolescents, several studies have demonstrated that peer/classroom norms have significant impact on behaviour. Dijkstra and Gest outlines a distinction between descriptive norms, i.e. the extent to which a given behaviour is prevalent in the classroom/peer group, and salient norms (or ‘norm salience’), i.e. the extent to which a behaviour is associated with popularity/(reputational) status (Dijkstra and Gest, 2015). They found among Dutch adolescents (TRAILS) that behaviour associated with popularity in a given classroom (academic achievement, prosocial behaviour, bullying) had a larger effect on the relationship between that behaviour and acceptance than the classroom prevalence of the behaviour (Dijkstra et al., 2008; Dijkstra and Gest, 2015). For instance, in classes where popularity was associated with bullying, the negative association between bullying and acceptance was weaker (Dijkstra et al., 2008). Laninga-Wijnen and colleagues investigated the temporal development of peer norms related to aggressive and prosocial behaviour on another longitudinal Dutch adolescents sample (SNARE) (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2018). They found that higher

initial levels of aggressive behaviour were associated with the development of higher aggressive descriptive and popularity norms, whereas higher initial levels of prosocial behaviour were associated with the development of higher levels of descriptive, but not popularity norms. Similarly, Rambaran and colleagues demonstrated the importance of norm salience in the spread of risk attitudes (e.g. smoking, skipping school, damaging things) among Dutch adolescents (Rambaran et al., 2013).

While the norm salience and descriptive norm approach provides a measure of the actual proportion and importance of the given behaviour, another approach is to ask students about their perceptions of peer norms. This can involve asking respondents to estimate the number of classmates conducting certain behaviours (e.g. making fun of others) (e.g. Galván et al., 2011), describe how the class would react to certain behaviours (e.g. Romera et al., 2019), or to what extent their classmates/friends value certain behaviours (e.g. Allen et al., 2005). These studies demonstrated the influence of *perceived* peer norms on individual behaviour. For instance, Romera and colleagues found among Spanish primary school students that both bullies and defenders had high popularity in classes with pro-bullying norms, while in classes with anti-bullying norms bullies had low and defenders high popularity (Romera et al., 2019). The importance of perceived norms is also underlined by an earlier review on peer influence processes (Brechwald and Prinstein, 2011) which suggests that adolescents' behaviour is more strongly associated with their perception of peer norms than their peers' actual (self-reported) behaviour.

Importantly, a significant portion of peer influence is not related to classroom norms but to cliques. Conformity to clique norms can be especially salient for high-status group members as non-conformity can easily lead to sanctions or expulsion from the group (Brown, 2011). Additionally, affiliation with the popular groups is an important social goal for many adolescents since it is one of the major ways of increasing one's own status (Dijkstra et al., 2010a; Eder, 1985), which explains the large influence popular students can have on peers outside of their cliques. However, it is not only the desire to join the popular clique that can affect individual behaviour, but at a more general level, the peer norms of any group/clique one would like to affiliate with. For instance, Berger and Rodkin found in a Chilean early adolescent sample that for peers who changes group affiliation between the two waves of survey, the level of aggressive and/or prosocial

behaviour was impacted by the norms of the group they joined (Berger and Rodkin, 2012).

Peer norms are assumed to be influenced by some structural factors, such as the structure of the popularity/status hierarchy. For instance, Garandeu and colleagues found that in classes with strong variations in popularity (hierarchical classes) aggression was positively associated with popularity whereas in classes with small variations in popularity (egalitarian classes) aggression was not associated with popularity (Garandeu et al., 2011). Similarly, social acceptance was less negatively associated with aggression in hierarchical classes. However, Zwaan and colleagues found the association between status and aggression to be stronger in more egalitarian classes (Zwaan et al., 2013). Reflecting on the conflicting results between these (and other) studies, Laninga-Wijnen and colleagues suggest that not only the variation in popularity but also the shape of the popularity hierarchy needs to be taken into consideration (Laninga-Wijnen et al., 2019). They found on a Dutch longitudinal sample (SNARE) that classes with a strong variation in popularity *and* a pyramid-shaped popularity hierarchy (with few popular students on the top) were characterized by a relative increase in aggressive popularity norms and a decrease in prosocial popularity norms. In addition to popularity hierarchies, the size of the school, the plurality of the class value system, and school transition may further refine the picture. The larger number of available peers and the increased variety of school and extracurricular activities at high school can both reduce the importance of status achievement in the classroom and the impact popular peers can have on their classmates (Brown, 2011). Furthermore, at high school interest starts to shift from group relationships towards individual ties, such as romantic relationships (Brown, 2011).

Another important factor is the socio-demographic composition of the class, in particular the racial/ethnic composition. Students who are in the numerical majority may receive more nominations as a result of *same ethnicity bias*. For instance, Bellmore and colleagues found that European, Asian, and Latin American students demonstrated *positive* same ethnicity bias (more acceptance and fewer rejection towards same-ethnicity peers), while African American students demonstrated *global* same-ethnicity bias (nominating more same-ethnicity peers for both acceptance and rejection) (Bellmore et al., 2007). Similarly, Pethes found on a Hungarian primary school sample that ethnic Roma students were more popular in Roma-majority classes than non-Roma students

(Pethes, 2015). Additionally, it has been documented in the literature that ethnic and racial segregation is prevalent even in desegregated/integrated classes (e.g. Moody, 2001). In such settings, race/ethnicity is typically the most salient factor along which sub-groups/cliques are formed, which can lead to the co-existence of pluralistic status systems along racial/ethnic lines (Brown, 2011). In these cases, the investigation of group-specific peer dynamics may be particularly useful in understanding the local status systems. For instance, Rock and colleagues found that in the case of African American students, high ethnic identity centrality was associated with high levels of peer acceptance and popularity when rated by other African American students, while their acceptance and popularity were unrelated to ethnic identity centrality when rated by European American peers (Rock et al., 2011). Similarly, some studies found in Hungary that Roma students were more likely to dislike (Boda and Néray, 2015), bully (Kisfalusi et al., 2018) or consider less clever (Kisfalusi et al., 2019) those peers whom they perceived as Roma but who self-identified as non-Roma.

Finally, the wider social context, such as the values and stereotypes held by members of the (adult) society and/or values and stereotypes presented through the mass media may also influence peer dynamics. For instance, status characteristics such as sex, race, or physical attractiveness can determine the distribution of influence and prestige among group members (Berger et al., 1980). Similarly, different expectations for members of low and high status groups can influence their behaviour, engagement, and performance. In Hungary, Grow and colleagues found among secondary school students that even after controlling for the dyadic perception of academic achievement, ethnic Roma students were less likely to receive ability attributions than non-Roma students both from their Roma and non-Roma peers (Grow et al., 2016). The authors found no such tendency in the case of gender. However, Kisfalusi and colleagues found among early adolescent primary school students that (after controlling for grades) respondents were more likely to nominate in-group than out-group peers as clever both in the case of gender and ethnicity, with the exception of boys, who were as likely to nominate boys as girls (Kisfalusi et al., 2019).

4. A cross-sectional view: Reputational status and acceptance from a mixed methods perspective²⁵

Chapter Summary

This chapter presents my first results regarding the correlates of reputational status and acceptance. The quantitative results come from multilevel and fractional regression analyses of the wave four data of the RECENS primary school database, while the qualitative results from the thematic analysis of the focus group interviews. The quantitative part used a restricted sample ($N = 754$) where classes with zero or one Roma student were excluded. The mixed methods integration of the results is informed by the ‘exploratory bidirectional’ framework (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017), where the initial qualitative analysis informs the quantitative analysis, and both are taken into consideration during the final interpretation. The research findings are mostly in line with the international literature, underlying the importance of athleticism, physical appearance, verbal aggression, and risk behaviour (smoking), while some diverging ethnic and gendered patterns also emerged. The novelty of the research lies in the mixed approach, while the chapter also contributes empirically to our knowledge about informal status among Hungarian early adolescents.

4.1. Introduction

We have seen in the previous chapters that the reputational and affective dimensions of peer status, according to the findings of the international literature, were two moderately correlated distinct constructs. We have also seen that in the predominantly North American and West European literature reputational status (popularity, coolness) was typically positively associated with athleticism, (relational) aggression, prosocial behaviour, risk behaviour, physical attractiveness, involvement in romantic relationships, leadership abilities, and extraversion, while it was negatively or non-significantly

²⁵ This chapter is a substantially extended and revised version of a manuscript submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, which is currently under review. The submitted manuscript only focused on the reputational status dimensions (popularity, coolness). Some changes have been made to the manuscript to meet the formal requirements of the dissertation.

associated with academic performance and (behavioural) academic engagement. In this literature, acceptance was also positively associated with most of these traits and behaviours, except for aggression with which it was negatively associated and risk behaviour with which it was typically not associated. Additionally, acceptance was usually positively associated with academic engagement and performance, although some research found no association with these correlates. The scarce literature from ‘non-Western’ contexts imply that there may be important cultural differences. For instance, research with Chinese adolescents found that popularity was positively associated with academic performance and more strongly associated with prosociality than in ‘Western’ samples (Li et al., 2012b; Niu et al., 2016; Owens et al., 2014), while the relationship between athleticism, aggression, and peer status was controversial in the Chinese studies (cf. Dong et al., 1996; Lu, Jin, et al., 2018; Niu et al., 2016; Schwartz et al., 2010; Tseng et al., 2013; Xi et al., 2016). The authors argued that these differences could be (at least partly) explained by the larger emphasis Chinese culture puts on academic achievement and the emphasis collectivist cultures put on social harmony. I hypothesized in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.) that the formerly socialist countries of the Central and Eastern European region may provide a cultural context distinct both from the ‘Western’ and the Chinese context. According to the work of Hofstede and colleagues, Hungary scores similarly on the cultural dimensions of power distance and individualism to the Northwestern European and ‘Anglo’ countries, while it scores similarly to most Asian countries on the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and restraint (Hofstede et al., 2010). Consequently, it could be expected that the Hungarian early adolescents in my sample would put similarly high importance on traits (e.g. physical attractiveness) or behaviour (e.g. athleticism, aggression) that is related to (interpersonal) competition as their ‘Western’ peers, whereas behaviour related to social harmony (e.g. being kind or helpful) could be less emphatic. However, since sports are particularly important in American society, I would expect the association between athleticism and peer status to be somewhat less emphatic in my sample. Based on the negative association between diligence and popularity Boda and Vörös found among Hungarian adolescents (Boda and Vörös, 2013), we could also expect a negative relationship between academic engagement and reputational status. In line with these preliminary expectations, the following hypotheses can be formed:

H1a: Athletic ability will be positively associated with both forms of peer status.

H1b: Athletic ability will not be the strongest/most important correlate for either form of peer status.

H2: Prosocial behaviour will only be modestly associated with both forms of peer status.²⁶

H3: Aggression will be positively associated with coolness/popularity and negatively with acceptance.

H4: Physical appearance will be positively associated with both forms of peer status.

H5: Academic engagement will be negatively associated with coolness/popularity.

With regards to the other correlates, based on the Hungarian and cross-cultural literature, no prior expectations are formed. Mandácskó and Panyik (2014) also found a positive relationship between smoking and peer status among Hungarian secondary school students; however, our early adolescent sample (age 11-13) may be too young for substance use to be prevalent.

In addition to these overall trends, some gender differences are also expected. We have seen in Chapter 3 that in the international literature athleticism was more strongly associated with male popularity, while prosocial behaviour and physical attractiveness with female peer status. Similarly, the ‘gender-typical’ forms of aggression were (more strongly) associated with reputational status: relational aggression in the case of girls and overt aggression in the case of boys. We have also seen that engagement in risk behaviour may have a negative association with girls’ acceptance, while academic achievement and engagement may be (more) negatively associated with boys’ reputational status. Since Hungary scored similarly to most Asian countries on Hofstede’s indulgence-restraint dimension, and since Hungary shows one of the highest levels of gender stereotypes within the European Union (European Commission, 2017), we could expect social norms dictating ‘gender-appropriate’ behaviour to be strong. Consequently, the following gender-specific hypotheses can be formed:

H6: Athletic ability will be more strongly associated with popularity/coolness for boys.

²⁶ Since the quantitative data does not contain sociometric peer nominations of prosociality, this can only be tested in the qualitative data.

H7: Prosociality will be more strongly associated with both forms of peer status for girls.

H8: Physical attractiveness will be more strongly associated with both forms of peer status for girls.

H9a: Academic achievement will be negatively associated with coolness/popularity for boys.

H9b: Academic achievement will not be associated with coolness/popularity for girls.

H10: Academic engagement will be more negatively associated with coolness/popularity for boys.

H11a: Overt aggression will be positively associated with boys' coolness/popularity.

H11b: Overt aggression will not be associated with girls' coolness/popularity.

H12a: Relational aggression will be positively associated with both boys' and girls' coolness/popularity.²⁷

H12b: Relational aggression will be more strongly associated with girls' coolness/popularity.

Furthermore, ethnic differences may also be expected. Although the Hungarian literature is limited on ethnic differences in reputational status and acceptance, the available evidence suggests that the international literature, most prominently the widely discussed differences between Black and White Americans, may not be a good indicator of the differences between Roma and non-Roma students in Hungary. We have seen above that empirical tests of the 'acting white' hypothesis did not find support for the presence of an 'oppositional culture' among Roma pupils. Although these studies did not investigate the reputational dimension of status, some of them used measures that are similar to acceptance (Habsz and Radó, 2018 used social preference, Hajdu et al., 2019 used friendship nominations). However, in a vignette experiment Keller (2020) found some limited evidence for the presence of an ethnic 'oppositional culture': in classes *with high ethnic diversity*, Roma students rated a *hypothetical* peer as 'less cool'. Even though the evidence for the 'acting white' phenomenon may be (so far) weak, there are some other factors to consider. Due to the disadvantaged social position and widespread exclusion of the Roma population, the only sizeable ethnic minority in Hungary, other

²⁷ Since relational aggression is not analysed in the quantitative models, this can only be deduced from the qualitative data.

forms of ‘oppositional cultures’ may have developed, such as the one observed by Willis (1977) among working-class English boys. Some American literature also suggests that aggression is more strongly associated with Black pupils’ coolness/popularity in some contexts (e.g. Luthar and McMahon, 1996; Meisinger et al., 2007). Consequently, it may be useful to investigate the relationship between aggression and reputational status among Roma students as well. Finally, the relationship between athleticism and reputational status may also be worth considering. Even though, to my knowledge, ethnic differences in the popularity-athleticism association have not been investigated in Hungary yet, and there are few well-known professional Roma athletes contrary to the abundance of high-profile Black athletes, there may be some reasons to consider potential ethnic differences. Since the academic performance of Roma students, on average, is much lower than the performance of their non-Roma peers (see for instance Kertesi and Kézdi, 2011, 2016), other areas where they can excel may receive significant salience. In the educational context, in addition to academic achievement, there are typically two other (school-supported) ways to excel: sports and arts. Therefore it may be expected that these activities would be more strongly associated with reputational status for Roma than for non-Roma pupils. Status achievement through arts, especially music, may be more in line with the cultural traditions (and public perceptions) of the Roma population. Based on these considerations, the following ethnicity-specific hypotheses can be formulated:

H13a: Academic achievement will be negatively associated with coolness/popularity for Roma students.

H13b: Academic achievement will be positively associated with acceptance for both Roma and non-Roma students.

H14a: Academic engagement will be more negatively associated with coolness/popularity for Roma students.

H14b: Academic engagement will be positively associated with acceptance for both Roma and non-Roma students.

H15: Aggression will be more strongly associated with coolness/popularity for Roma students.

H16: Athletic ability will be more strongly associated with coolness/popularity for Roma students.

H17: Arts (music) will be more strongly associated with coolness/popularity for Roma students.²⁸

4.2. Data and analytical strategy

4.2.1. Data

Quantitative Data

For the present analysis, a limited version of the wave four database was used. The original sample involved 1054 students in 53 classes (51 per cent male, 35 per cent ethnic Roma, 31 per cent with low SES background, mean GPA: 3.27). However, due to the goals of the present analysis, classes with no or only one ethnic Roma students were excluded, leaving a sample of 754 students in 41 classes (51 per cent male, 47 per cent Roma, 39 per cent low SES, mean GPA: 3.02). This also makes this reduced sample more similar to the focus group sample (see below). In this new sample the average proportion of Roma students per class is 42 per cent (ranging from 8 to 83 per cent), while 59 per cent of the Roma and 21 per cent of the non-Roma pupils have low SES. The average class size is 19 students, ranging from 10 to 25 pupils. The procedure of the data collection (section 2.1.1.) and the variables used in the quantitative analyses (section 2.3.) were described in Chapter 2. Table 2 below presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in the quantitative models, while Table 3 compares the mean coolness and acceptance scores along the binary variables included in the analysis (sex, ethnicity, SES, being a smoker). For each pair of acceptance scores independent t-tests were conducted, whereas for each pair of coolness scores, given that the coolness score is not normally distributed, Mann-Whitney U tests (histograms showing the distribution of the two dependent variables can be found in the Appendices, Figures 2-3). We can see that there were no statistically significant differences in acceptance scores along any of the binary variables, whereas coolness scores differed significantly three out of four cases. Boys, Roma students, and smokers were considered cooler than girls, non-Roma pupils, and non-smokers, respectively.

²⁸ Since arts are not measured by the quantitative database, this can only be tested in the qualitative data.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (wave four, limited database)²⁹

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
<i>Peer nominations</i>					
Coolness	.26	.19	0	.83	754
Acceptance	.51	.20	0	1	729
Athleticism	.28	.26	0	1	754
Verbal aggression	.12	.12	0	.67	754
Physical aggression	.06	.09	0	.5	754
Physical appearance	.23	.19	0	.93	754
Teacher's favourite	.18	.19	0	.94	754
Smart	.33	.25	0	1	754
<i>GPA and engagement</i>					
Engagement	.27	1.15	-2	2	570
GPA (deviation)*	.00	.95	-2.41	2.5	648
<i>Contextual variables</i>					
GPA (class)	3.02	.41	1.65	3.91	672
Roma proportion	.42	.21	.08	.83	754
Disadvantaged proportion	.33	.34	0	1	754

*GPA (deviation) is the individual deviation from the average class GPA

Table 3: Mean coolness and acceptance scores (wave four, limited database)

	Coolness score (mean/SE)	Acceptance score (mean/SE)
Boy	.31(.010)***	.50(.010)
Girl	.21(.009)***	.52(.010)
Roma	.30(.011)***	.51(.011)
Non-Roma	.22(.009)***	.51(.010)
Low SES	.28(.013)	.52(.121)
Non-low SES	.25(.009)	.51(.010)
Smoker	.35(.027)**	.49(.026)
Non-smoker	.26(.008)**	.52(.001)

** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Note: independent t-tests were conducted for each pair of acceptance scores and Mann-Whitney U tests for each pair of coolness scores

²⁹ All statistical data presented in the dissertation was calculated with Stata/MP 13.1., with the exception of the fractional regression models presented in the Appendices, which were calculated with Stata/IC 16.0.

Qualitative Data.

The thematic analysis presented in this chapter involves all the 21 focus groups (144 students, 10 school classes). According to the survey results, 54 per cent of the focus group sample were male, 68 per cent ethnic Roma, 19 per cent had low SES, and the mean GPA was 2.87, thus classes with a higher proportion of Roma students were somewhat overrepresented compared to the quantitative sample. The procedure of the data collection and the structure of the interviews were described in Chapter 2 (section 2.1.2.).

4.2.2. Analytical Strategy

The mixed methods data integration applied a concurrent ‘exploratory bidirectional’ framework (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017), where the qualitative data was analysed first, which subsequently informed the quantitative data analysis and for the final interpretation both analyses were taken into consideration. The qualitative data was analysed with qualitative thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006), where I applied thematic coding on the transcripts of the interviews. I followed a ‘reflexive’ approach (Braun et al., 2018), where the final codes were the result of an iterative coding process and the construction and interpretation of the themes were made by me. I will present in the next section the most important themes that I identified in the data with illustrative examples. For the quantitative analysis, multilevel and fractional (Papke and Wooldridge, 1996; Ramalho et al., 2011) regression models were built. Although multilevel methods seem a natural choice as pupils are nested in school classes, considering the limited, proportional nature of the dependent variables, some researchers argue that the application of fractional regression models is more appropriate (e.g. Kisfalusi, 2016a). The results of the fractional regression models are presented in the Appendices (Tables 16-17) for the reader’s information.

In the quantitative models, based on the empirical literature described above, the following individual-level variables were included: athleticism (*sport*), verbal aggression (*mock*), physical aggression (*hit*), physical appearance (*looks*), perceived smartness, being the teacher’s favourite, GPA (deviance from the class average), (behavioural) engagement, being a smoker, sex, ethnicity, SES, and the other status dimension (i.e. acceptance for the coolness models and coolness for the acceptance models). In order to

control for contextual effects, I also involved three contextual variables: average class GPA, the proportion of Roma students, and the proportion of low SES students. In line with the theoretical expectations described above, the interaction of sex and ethnicity with the following variables were also included: verbal and physical aggression, GPA, athleticism, and physical appearance. In order to understand the combined effects of gender and ethnicity, three-way interactions were also added. To facilitate the interpretation of these interactions, the combined coefficients and joint significance tests for the four groups (Roma boys, non-Roma boys, Roma girls, non-Roma girls) will be presented in a separate table. Further, a three-way interaction between ethnicity, ethnic proportion, and GPA was also added as the qualitative interviews suggested some degree of ‘oppositional culture’ in some of the ethnically segregated classes. Finally, in the Discussion section an integrated interpretation of the quantitative and qualitative results will be presented.

4.3. Results

4.3.1. Qualitative Results

Although the focus groups predominantly concentrated on students’ discursive construction of popularity and popularity dynamics, pupils sometimes talked about personality traits and behaviours that made them like or dislike their peers. Generally, these traits and activities related to social preference were well distinguishable from the traits and behaviours that, in their perception, made someone popular in the class. Since the latter, reputational dimension appeared much more emphatically in students’ accounts, and was also the focus of the group interviews, this section will primarily present the results related to this dimension.

As was mentioned in Chapter 2 (section 2.1.2.), at the beginning of the interviews students were asked to list and rank the characteristics that they believed contributed to popularity in their class. At this initial stage they almost exclusively ranked physical strength, good academic performance, being good at sports, and in groups where it was listed, being humorous/funny at the first three places. This convergence in the initial answers shows that students at this stage mostly provided answers that were ‘safe’ to present to an adult audience and, at the same time, easy to conceive when confronted with

such a complex question. Additionally, students might also have relied on some frames provided by the survey questionnaire (wave four), which took place approximately one month prior to the interviews (the survey questionnaire also included ‘good academic performance’ and being ‘good at sports’). However, as the interviews progressed and the in-depth discussion of popularity-related traits/behaviours evolved, the importance of more anti-social behaviours such as the lack of respect towards teachers, verbal and physical confrontations with peers, and ‘arrogance’ also emerged. Simultaneously, good academic performance was hardly ever mentioned later, and when pupils were asked directly about it, they argued that it was either irrelevant or somewhat negative from the perspective of popularity. In several groups, some forms of prosocial behaviour (e.g. being kind, helpful) were also outlined as salient contributors to one’s popularity. In the rest of the section, I will present the most important themes one-by-one.

Physical Strength and Aggression

Physical strength, the ability to protect oneself and one’s friends, was a recurring theme in most of the boy groups. Its salience is well demonstrated by the fact that it frequently came up even at parts of the interviews where other topics were discussed. While the initiation of verbal and physical confrontations was almost exclusively presented in a negative light, the ability to protect oneself against such aggression appeared to be highly desirable. Of course, it is often difficult to judge who really started a confrontation and whether the reaction was ‘proportional’ to the original aggression, for instance in cases when verbal aggression was countered by physical violence.

Michael: The only thing I can’t put up with is when someone calls my mother names. And he [*another boy from the class*] did that once and it turned out really bad for him.³⁰

Verbal aggression was mentioned both in the case of boys and girls, while physical confrontation, with a few exceptions, was predominantly related to boys. The prevalence of boys’ physical confrontations was also confirmed by girls’ reports, while such confrontation among girls was only mentioned a few times (for an exception see the more

³⁰ All quotations have been translated from Hungarian by the author. All original names have been changed to (different) English names in order to protect the participants’ anonymity.

detailed description of ‘oppositional cultures’ in some ethnically segregated classes in Chapter 6).

Sophia: Emily got beaten up exactly because of her coolness.

Emma: You saw Ann, that tall girl who was here [just before the interview started], she provoked her. (...) Because Emily cooked up that she talked behind her back with one of our girlfriends, and she was taunting Ann all day (...)

Sophia: And then Emily [said] she won’t dare hit me, I will beat her up, and then Ann bet her up.

We can see in this excerpt that overt verbal aggression (taunting) and relational manipulation (talking behind one’s back) were associated with status (coolness). Indeed, verbally aggressive peers were often considered popular and, mostly in the case of girls, they were also frequently labelled as ‘arrogant’ and seemed to be widely disliked, which underlines the distinction between being liked and being considered popular/cool (powerful). The popularity of these disliked peers was typically associated with denigrating and mocking others.

Moderator: And Sandra, why is she arrogant?

Several students: Because she denigrates everybody, she taunts everyone.

Barbara: And that [she thinks] she’s the best at everything. [*others agree*] [...]

Moderator: And Martha, why do you think it’s possible that Sandra is so arrogant and still popular?

Martha: She’s not popular at all.

Moderator: She’s not. [*others disagree*] Uhm, so she’s popular but not in the good sense?

Several students: yes, yes.

Amanda: And if someone dares talk to her, she denigrates them, and shouts at them. So I think because of this. No one dares to taunt her, they look up on her because of fear.

Pupils, primarily boys, with significant physical strength appeared to have particularly high status, not only as they were looked up on for their potential protective power, but also for being feared as aggressors. However, probably as a sort of “boys’ code”, many would not admit fear openly as is demonstrated by the following excerpt.

Moderator: And, by the way, does anyone become popular because s/he³¹ is more violent, gets into physical fights, or are you afraid of them?

Daniel: We are afraid.

David: It’s not that we are afraid of them but... [*silence*]

Moderator: So you are not afraid of them, okay.

³¹ Hungarian pronouns have no gender.

Andrew: I'm not afraid of anyone either.

Chris: I'm not afraid of anyone either.

Although only a few students did actually admit being physically aggressive, there were some examples mentioned when a stronger, (assumedly) aggressive student was successfully confronted by a group of their classmates. Importantly, while 'authentic' physical strength was looked up on, physical weakness combined with aggressive behaviour seemed to lead to extreme unpopularity.

William: If he is a jerk and jibes without any reason. Also if he is really weak and still insists on being strong. He is sitting in front of me, for example [*points at another boy*].

Pro- and Antisocial Behaviour

During the interviews, both prosocial and antisocial behaviours were mentioned several times as contributors to popularity. While kindness, friendliness, and helpfulness were frequently emphasized, they were often verbalized as the negation of non-desirable characteristics (e.g. not mocking others, not being rude), thus sometimes they might have been part of pupils' desires rather than actual characteristics contributing to status. Personality traits such as *extraversion* ('being able to talk to everyone') or *resilience* (not being 'too touchy') also frequently came up in combination with these prosocial traits.

Natalie: Alex's group, Julia and Molly cannot talk to everyone and they are not popular.

Moderator: Why not?

Natalie: Because they are really touchy, because if anyone says anything they rather run away.

Jack: Or they lash out at you.

With regards to the role of antisocial behaviour, students were more divided. It seems that 'softer' forms of antisocial behaviour (e.g. jests aimed at teachers and classmates) could contribute to one's popularity to a great extent in many classes, while 'too much' antisocial behaviour could have the contrary effect. However, reflection on the interview situation needs to be made here. The presence of adult interviewers and compliance with their assumed expectations might have influenced these answers, in particular in the case of the 'strong' forms of antisocial behaviour. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that

students were typically really open about ‘bad behaviour’ (a term they used frequently) and its (assumed) contribution to one’s popularity.

Jasmine: Because there is something every week. Not long ago I got a written warning from the principal.

Stella: I had a school disciplinary hearing not long ago.

Lucy: Me too!

Stella: And I’m still behaving badly.

Naomi: We dig it when someone behaves badly.

Moderator: And what does it mean that s/he behaves badly?

Naomi: S/he’s swearing at teachers, talking during classes, hitting, taunting you.

As we have seen in the literature, substance use is one form of risk behaviour widespread among adolescents. Both during the interviews and the survey research students were asked about drinking alcohol and smoking. Interestingly, while pupils were quite open during the interviews about other forms of ‘bad behaviour’, they tended to become visibly defensive and tense when they were asked about smoking. They heavily denied that anyone smoked in the class or emphasized that the ones who smoked were ‘not in this group’. Additionally, they often controlled each other’s answers to ensure that no-one mentioned names. It may be the case that smoking is judged in a much more negative light by teachers and parents than jibes or even physical aggression. Students occasionally mentioned that parents were going to ‘kill’ them in case they found out they were smoking, while such concerns never came up with regards to physical confrontations with peers or disrespect towards teachers. However, after being repeatedly assured that no-one would learn about their smoking habits, participants often opened up about this topic.

Moderator: And what do you think about someone smoking, for instance?

Sara: You won’t show this video [*sic*] to anyone, will you?

Moderator: No, it will only be heard by us [*the researchers*], no one else.

Sara: Do I have to answer honestly now? But you won’t tell anyone, will you?

Moderator: Your teachers won’t know about it either. So, are those who smoke popular or unpopular?

Sara: Popular.

Alice: Popular.

Based on the (somewhat limited) information that participants provided, it seems that trying out smoking could make someone more popular initially (being admired for they 'bravery'); however, this effect often diminished over time. In the case of frequent smokers, smoking sometimes contributed negatively to popularity, at least according to students' reports. Additionally, some socially excluded students were also reported to smoke regularly, and in their case unpopularity was clearly not the result of their smoking habits but other factors. On the other hand, alcohol consumption did not really seem relevant for this age group (age 11-13). During the interviews, students did not report drinking alcoholic beverages regularly, and only a few of them mentioned having tried them out at all, typically together with adult family members. Noticeably, this question did not cause any strong emotional reaction from pupils, nor the need to control each other's answers.

Good Academic Performance

Most students claimed that school performance did not affect popularity. However, peers with good academic performance were sometimes considered 'antisocial' or 'boring' and students with good grades had to prove they were not 'nerds'.

William: By the way Rob is not a nerd; not a nerd because he is able to talk with anyone.

Jennifer: The ugly nerd [is unpopular in the class]. [...]

Moderator: And why are good students unpopular?

Jennifer: Because that's so oldish.

In the excerpts above two aspects are of particular importance. In the first quotation, the label 'nerd' is constructed as a complex category involving good grades, academic engagement, *and* low social skills. The (high status) respondent was defending a classmate (a friend of his) from the 'accusation' of being a 'nerd' by pointing out that the student in question had good social skills. The second quotation demonstrates the stereotypical association between good and academically engaged students and physical unattractiveness, being 'oldish', and being boring.

Additionally, in many groups strong resentfulness was verbalized towards those good students who were *also* perceived as the ‘teacher’s favourite’ either for getting ‘special treatment’ or for being ‘too kind’ towards the teacher.

Moderator: And if someone is a good student, does that make him/her more popular in this class?

Axel: It depends, if s/he’s a brown-noser then no. [...]

Moderator: Okay, but what does s/he do, so that s/he’s a brown-noser?

Axel: For example, [*imitating a ‘nerd’ talking to the teacher*] Sir, do we have an oral report³² today, or do I have an oral report, will I get a five, won’t I?

Patrick: Shows much kindness to the teacher.

Victor: For instance, [*imitating*] I will invite you Sir for a Coke, or something.

Interestingly, the strongest hostility towards academically engaged students was verbalized in some of the only-Roma girl groups (this topic will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6).

Linda: Just sitting at your desk [all day], so oldish, that’s not [cool].

Kimberly: That’s not [cool].

Linda: I’d like to hit them in the head.

Moderator: So it’s not possible for someone to be both [a good student and cool]?

Linda: No, not in this class.

Athleticism

As expected, being good at sports was reported to be a salient component of school popularity. In the case of boys, it appeared to be the most important theme in *every* group, although some forms of sports, soccer in particular, seemed to be more important than others. Additionally, boxing seemed to be the second most important sport among boys, which is probably related to the importance of physical strength and protective potential discussed above. However, in most groups, boys reported to like all forms of sports, although no other sport emerged with comparable prestige to soccer and boxing. In the case of girls, a wide variety of sports were mentioned (e.g. volleyball, handball, but also

³² In the Hungarian school system it is customary in most subjects that students regularly have so-called ‘oral reports’ (*felelés*) in the first part of the class, where they get a grade for summarizing the material of the previous lesson(s) in front of the whole class. Students typically do not know in advance whom the teacher will select.

football). Nevertheless, in some girl groups some degree of ‘resentfulness’ towards sports was also observable.

Amy: There are boys [in the class] who really like sports.

Moderator: And does it make them more popular than the other boys? [...]

Rebecca: Just a bit.

Moderator: And among girls, how popular are those who do sports?

Rebecca: We just laugh at them.

Moderator: So this does not make girls more popular?

Rebecca: five per cent or ten per cent [more popular], or not even that.

Being Humorous and Funny

Being humorous and funny was another important theme that frequently came up during the interviews. It was reported to contribute to pupils’ popularity in several different ways. First, being funny could make someone popular on its own right, in particular if it was connected to (perceived) ‘spontaneity’.

Moderator: What makes someone funny?

Jason: S/he tells jokes, and reacts in some situations in a way that’s funny.

Lucas: Doesn’t take it seriously.

Moderator: So someone who can say something funny immediately.

Several boys simultaneously: Yes, yes.

Moderator: Or perhaps s/he tells you jokes?

Jason: Not really, but in the middle of a conversation drops in a punchline and stuff.

Second, being funny was related to both prosocial and antisocial behaviour. In some groups it was connected to instances of rebellion against the teachers’ authority through different jests at them. However, being funny was most frequently mentioned together with such traits as kindness, helpfulness and ‘not being a jerk to others’ (e.g. cheering up someone). All the three forms point to the direction that humour is associated with popularity, at least partly, due to the advanced verbal and social skills that these students possess.

Gender and Ethnicity

During the interviews, the relationship between ethnicity and popularity was consistently denied or underplayed, which may be explained by several factors. First, from the perspective of Roma respondents, the fact that the focus group moderators were all non-

Roma may have posed serious constraints on them expressing potential pro-Roma preferences. Second, in the mixed-ethnicity classes almost all focus groups were also mixed ethnically, which could also have put serious constraints on openly discussing ethnic dynamics. However, it is important to recall that groups were created by the students themselves, and while most groups became segregated gender-wise, ethnicity did not seem to play an important role in forming these groups. Therefore, it is possible that ethnicity *in fact* did not play a particularly salient role in this early adolescent sample. Gender, on the other hand, seemed to be a more important factor: all of the boy groups and some of the girl groups reported that boys, in general, were more popular than girls. Nevertheless, there were some girl groups where girls believed that they were, on average, more popular than boys.

4.3.2. Quantitative Results

For the quantitative analysis, random intercept multilevel models were built for both coolness and acceptance. In each model, intercepts were allowed to vary across classes, and standard errors were clustered at the class level. I built four models: in the first one, the theoretically relevant individual-level and contextual variables were involved, while in the second one the expected interactions were also added (for the details of the model building see above). In the third model, those variables were removed that were statistically insignificant *and* produced insignificant coefficients in size *and* significantly limited the case number at the same time. Since the peer nomination of smartness was highly correlated with the GPA (see Table 13 in the Appendices for correlations), the first three models excluded the smartness variable, whereas the fourth model is identical to the third one but includes smartness and excludes the GPA. This way the ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ measures of (academic) abilities are separated into distinct models.

Table 4 below shows the multilevel models of coolness. In Model 1 (the model without the interactions), we can see that, overall, being good at sports, verbal aggression (*mock*), physical appearance, and acceptance are positively associated with coolness, in line with our prior expectations. In addition, boys and Roma pupils still have significantly higher scores on coolness (cf. the descriptive statistics above) even after we have controlled for a variety of other variables. On the other hand, none of the measurements

of academic performance/engagement (GPA, engagement, teacher's favourite) seem to be associated with coolness, similarly to physical aggression, being a smoker, disadvantaged social background, or the three contextual variables. The inclusion of the interaction terms in Model 2 somewhat modifies the picture, with a statistically significant positive interaction for Roma girls in the case of physical aggression (Roma x Hit), and a statistically significant positive interaction for non-Roma boys in the case of sports (Boy x Sport). After removing some variables in Model 3, the interaction terms change; in this model we see a statistically significant negative interaction in the case of verbal aggression in the case of Roma girls (Roma x Mock) and a statistically significant positive interaction in the case of physical appearance for non-Roma boys (Boy x Looks). This change may be due to the increased number of observations (N=459 in Model 2 and N=627 in Model 3) and/or the better model fit (cf. AIC and BIC scores). Model 4 mostly replicates the results of Model 3, with smartness (similarly to the GPA) not being associated with coolness.

Table 4: Multilevel models of coolness (wave four, limited database)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Individual-level variables</i>				
Sport	0.21***	0.01	0.07	0.09
Mock	0.23**	0.53***	0.58***	0.60***
Hit	0.14	-0.20	0.13	0.04
Looks	0.41***	0.42***	0.40***	0.37***
Teacher's favourite	-0.04	-0.00		
Acceptance	0.27***	0.24***	0.25***	0.23***
Engagement	-0.00	-0.00		
Smoker	0.03	0.03		
Boy	0.10***	0.03	0.06*	0.04
Roma	0.03*	0.02	0.05	0.03
Disadvantaged	-0.01	-0.01		
GPA (dev)	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	
Smart				-0.03
<i>Contextual variables</i>				
GPA (class)	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	
Roma (prop)	0.01	-0.01	-0.07	-0.05
Disadvantaged (prop)	-0.02	-0.04		
<i>Individual-level interactions</i>				
Roma x Sport		0.05	0.07	0.06

Roma x Mock		-0.07	-0.33*	-0.32*
Roma x Hit		0.57*	0.33	0.38
Roma x GPA (dev)		-0.00		
Roma x Looks		-0.06	-0.03	0.01
Boy x Sport		0.25*	0.14	0.11
Boy x Mock		-0.24	-0.26	-0.25*
Boy x Hit		0.25	-0.09	-0.01
Boy x GPA (dev)		0.00		
Boy x Looks		0.28	0.30*	0.34***
Boy x Roma		0.07	0.02	0.03
Roma x Boy x Sports		-0.09	-0.05	-0.03
Roma x Boy x Mock		-0.41	0.01	-0.04
Roma x Boy x Hit		-0.52	-0.26	-0.17
Roma x Boy x GPA		-0.03		
Roma X Boy x Looks		-0.11	-0.1	-0.14
Interaction with contextual variables				
Roma x Roma (prop)		0.04	0.02	0.03
Roma x Roma (prop) x GPA (dev)		0.05		
Constant	-0.10	-0.06	-0.06	-0.08**
σ_e^2	0.07***	0.06***	0.06***	0.06***
σ_{u0}^2	0.11***	0.10***	0.11***	0.11***
N	459	459	627	729
AIC	-622.42	-673.16	-911.72	-1090.51
BIC	-548.1	-541.03	-791.82	-971.13

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

In order to better understand the association between the correlates and coolness for each sociodemographic group (Roma boys, non-Roma boys, Roma girls, non-Roma girls), I calculated the combined coefficients and ran joint significance tests for each group.³³ Table 5 below shows that athleticism is actually positively associated with coolness for all groups except for non-Roma girls (if we consider the models with the better fit, i.e. Models 3-4). Similarly, verbal aggression is positively associated with coolness for three out of the four groups, the exception here are the Roma boys. Conversely, physical aggression is positively associated with coolness only in the case of Roma girls. The strong positive association between physical appearance and coolness is statistically significant for all groups; however, surprisingly, this association is much stronger for boys than for girls.

³³ With the exception of GPA, where both the main and the interaction effects were zero or near zero in all cases.

Table 5: Combined coefficients and joint significance tests for the coolness models
(1. non-Roma girls; 2. Roma girls; 3. non-Roma boys; 4. Roma boys)

	Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff	p-value	Coeff	p-value	Coeff	p-value
1. Sports	0.01	(0.94)	0.07	(0.38)	0.09	(0.20)
2. Sports + Roma x Sports	0.06	(0.42)	0.14	(0.04)	0.15	(0.02)
3. Sports + Boy x Sports	0.26	(0.00)	0.21	(0.00)	0.20	(0.00)
4. Sports + Boy x Sports + Roma x Sports + Roma x Boy x Sports	0.23	(0.00)	0.23	(0.00)	0.24	(0.00)
1. Mock	0.53	(0.00)	0.58	(0.00)	0.60	(0.00)
2. Mock + Roma x Mock	0.46	(0.00)	0.25	(0.04)	0.28	(0.01)
3. Mock + Boy x Mock	0.29	(0.00)	0.32	(0.00)	0.35	(0.00)
4. Mock + Boy x Mock + Roma x Mock + Roma x Boy x Mock	-0.19	(0.10)	0.00	(0.97)	-0.01	(0.95)
1. Hit	-0.20	(0.32)	0.13	(0.62)	0.04	(0.85)
2. Hit + Roma x Hit	0.37	(0.03)	0.47	(0.01)	0.42	(0.02)
3. Hit + Boy x Hit	0.04	(0.78)	0.05	(0.69)	0.03	(0.81)
4. Hit + Boy x Hit + Roma x Hit + Roma x Boy x Hit	0.09	(0.64)	0.12	(0.43)	0.24	(0.12)
1. Looks	0.42	(0.00)	0.40	(0.00)	0.37	(0.00)
2. Looks + Roma x Looks	0.36	(0.00)	0.37	(0.00)	0.37	(0.00)
3. Looks + Boy x Looks	0.70	(0.00)	0.70	(0.00)	0.70	(0.00)
4. Looks + Boy x Looks + Roma x Looks + Roma x Boy x Looks	0.53	(0.00)	0.56	(0.00)	0.57	(0.00)

The same four models were ran in the case of acceptance (Table 6). Model 1 shows, in line with our expectations, that acceptance is positively associated with being good at sports, physical appearance, coolness, and the GPA, while it is negatively associated with physical aggression (*hit*). Interestingly, the negative association with verbal aggression (*mock*) is not significant statistically, while there is a, somewhat unexpected, statistically significant negative association with being a smoker. Additionally, the contextual effect of the class average GPA was also statistically significant, implying that in classes with a higher average GPA the individual acceptance scores are also higher on average. The three models that include the interaction terms show that none of the individual-level interactions are significant statistically (many of them are rather negligible in size as well); however, there is a statistically significant negative three-way interaction between ethnicity, GPA and the proportion of Roma

students in the class (Roma x Roma (prop) x GPA (dev)). This implies that in classes with a higher proportion of Roma students, better GPA is more negatively associated with acceptance for Roma than non-Roma students.

Similarly to the coolness models, I also calculated the combined coefficients and ran joint significance tests for the four sociodemographic groups (Table 7). The results show that being good at sports was not associated with acceptance for any of the groups, while for Roma boys physical aggression and for Roma girls verbal aggression was negatively associated with acceptance. One of the models show that the negative association between verbal aggression and acceptance was also statistically significant for Roma boys. The positive association with physical appearance is statistically significant for girls and Roma boys in all models, and for non-Roma boys in Model 3.

Table 6: Multilevel models of acceptance (wave four, limited database)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Individual-level variables</i>				
Sport	0.08*	0.10	0.07	0.05
Mock	-0.12	-0.22	-0.29	-0.18
Hit	-0.32**	-0.08	-0.33	-0.36
Looks	0.29***	0.29***	0.30***	0.30***
Teacher's favourite	-0.08	-0.07		
Coolness	0.31***	0.33***	0.31***	0.30***
Engagement	0.01	0.01		
Smoker	-0.04*	-0.04		
Boy	0.02	0.05	0.04	0.06
Roma	0.02	0.06	-0.02	0.03
Disadvantaged	-0.02	-0.01		
GPA (dev)	0.05***	0.07***	0.05***	
Smart				0.26***
<i>Contextual variables</i>				
GPA (class)	0.07*	0.08*	0.07*	
Roma (prop)	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.06
Disadvantaged (prop)	0.03	0.04		
<i>Individual-level interactions</i>				
Roma x Sport		0.01	0.03	0.02
Roma x Mock		-0.11	-0.07	-0.2
Roma x Hit		-0.08	0.26	0.4
Roma x GPA (dev)		0.04		
Roma x Looks		0.00	0.05	-0.05

Boy x Sports	-0.02	0.00	0.03	
Boy x Mock	0.27	0.25	0.07	
Boy x Hit	-0.53	-0.19	-0.03	
Boy x GPA (dev)	-0.01			
Boy x Looks	-0.06	-0.04	-0.17	
Boy x Roma	-0.07	-0.01	-0.06	
Roma x Boy x Sport	-0.02	-0.05	-0.04	
Roma x Boy x Mock	-0.04	-0.17	0.08	
Roma x Boy x Hit	0.53	0.11	-0.16	
Roma x Boy x GPA	0.02			
Roma x Boy x Looks	0.03	-0.06	0.13	
<i>Interaction with contextual variables</i>				
Roma x Roma (prop)	-0.02	0.04	0.03	
Roma x Roma (prop) x GPA (dev)	-0.12*			
Constant	0.12	0.08	0.12	0.25***
σ_e^2	0.07***	0.07***	0.06***	0.06***
σ_{u0}^2	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***	0.12***
N	459	459	627	729
AIC	-547.91	-536.47	-763.41	-903.61
BIC	-473.59	-404.34	-643.51	-784.22
*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001				

Table 7: Combined coefficients and joint significance tests for the acceptance models
(1. non-Roma girls; 2. Roma girls; 3. non-Roma boys; 4. Roma boys)

	Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coeff	p-value	Coeff	p-value	Coeff	p-value
1. Sports	0.10	(0.11)	0.07	(0.16)	0.05	(0.39)
2. Sports + Roma x Sports	0.11	(0.16)	0.10	(0.07)	0.07	(0.24)
3. Sports + Boy x Sports	0.08	(0.22)	0.08	(0.11)	0.08	(0.06)
4. Sports + Boy x Sports + Roma x Sports + Roma x Boy x Sports	0.07	(0.22)	0.06	(0.25)	0.06	(0.27)
1. Mock	-0.22	(0.36)	-0.29	(0.12)	-0.18	(0.25)
2. Mock + Roma x Mock	-0.33	(0.01)	-0.36	(0.01)	-0.38	(0.00)
3. Mock + Boy x Mock	0.05	(0.70)	-0.04	(0.70)	-0.11	(0.26)
4. Mock + Boy x Mock + Roma x Mock + Roma x Boy x Mock	-0.10	(0.35)	-0.29	(0.05)	-0.23	(0.11)
1. Hit	-0.08	(-0.19)	-0.33	(0.34)	-0.36	(0.27)
2. Hit + Roma x Hit	-0.16	(0.43)	-0.07	(0.71)	0.04	(0.81)
3. Hit + Boy x Hit	-0.61	(0.00)	-0.52	(0.00)	-0.39	(0.00)
4. Hit + Boy x Hit + Roma x Hit + Roma x Boy x Hit	-0.16	(0.38)	-0.14	(0.31)	-0.15	(0.27)

1. Looks	0.29	(0.00)	0.30	(0.00)	0.30	(0.00)
2. Looks + Roma x Looks	0.29	(0.00)	0.35	(0.00)	0.25	(0.00)
3. Looks + Boy x Looks	0.23	(0.09)	0.26	(0.02)	0.12	(0.20)
4. Looks + Boy x Looks + Roma x Looks + Roma x Boy x Looks	0.26	(0.00)	0.25	(0.01)	0.21	(0.03)

Since both dependent variables are proportions between zero and one, the robustness of the results was tested by rerunning all the models in fractional outcome regressions. This also seems necessary as the multilevel coolness models predicted values of the dependent variable slightly below zero in the case of 15 observations (see Table 14 in the Appendices). Overall, the fractional regression models (Tables 16-17 in the Appendices) produced the same results as the multilevel models with regards to the direction of the associations; however, the level of statistical significance differs in some cases. Importantly, in the fractional regression models of coolness, the positive association with being a boy is statistically significant in all models, whereas the positive interaction term between being a boy and physical appearance is not significant statistically in any of the models. Similarly, in the fractional regression models of acceptance, the positive association with being good at sports and the negative association with physical aggression are statistically significant in most models.

4.4. Discussion

This section will attempt to integrate the qualitative and quantitative findings and revisit the hypotheses outlined in the introduction of this chapter. My results show that, in line with the international literature, the reputational and the affective dimensions of status are indeed two distinct dimensions with a partly different set of correlates. Even though, due to the characteristics of my data, I have used two different constructs to grasp the reputational dimension (coolness in the quantitative and popularity in the qualitative part), the focus group interviews showed that pupils at the end of grade six had a reasonably good understanding of the concept of popularity and how it may be distinct from being liked, contrary to the time when the pre-survey interviews had been conducted approximately two years earlier (the reason for including coolness instead of popularity in the survey questionnaire is discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4.). Similarly to the

interviews, the quantitative data also show that coolness and acceptance are only moderately correlated in the sample (in wave four this correlation was 0.47, see Table 13 in the Appendices). Nevertheless, the scope of mixed methods integration is limited to some extent by the fact that the focus of the group interviews was reputational popularity and not the affective status dimension (acceptance), although the latter was also often touched upon in students' accounts.

With regards to *athleticism*, the group interviews underlined the importance of being good at sports, in particular in the case of boys. Based on these interviews, we could expect athletic ability to be one of the most important/strongest correlate/factor regarding boys' popularity. The quantitative findings were only partly in line with these assumptions. Although the positive association between coolness and being good at sports was statistically significant for all sociodemographic groups except for non Roma-girls, there were several correlates that were more strongly associated with coolness even for boys (physical appearance, acceptance, verbal aggression). Additionally, athleticism was not associated statistically significantly with acceptance, except for the first model without the interaction effects. In the introduction of this chapter, I hypothesized that athletic ability would be positively associated with both forms of peer status (H1a) and that it would not be the strongest correlate for either form of status (H1b). Additionally, it was also assumed that being good at sports would be more strongly associated with coolness/popularity for Roma students (H16) and for boys (H6). While the results support the last hypotheses (H6), they only support the former (H16) in the case of Roma girls. With regards to the first hypothesis (H1a) we can only say for certain that athleticism was positively associated with the reputational dimension, but the association with acceptance is weak at best. Concerning the importance of sports (H1b), both the quantitative and the qualitative results show that it was not a particularly important factor in girls' popularity/coolness; however, the focus groups, contrary to the regression models, indicated it to be the most important/strongest contributor for boys. The lower level of importance sports play in girls' peer status may also be partly due to the availability of primarily 'masculine' sports (e.g. soccer, boxing) in the mostly disadvantaged, rural environment where a significant portion of the schools in the sample are situated.

Concerning *aggression*, the focus groups suggest that some popular but not widely liked girls could use both overt verbal and relational aggression strategically in order to

gain/maintain high status. In the case of boys, physical strength was associated with high status but only if used 'reactively' (at least according to pupils' account), i.e. to protect oneself and friends, although we saw that sometimes it also included 'protection' from verbal insults/aggression. The quantitative results support this interpretation, with verbal aggression being positively associated with coolness for all groups except for Roma boys, and this association was particularly strong for non-Roma girls. On the other hand, the positive association with physical aggression was only statistically significant in the case of Roma girls. The focus groups also showed some evidence of a potential 'oppositional culture' among girls in some ethnically segregated school classes. The multilevel regression models of acceptance showed that the negative association between verbal aggression and acceptance was statistically significant only in the case of Roma girls, while the negative association between physical aggression and acceptance only in the case of Roma boys. However, the fractional regression models suggest that the negative association between physical aggression and acceptance is statistically significant for all groups. In the introduction to this chapter, I hypothesized that aggression would be positively associated with coolness/popularity and negatively with acceptance (H3), while I also expected the association with overt aggression to be only present among boys (H11a, H11b). Further, I assumed that relational aggression would be positively associated with coolness/popularity for both sexes (H12a), but this association would be stronger for girls (H12b). Finally, I expected aggression to be more strongly associated with Roma pupils' reputational status (H15). The first hypothesis (H3) was mostly supported, although we saw that to some extent it depended on the form of aggression and the sociodemographic group. The gender-related hypotheses about overt aggression (H11a, H11b) were not met, we saw above that overt verbal aggression was even more strongly associated with girls' reputational status, whereas overt physical aggression was only positively associated with Roma girls popularity/coolness. The assumption that aggression would be more strongly associated with Roma students' reputational status (H15) was true for Roma girls but not for Roma boys. Finally, although relational aggression can only be investigated based on the interview data, the results suggest that manipulative techniques could be used strategically by girls to maintain status (support for H12b), but similar reports about boys were not really present in the discussion (no support for H12a).

In the introduction of this chapter, I also hypothesized that academic *engagement* would be negatively associated with coolness/popularity (H5), but positively with acceptance (H14b). Further, I assumed that the negative association would be stronger for boys (H9a) and Roma students (H14a). With regards to academic *achievement*, I assumed it to be negatively associated with reputational status for boys (H9a) and Roma students (H13a), but not for girls (H9b). Finally, I assumed it to be positively associated with acceptance for all group (H13b). The group interviews clearly supported the assumption that too much engagement, in particular showing ‘too much kindness’ to the teacher or being too ‘nerdy’ can seriously harm one’s popularity, while in most groups any effect of the actual performance (i.e. grades) was denied or underplayed. Surprisingly, in the regression models of coolness none of the measurement related to achievement or engagement (GPA, engagement, teacher’s favourite, being considered smart) seemed to have any effect on status (which contradicts all the related hypotheses listed above). In the acceptance models, the expected positive association with grades (H13b) was supported, but not the association with engagement (H14b). The positive association between acceptance and grades is in line with the findings of Habsz and Radó (2018) and Hajdu and colleagues (2019), who used similar measures for social preference (see Chapter 3). The case of a potential ‘oppositional culture’ in some of the segregated classes provides a good example of how the qualitative analysis can inform the subsequent quantitative analysis: in reflection to the findings in some group interviews, I included a three-way interaction between ethnicity, GPA, and the proportion of Roma students in the statistical models. Although the multilevel models of coolness did not yield significant results, the acceptance models found a sizeable negative interaction between these variables, implying that in classes with a high proportion of Roma students, Roma students who perform well academically suffer a significant loss in peer acceptance (as compared to non-Roma students).

The remaining hypotheses listed in the introduction of this chapter are related to physical attractiveness (H4, H8), prosocial behaviour (H2, H7), and arts (H17). My results supported the assumption that physical appearance/attractiveness would have a positive relationship with both forms of status (H4); however, contrary to the prior expectations (H8), and somewhat surprisingly, the multilevel models showed that it was more strongly associated with boys’ coolness. It may be the case that in my sample at this

specific age group boys' ability to attract girls' attention/interest was particularly highly esteemed/admired among members of both sexes. In the case of prosociality, only the interview data provides information, but the interviews suggest that being kind and helpful was highly esteemed by members of both sexes. However, its strength (H2) and gender differences in the strength (H7) cannot be reliably assessed based on the available data. Finally, although being a good singer was mentioned by some students (primarily by Roma girls) during the interviews, the interview data does not really suggest that being good at arts (music) would be particularly strongly related to Roma students' peer status (which was assumed by H17). In addition to the hypothesized relationships, the issue of pupils smoking is also worth reflecting on. We saw that in the multilevel models it was not associated with reputational status, which could be due to the low proportion of students admitting in the survey that they smoked (in wave four it was 8%). However, the group interviews uncovered that this activity was strongly stigmatized by adults, which made students hesitant to admit smoking even during the interviews for the fear of being found out by parents and teachers. However, after assurances of anonymity were given, the pupils frequently revealed that peers who smoked tended to be considered more popular, in particular so long as it had the feeling of novelty. They looked up on those peers who were 'brave enough' to smoke, i.e. to do an activity that made them look more mature and was strongly disapproved by adults at the same time. This finding is in line with 'the maturity gap' hypothesis (Moffitt, 1993).

In the next two chapters, I will continue the analysis of peer status. The following chapter will further explore coolness and acceptance dynamics on the first four waves of the RECENS primary school database. The combined panel dataset and the application of the within-between random effects (REWB) model provides the opportunity for a more nuanced analysis of the gendered and ethnic patterns of status dynamics. In chapter 6, I will present a discourse analysis of the focus group data with a focus on the gender differences in popularity discourses, while the intersections of gender and ethnicity will also be covered.

5. A longitudinal view: Ethnic and gender differences in coolness and acceptance dynamics³⁴

Chapter Summary

This chapter builds on the analysis presented in the previous chapter and further explores coolness and acceptance dynamics in the RECENS primary school sample. However, this time a panel dataset built from the first four waves of the RECENS database is used (N of students = 1313, N of observations = 4441). A relatively novel multilevel technique is used, the within-between random effects (REWB) model, which makes the decomposition of within-individual changes and between-individual differences possible. The hypotheses formulated in this chapter are based on the empirical results of the previous chapter. While many of the previous associations were supported by the REWB models, some contrasting findings were also found (e.g. with regards to athleticism or GPA). A systematic comparison of the findings and reflections on the potential differences are provided at the end of the chapter.

5.1. Introduction

The quantitative analysis presented in this chapter builds on the mixed methods findings of the previous chapter. While the cross-sectional analysis had its own strengths, in particular with regards to the variables it offered (peer nominated athletic ability and “teachers’ favourite” nominations), the within-between random effects (REWB) models applied in the current chapter provide multiple advantages. In addition to the benefits of having repeated measures and a larger sample, the REWB model also offers the possibility of decomposing the effects of within-individual changes and between-individual differences (Bell et al., 2019). Drawing on the important gender differences unveiled in the previous chapter, and taking advantage of the larger sample size, I decided to split the sample into a male and a female subsample and run all the models separately

³⁴ This chapter is a substantially extended and revised version of a manuscript submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, which is currently under review. The submitted manuscript only focused on the reputational status dimension (coolness). Some changes have been made to the manuscript to meet the formal requirements of the dissertation.

on them in order to more conveniently explore the distinct status dynamics. However, after analysing the models run on the separate samples, a few gender effects will also be tested on the full sample, in order to clarify the strength of potential gender differences in the case of variables that were significant for both sexes. The current chapter draws on the empirical findings of the previous chapter. In line with these findings, the following hypotheses were formulated.

Athletic ability

H1a: Athletic ability will be positively associated with coolness for boys and Roma girls.

H1b: Athletic ability will not be associated with coolness for non-Roma girls.

H2: Athletic ability will not be associated with acceptance for any of the groups.

It will be particularly interesting to see whether the lack of association between athletic ability and acceptance, which contradicts the international literature, still holds in the panel sample.

Aggression

H3a: Verbal aggression will be positively associated with coolness for all groups.

H3b: Verbal aggression will be more strongly associated with coolness for girls than boys.

H4a: Physical aggression will not be associated with coolness for boys or non-Roma girls.

H4b: Physical aggression will be positively associated with coolness for Roma girls.

H5: Verbal aggression will be negatively associated with acceptance for all groups.

H6a: Physical aggression will not be associated with acceptance for girls or non-Roma boys.

H6b: Physical aggression will be negatively associated with acceptance for Roma boys.

It will be particularly interesting to see whether the association between physical aggression and coolness still holds for Roma girls, and whether the lack of association between physical aggression and acceptance still holds for most groups.

Academic achievement and engagement

H7: Academic achievement (GPA) will not be associated with coolness for any of the groups.

H8: Academic achievement (GPA) will be positively associated with acceptance for all groups.

H9: Academic engagement will not be associated with coolness for any of the groups.

H10: Academic engagement will not be associated with acceptance for any of the groups.

From this group of hypotheses, probably the most interesting is whether the lack of (negative) association between academic engagement and coolness still holds in the panel data.

Physical appearance

H11a: Physical appearance will be positively associated with coolness for all groups.

H11b: Physical appearance will be more strongly associated with coolness for boys.

H12a: Physical appearance will be positively associated with acceptance for all groups.

H12b: There will be no gender difference in the strength of the association between physical appearance and acceptance.

It will be particularly interesting to see whether the much stronger association between physical appearance and coolness for boys still holds in the panel data.

Smoking

H13a: Starting smoking (within-individual change) will be positively associated with coolness.

H13b: Smoking (between-individual difference) will not be associated with coolness.

5.2. Data and analytical strategy

5.2.1. Data

The combined panel dataset of the first four waves involved 1313 pupils and 4441 observations, 53 per cent of whom were male, 36 per cent self-reported ethnic Roma, and 35 per cent had a disadvantaged social background. The procedure of the data collection (section 2.1.1.) and the variables used in the quantitative analyses (section 2.3.) were described in Chapter 2. Table 8 below presents the descriptive statistics of the (non-categorical) variables used in the quantitative models for the full sample, and for all the four socio-demographic subgroups.

Table 8: Descriptive statistics: mean(SD), minimum, maximum (panel data)

	Boy		Girl		Overall	Min	Max
	Roma	non-Roma	Roma	non-Roma			
Coolness	0.31 (0.21)	0.23 (0.21)	0.25 (0.18)	0.20 (0.18)	0.24 (0.20)	0	1
Acceptance	0.47 (0.21)	0.50 (0.20)	0.51 (0.20)	0.51 (0.21)	0.49 (0.21)	0	1
Mock	0.21 (0.15)	0.13 (0.14)	0.11 (0.11)	0.06 (0.08)	0.12 (0.14)	0	1
Hit	0.12 (0.12)	0.06 (0.09)	0.05 (0.07)	0.02 (0.04)	0.06 (0.09)	0	0.81
Looks	0.22 (0.19)	0.18 (0.18)	0.29 (0.20)	0.25 (0.20)	0.23 (0.19)	0	1
Smart	0.24 (0.22)	0.37 (0.26)	0.30 (0.24)	0.43 (0.27)	0.35 (0.26)	0	1
Engagement	-0.13 (1.03)	0.39 (0.89)	0.26 (1.01)	0.84 (0.85)	0.39 (1.00)	-2	2
GPA	2.68 (0.89)	3.64 (0.99)	2.96 (0.90)	3.96 (0.92)	3.42 (1.06)	1	5
N of obs.	915	1422	804	1300	4441		

5.2.2. Analytical strategy

As mentioned above, the analysis in this chapter applies the *within-between random effects* (REWB) model (the model is described in more details in Chapter 2, section 2.2.2.). Contrary to the traditional random effects model, the REWB model is able to

decompose and estimate separately the within- and the between-individual effects (Bell et al., 2019). The following formula presents a schematic overview of the random-intercept REWB models used in this chapter:

$$(2.) \quad Coolness_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_{1W}(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i) + \beta_{2B}\bar{x}_i + \beta_3Roma_i + \beta_{4W}(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i)Roma_i + \beta_{5B}\bar{x}_iRoma_i + v_i + \epsilon_{it}$$

In this model, $Roma_i$ is the only time-invariant (level 2) variable (since the database is split into a male and female subsample). As the model also includes ethnic interactions, β_{1W} is the estimate of the average within effects, i.e. the effect of within-individual change, in the case of non-Roma respondents, while $\beta_{1W} + \beta_{4W}$ is the estimated effect for Roma participants (these estimates are equal to the estimates a fixed effects regression model would produce on the same data, see Bell et al., 2019). The estimates of the average between effects, i.e. differences between individuals, are given by β_{2B} and $\beta_{2B} + \beta_{5B}$, for non-Roma and Roma pupils, respectively. v_i is the individual-level (level 2) random effect for individual i , attached to the intercept β_0 , while ϵ_{it} is the idiosyncratic error term.

For the analysis of coolness and acceptance dynamics, the same three models were built for both the male and the female subsamples. Model 1 includes all the empirically relevant variables (that are accessible in the database), but does not include the interaction effects. These variables are athleticism, verbal aggression, physical aggression, physical appearance, the other status dimension (i.e. acceptance for the coolness models and coolness for the acceptance models), GPA, academic engagement, being a smoker, ethnicity, and SES. Similarly to the cross-sectional models, smartness was not included together with the GPA in the REWB models (see Tables 18-19 in the Appendices for the correlations). Unfortunately, peer nominations of athletic ability and being the “teacher’s favourite” are not available in the panel database. However, binary nominations of being good at sports are available from the teacher questionnaires, so, in absence of a better measure, this will be used to measure athletic abilities. Model 2 also involves the theoretically relevant interactions. In addition to the two-way ethnic interactions already used in the previous chapter, the interactions between athleticism and academic performance (Sports x GPA), social background and physical appearance (Looks x Disadvantaged), and verbal aggression and physical attractiveness (Mock x

Looks) were also added. The first additional interaction intends to test whether academically well-performing pupils need to ‘balance’ their achievement with other factors in order to maintain reputational status, as is suggested by qualitative studies (e.g. Francis et al., 2010), while the second interaction tests whether being at least relatively affluent is needed in order to stay ‘fashionable’ and thus attractive, as was found by Adler and colleagues (1992). The third interaction tests whether physical attractiveness (an important factor for gaining status) has larger returns on status if it comes together with the (strategic) use of aggression, as is suggested by evolutionary theories. In Model 3, GPA and academic engagement were replaced by the smartness score, otherwise the model is identical to Model 2. In every model, as described above, both the individual-level averages of the time-variant explanatory variables (labelled as ‘mean’ in the regression tables) and their demeaned values (labelled as ‘change’) are included to decompose the effects of between-individual differences and within-individual changes.

5.3. Results

As mentioned above, the same models were run both on the male and the female subsamples both for coolness and acceptance. Table 9 below presents the REWB models of coolness in the boy subsample. The results show statistically significant positive associations between coolness and being good at sports, verbal aggression, acceptance, and physical appearance. More precisely, they show that between-individual differences in athletic abilities (Sport (mean)) were associated with coolness; however, within-individual improvements in this skill (Sport (change)) did not predict improved status (nevertheless, this may be due to the binary nature of the Sport variable in the panel database). In Model 1, within-individual increases in verbal aggression (Mock (change)) predicted higher status, which is particularly in line with the assumptions of evolutionary theories. With regards to physical appearance, between-individual differences in attractiveness (Looks (mean)) were strongly associated with higher levels of coolness; however, within-individual improvements in perceived attractiveness (Looks (change)) were, somewhat surprisingly, predictive of lower coolness among boys. Importantly, within-individual improvements in the GPA (GPA(change)) and between-individual differences in academic engagement (Engagement (mean)) were associated with a slight

decrease in coolness, whereas positive changes in the perception of one's smartness (Smart (change)) was predictive of higher status. Additionally, in all the three models, Roma boys were statistically significantly higher on coolness than their non-Roma peers.

Although none of the ethnic interactions are statistically significant (with the exception of Roma x Sport (mean) in Model 3), joint significance tests were conducted in order to test whether the combined main and interaction terms are statistically significant for Roma pupils (see Table 20 in the Appendices). The results show that for Roma boys neither verbal nor physical aggression was associated with coolness, whereas the associations with being good at sports (Sport (mean)) and academic performance (GPA (change)) are significant in their case as well. However, the significant negative interaction between ethnicity and athleticism in Model 3 suggest that the importance of sports may be smaller for Roma than non-Roma boys. With regards to the other interactions, in line with our prediction, improvements in the GPA were more positively associated with coolness in case they took place simultaneously with improvements in athletic skills (Sport (change) x GPA (change)), while, contrary to our expectations, the interaction between physical attractiveness and verbal aggression (Looks (mean) x Mock (mean)) was negative. The interaction between physical appearance and disadvantaged social background was not significant statistically.

Table 9: Within-between random effects (REWB) models of coolness in the **BOY** subsample

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sport (change)	0.01	0.01	0.02
Sport (mean)	0.07***	0.13*	0.12***
Mock (change)	0.16**	0.05	0.08
Mock (mean)	0.07	0.28**	0.28**
Hit (change)	0.00	0.15	0.14
Hit (mean)	0.02	-0.03	-0.06
Looks (change)	-0.34***	-0.34***	-0.39***
Looks (mean)	0.81***	0.94***	0.98***
Acceptance (change)	0.30***	0.29***	0.28***
Acceptance (mean)	0.19***	0.19***	0.19***
GPA (change)	-0.05***	-0.05**	
GPA (mean)	0.01	0.02*	
Engagement (change)	0.01	0.00	
Engagement (mean)	-0.02**	-0.03**	
Smoker (change)	0.02	0.02	0.03
Smoker (mean)	0.04	0.04	0.03

Disadvantaged (change)	0.01	0.01	0.01
Disadvantaged (mean)	-0.02	0.01	0.01
Roma	0.02*	0.15**	0.05*
Roma x Mock (change)		0.09	0.08
Roma x Mock (mean)		-0.18	-0.13
Roma x Hit (change)		-0.28	-0.23
Roma x Hit (mean)		0.11	0.16
Roma x GPA (change)		-0.02	
Roma x GPA (mean)		-0.03	
Roma x Engagement (change)		0.01	
Roma x Engagement (mean)		0.01	
Roma x Sport (change)		-0.02	-0.01
Roma x Sport (mean)		-0.05	-0.07*
Sport (change) x GPA (change)		0.11***	
Sport (mean) x GPA (mean)		-0.01	
Looks (mean) x Mock (mean)		-0.74*	-0.76*
Looks (mean) x Mock (change)		0.37	0.44
Looks (mean) x Disadvantaged (mean)		-0.11	-0.08
Smart (change)			0.16***
Smart (mean)			-0.01
Roma x Smart (change)			-0.02
Roma x Smart (mean)			0.02
Sports (change) x Smart (change)			-0.11
Sports (mean) x Smart (mean)			-0.10*
Constant	-0.04	-0.12***	-0.07***
N of observations	1534	1534	1757
N of individuals	590	590	617
sigma_e	0.13	0.13	0.13
sigma_u	0.07	0.07	0.06
r2_w	0.24	0.25	0.21
r2_b	0.62	0.64	0.66
r2_o	0.58	0.59	0.58

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 10 below shows the results of the same models on the girl subsample. Similarly to boys, acceptance and between-individual differences in physical appearance were positively associated with coolness. However, several of the ethnic interactions were significant statistically among girls. In order to better understand the ethnic differences, joint significance tests were also run for these models (see Table 21 in the Appendices). They show that being good at sports was not associated with coolness for either group of girls, while within-individual improvements in athletic abilities (Sport (change)) were

even associated with decreases in status for non-Roma girls, but not for Roma girls. Interestingly, verbal aggression was statistically significantly associated with coolness only in the model without interactions (Model 1); neither its positive association for non-Roma girls nor the negative association for Roma girls (Mock (mean) + Roma x Mock (mean)) was statistically significant, in spite of the statistically significant negative interaction term between verbal aggression and ethnicity. Physical aggression, similarly to the cross-sectional models, was positively associated with the status of Roma girls. Improvements in the GPA were positively associated with coolness for both groups, whereas improvements in academic engagement were only associated with status for Roma girls. Additionally, improvements in perceived smartness were positively associated with coolness for both groups. With regards to the other interactions, the hypothesized positive interaction between physical appearance and verbal aggression (Looks (mean) x Mock (mean)) had a large, statistically significant coefficient, implying that physically attractive and verbally aggressive girls had larger returns on coolness.

Table 10: Within-between random effects (REWB) models of coolness in the **GIRL** subsample

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sport (change)	-0.04**	-0.04**	-0.06***
Sport (mean)	0.00	0.01	0.01
Mock (change)	-0.00	-0.08	-0.05
Mock (mean)	0.25***	0.23	0.24
Hit (change)	0.01	0.01	-0.11
Hit (mean)	0.33**	-0.14	-0.11
Looks (change)	0.01	0.02	0.02
Looks (mean)	0.66***	0.60***	0.63***
Acceptance (change)	0.15***	0.16***	0.08*
Acceptance (mean)	0.10***	0.12***	0.11***
GPA (change)	0.05***	0.04**	
GPA (mean)	0.00	0.01	
Engagement (change)	0.00	-0.01	
Engagement (mean)	-0.01	-0.01	
Smoker (change)	0.05	0.04	0.05
Smoker (mean)	0.02	0.02	0.04
Disadvantaged (change)	0.01	0.01	0.00
Disadvantaged (mean)	-0.03*	-0.00	-0.00
Roma	0.02*	0.08*	0.02
Roma x Mock (change)		0.2	0.15
Roma x Mock (mean)		-0.37**	-0.32*
Roma x Hit (change)		-0.02	0.14

Roma x Hit (mean)		0.75**	0.71**
Roma x GPA (change)		0.00	
Roma x GPA (mean)		-0.02	
Roma x Engagement (change)		0.04***	
Roma x Engagement (mean)		0.00	
Roma x Sport (change)		0.02	0.04
Roma x Sport (mean)		0.04	0.04
Sport (change) x GPA (change)		-0.09	
Sport (mean) x GPA (mean)		-0.01	
Looks (mean) x Mock (mean)		0.88*	0.65
Looks (mean) x Mock (change)		-0.10	0.01
Looks (mean) x Disadvantaged (mean)		-0.07	-0.06
Smart (change)			0.20***
Smart (mean)			-0.00
Roma x Smart (change)			0.10
Roma x Smart (mean)			-0.01
Sports (change) x Smart (change)			-0.37**
Sports (mean) x Smart (mean)			-0.04
Constant	-0.04*	-0.06*	-0.03*
N of observations	1471	1471	1643
N of individuals	523	523	536
sigma_e	0.11	0.11	0.11
sigma_u	0.03	0.03	0.04
r2_w	0.05	0.08	0.1
r2_b	0.71	0.72	0.73
r2_o	0.55	0.56	0.58

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 11 below shows the results of the acceptance models in the boy subsample. In line with our expectations, physical appearance, coolness, GPA, academic engagement, and smartness were positively associated with acceptance, while verbal and physical aggression negatively. Athletic abilities were not related to acceptance, while the association with being a smoker (but not with becoming one) was negative in Model 3. None of the ethnic interactions are statistically significant and the joint coefficient tests (see Table 22 in the Appendices) do not imply many ethnic differences either. The only two differences are that for Roma boys the negative association between increased physical aggression and acceptance (Hit (change) + Roma x Hit (change)) is statistically significant in Model 3 as well, while academic engagement (Engagement (mean) + Roma x Engagement (mean)) is not associated with acceptance for Roma boys.

Table 11: Within-between random effects (REWB) models of acceptance in the **BOY** subsample

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sport (change)	0.00	0.01	0.01
Sport (mean)	-0.02	0.06	0.03
Mock (change)	-0.15***	-0.16	-0.05
Mock (mean)	-0.32***	-0.34**	-0.32**
Hit (change)	-0.20***	-0.18*	-0.12
Hit (mean)	-0.16	-0.15	-0.11
Looks (change)	0.09***	0.09***	0.03
Looks (mean)	0.31***	0.29***	0.21**
Coolness (change)	0.19***	0.19***	0.18***
Coolness (mean)	0.36***	0.36***	0.30***
GPA (change)	-0.01	-0.01	
GPA (mean)	0.02*	0.02*	
Engagement (change)	0.00	0.00	
Engagement (mean)	0.03**	0.03*	
Smoker (change)	-0.00	-0.01	0.00
Smoker (mean)	-0.04	-0.04	-0.06*
Disadvantaged (change)	0.01	0.01	0.02*
Disadvantaged (mean)	-0.01	0.01	0.01
Roma	0.01	0.01	0.02
Roma x Mock (change)		0.09	-0.01
Roma x Mock (mean)		-0.11	-0.11
Roma x Hit (change)		-0.06	-0.13
Roma x Hit (mean)		-0.02	0.02
Roma x GPA (change)		0.00	
Roma x GPA (mean)		0.01	
Roma x Engagement (change)		0.00	
Roma x Engagement (mean)		-0.00	
Roma x Sport (change)		-0.01	-0.01
Roma x Sport (mean)		-0.01	-0.01
Sport (change) x GPA (change)		-0.06	
Sport (mean) x GPA (mean)		-0.02	
Looks (mean) x Mock (mean)		0.29	0.29
Looks (mean) x Mock (change)		-0.12	-0.26
Looks (mean) x Disadv. (mean)		-0.09	-0.10
Smart (change)			0.25***
Smart (mean)			0.28***
Roma x Smart (change)			-0.02
Roma x Smart (mean)			0.04
Sports (change) x Smart (change)			-0.14
Sports (mean) x Smart (mean)			-0.12*
Constant	0.36***	0.34***	0.34***

N of observations	1534	1534	1757
N of individuals	590	590	617
sigma_e	0.10	0.10	0.10
sigma_u	0.11	0.11	0.09
r2_w	0.09	0.10	0.14
r2_b	0.50	0.51	0.57
r2_o	0.44	0.44	0.49

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

The acceptance models in the girl subsample (Table 12) show a somewhat different picture. Although (similarly to the models of boys) physical appearance and coolness were positively associated with acceptance, some of the ethnic interactions were also statistically significant in the case of girls. Taking into consideration the results of the joint significance tests (see Table 23 in the Appendices), we see that verbal aggression (Mock (mean)) was negatively associated with the acceptance of non-Roma girls but was not associated with acceptance of Roma girls. The negative association between within-individual increases in verbal aggression (Mock (change)) and acceptance, however, is statistically significant for both groups (although for non-Roma girls only in Model 3). Additionally, the association between acceptance and physical aggression is negative for Roma girls, while it is nonsignificant for non-Roma girls. In Model 2, within-individual improvement in athletic abilities (Sport (change)) is associated with higher acceptance for non-Roma girls, whereas this association is non-significant for Roma girls. The nonsignificant associations between acceptance and GPA for non-Roma girls became statistically significant for Roma girls: this association was slightly negative with regards to within-individual improvement (GPA (change) + Roma x GPA (change)), but positive with regards to between-individual differences (GPA (mean) + Roma x GPA (mean)). Both within-individual improvements and between-individual differences in smartness were positively associated with acceptance. In addition to the ethnic interactions, the interaction between physical attractiveness and verbal aggression (Looks (mean) x Mock (mean)) is statistically significant and negative, which implies that good-looking verbally aggressive girls (who are probably high on coolness, see above) are particularly disliked by their peers.

Table 12: Within-between random effects (REWB) models of acceptance in the **GIRL** subsample

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sport (change)	0.04**	0.03*	0.03
Sport (mean)	0.01	0.14	0.09*
Mock (change)	-0.28***	-0.21	-0.22*
Mock (mean)	-0.53***	-0.61**	-0.55**
Hit (change)	-0.13	-0.20	-0.21
Hit (mean)	-0.06	0.63	0.43
Looks (change)	0.30***	0.30***	0.29***
Looks (mean)	0.39***	0.43***	0.38***
Coolness (change)	0.14***	0.15***	0.08**
Coolness (mean)	0.28***	0.34***	0.25***
GPA (change)	-0.03**	-0.02	
GPA (mean)	0.03***	0.02	
Engagement (change)	0.00	0.00	
Engagement (mean)	0.02	0.03*	
Smoker (change)	0.01	0.01	0.01
Smoker (mean)	0.03	0.03	-0.01
Disadvantaged (change)	0.02	0.02	0.02*
Disadvantaged (mean)	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
Roma	0.03*	-0.08	0.00
Roma x Mock (change)		-0.11	-0.09
Roma x Mock (mean)		0.65***	0.48*
Roma x Hit (change)		0.14	0.09
Roma x Hit (mean)		-1.15**	-0.75
Roma x GPA (change)		-0.01	
Roma x GPA (mean)		0.03	
Roma x Engagement (change)		-0.02*	
Roma x Engagement (mean)		-0.02	
Roma x Sport (change)		0.00	0.01
Roma x Sport (mean)		-0.05	-0.04
Sport (change) x GPA (change)		0.04	
Sport (mean) x GPA (mean)		-0.03	
Looks (mean) x Mock (mean)		-1.10*	-0.69
Looks (mean) x Mock (change)		-0.02	0.03
Looks (mean) x Disadv. (mean)		0.03	0.01
Smart (change)			0.22***
Smart (mean)			0.23***
Roma x Smart (change)			-0.06
Roma x Smart (mean)			0.02
Sports (change) x Smart (change)			-0.13
Sports (mean) x Smart (mean)			-0.13
Constant	0.27***	0.28***	0.31***

N of observations	1471	1471	1643
N of individuals	523	523	536
sigma_e	0.11	0.11	0.11
sigma_u	0.10	0.10	0.09
r2_w	0.17	0.18	0.21
r2_b	0.53	0.55	0.57
r2_o	0.45	0.47	0.48

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Finally, after presenting the different acceptance and coolness models in the two subsamples, it is also worth considering whether factors that were statistically significant for both sexes contribute more to the status of boys or girls. For this reason, some further models were run on the *whole* sample with gender interactions (see Tables 24-25 in the Appendices). The results show that the average level of verbal aggression (Mock (mean)) contributed to girls' coolness more (while we already saw earlier that within-individual increases in verbal aggression only contributed to boys' coolness), whereas acceptance and physical attractiveness had a larger effect on boys' status. Additionally, verbal aggression was less negatively associated with boys' acceptance. Furthermore, within-individual improvements in perceived smartness were associated with coolness more strongly for girls, but with acceptance more strongly for boys.

5.4. Discussion

In this section, the hypotheses formulated in the introduction will be revisited in light of the empirical findings presented in this chapter. In the introduction, based on the cross-sectional results of the previous chapter, I hypothesized that *athletic ability* would be positively associated with coolness for all groups except for non-Roma girls (H1a-b). Additionally, I assumed that it would not be associated with acceptance for any of the four sociodemographic groups (H2). The results show that being good at sports was indeed associated with coolness for boys; however, it was not associated with coolness for either of the girl groups, and the positive association was actually weaker for Roma than non-Roma boys. Overall, as expected, athletic skills were not associated with acceptance (with the exception of one of the models on the girl subsample, which found

positive association between within-individual change in sports and acceptance for non-Roma girls). The gender differences between the coolness models are mostly in line with our expectations, as the international empirical literature has also found athleticism to be more strongly associated with boys' status (see Chapter 3), and we have also hypothesized in Chapter 1 (section 1.3.) that the more traditional social norms on gender roles in Hungary would result in stronger associations between status and 'gender-typicality'. This may explain the non-significant results in the case of girls. Additionally, we have also hypothesized in the previous chapter that due to the characteristics of this early adolescent sample, 'gender-typical' sports are probably less available for girls. The lack of ethnic differences among girls and the even weaker association between athleticism and coolness for Roma boys in one of the models underlines the limits of comparing ethnic Roma pupils in Hungary to African American students. Although both groups are socially marginalized and have lower average academic performance than the White/non-Roma population, Roma students may compensate for it with gaining status by other activities that are more in line with their cultural traditions, for instance by music/singing (additionally, we have seen in Chapter 3 that more recent research also puts into question the stronger association between athleticism and popularity in the case of Black American students).

With regards to the different forms of *aggression*, I hypothesized that verbal aggression would be positively associated with coolness for all groups (H3a), but this association would be stronger for girls (H3b). Additionally, based on the cross-sectional analysis of the previous chapter, I hypothesized that physical aggression would only be associated with coolness for Roma girls (H4a-b). With regards to acceptance, I assumed that verbal aggression would be negatively associated with acceptance for all groups (H5), whereas physical aggression would only be associated with Roma boys' acceptance and this association would be negative (H6a-b). The results show that verbal aggression was associated with coolness for non-Roma boys but not for Roma boys, whereas the association for girls was only statistically significant in the main model without ethnic interactions. However, gender interactions on the whole sample did show that, overall, the effect was stronger for girls than boys, which provides some support for my related hypothesis. As assumed, physical aggression was only associated with coolness in the case of Roma girls. Further, in line with our expectations, between-individual differences

in verbal aggression were negatively associated with acceptance for all groups; whereas within-individual increases in verbal aggression were only negatively associated with non-Roma girls' acceptance. The gender interactions in the models including the full sample show that the negative association between verbal aggression and acceptance was weaker for boys. Physical aggression was also negatively associated with acceptance for all groups except for non-Roma girls, where this association was nonsignificant. For boys this association was related to within-individual increases in physical aggression, whereas for Roma girls it was related to between individual differences.

These results do not really support the assumption that status would be more strongly associated with aggression for Roma pupils (as was hypothesized in section 1.3.), with the exception of the association between physical aggression and coolness for Roma girls. This latter may be in line with some findings in the international literature that documented similar patterns among ethnic minority girls (e.g. Eriksen, 2019). With regards to gender differences, the stronger positive association between verbal aggression and coolness for girls as well as the stronger negative association between verbal aggression and acceptance in their case, suggest that this form of overt aggression may be considered more 'gender-typical' or 'gender-appropriate' for gaining reputational status for girls in this particular sample (while the descriptive statistics imply that this form is also more prevalent among boys). However, such status competition seems to have higher costs for girls with regards to social acceptance.

Furthermore, I hypothesized that *academic achievement* would not be associated with coolness for any of the groups (H7), but it would be positively associated with acceptance for every group (H8). Additionally, I hypothesized that there would be no association between *academic engagement* and either dimension of peer status (H9-10). However, the results of the regression models in this chapter show a more refined picture. In line with the findings of the international literature (see Chapter 3), my data show important gender differences. In the case of non-Roma boys, within-individual changes in the GPA and between individual differences in academic engagement were associated slightly negatively with coolness, while among Roma boys only the negative association between GPA and coolness was present. Conversely, within-individual improvements in the GPA were positively associated with coolness for both groups of girls, and for Roma girls within-individual improvements in academic engagement too. Within-individual

improvements in (perceived) smartness were also positively associated with this form of status for all the four groups. Acceptance, in line with my expectations, was slightly but positively associated with GPA for every group, although within-individual improvements in GPA had a slight negative association in the case of Roma girls (while the association regarding between-individual differences was positive in their case, too). Additionally, both within-individual improvements and between-individual differences in smartness were positively associated with acceptance.

These findings suggest that (in our sample) improved academic performance resulted in losses in reputational status for boys, unless ‘balanced’ by improved athletic abilities, whereas no such social sanctions were observable for girls. On the other hand, contrary to some assumptions outlined in the previous chapters, these associations were not more negative for Roma pupils. In fact, academic engagement was only positively associated with coolness in the case of Roma girls. This, taken together with the findings of the previous paragraph, implies that there may be two different groups of high-status Roma girls in the sample: one that is high on physical aggression and one that is academically engaged/motivated. The lack of (negative) ethnic differences related to acceptance are also in line with the prior Hungarian literature which used similar constructs (Habsz and Radó, 2018; Hajdu et al., 2019), with the exception of the slight but negative association between within-individual changes in GPA and acceptance for Roma girls.

Finally, it was hypothesized that *physical appearance* would be associated with both forms of status (H11a, H12a) and this association would be stronger for boys in the case of coolness (H11b), while there would be no gender differences in the case of acceptance (H12b). The results did support these assumptions. With regards to *smoking*, I assumed, in line with the qualitative results of the previous chapter, that within-individual changes (starting smoking) would be positively associated with reputational status (H13a), while between-individual differences would not be associated with status (H13b). The empirical results found no association between peer status and either form of smoking, with the exception to the slight negative association between acceptance and between-individual differences in smoking in one of the models in the boy subsample.

The results presented in this chapter underline the importance of gender differences in informal status dynamics, while ethnic differences were not found to be

particularly emphatic, with some exceptions related to Roma girls. Therefore, in the next chapter, I will revisit the qualitative data, and present an in-depth discourse analysis with a focus on gender differences in popularity discourses.

6. Gender differences in popularity discourses³⁵

Chapter Summary

This chapter investigates gender differences in popularity discourses in the qualitative data. The analysis draws on a critical, primarily Foucauldian, understanding of discourse and power relations. Due to the somewhat different focus and methodological approach of this chapter, the empirical literature related to gendered popularity discourses and the methodological literature related to Foucauldian discourse analysis will also be presented briefly in the first part. The discourse analysis of the focus groups show that popularity discourses of boys were related to such traditional ‘masculine’ traits as sports, physical strength and dominance, while girls’ discourses were centred on physical appearance, verbal aggression, ‘arrogance’, and kindness. However, while ‘sensitivity’, the lack of physical strength and the inability to ‘protect oneself’ were considered ‘unmanly’, no similar discourses of ‘unfemininity’ emerged. In the case of girls, primarily ‘liking boys too much’ was disapproved, however, ‘bad behaviour’ in general or academic disengagement were not. The chapter also briefly covers the intersections of gender and Roma ethnicity.

6.1. Introduction

This chapter analyses popularity discourses in the qualitative data with a focus on gender differences. We have seen both in the empirical literature and the previous chapters that there were salient gender differences in informal status dynamics at this age group. Further, the fact that the focus groups were predominantly gender-segregated (as the result of pupils’ own group-forming processes) makes the investigation of the separate boy and girl subcultures (or at least their discursive construction in an interview situation) more convenient.

Importantly, popularity (and informal status in general) is not simply a ‘given’, fixed aspect of one’s life but it is, to a great extent, constructed, negotiated and re-

³⁵ This chapter is a slightly extended version of a manuscript submitted to a peer-reviewed journal, which is currently under review. Some changes have been made to the manuscript to meet the formal requirements of the dissertation.

negotiated through discourse. The dynamics of these discursive constructions are influenced by the ‘milieu’ of the school class as well as by the wider social context. In particular, the role and salience of gender, ethnicity, and social class are strongly shaped by the local and national context, norms and prejudices. For instance, social expectations about what boys and girls *should* or *should not* do or where the ‘place’ of men and women, or certain ethnic groups or social classes, are, have a strong impact on what physical, personality and behavioural attributes would contribute to one’s popularity or unpopularity as function of their sex, ethnicity, and social class, as well as on the ways they *can* talk about and negotiate these dynamics. We have seen earlier that Hungary showed particularly high levels of gender stereotypes compared to most other member states of the European Union (European Commission, 2017). Additionally, the Hungarian conservative-populist government and public intellectuals close to it have openly been engaged in anti-gender and anti-feminist discourses recently (see for instance Kováts and Pető, 2017). Consequently, it will also be interesting to see to whether these stereotypes and discourses are replicated in the popularity discourses of the early adolescents in my sample.

6.2. Gender and the discursive construction of popularity

According to qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations, the most important traits and skills for boys to be perceived as popular are related to athletic ability, physical strength (the ability to intimidate and dominate peers), being perceived as smart and humorous, school disengagement, disruptive behaviour, successful cross-gender relationships and ‘doing heterosexuality’ (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Chambers et al., 2004; Francis, 2009; Kehily and Nayak, 1997; Renold, 2000). In the case of girls, the most important traits involve social skills (being ‘nice’ and compliant but *also* being ‘mean’ and manipulative), being fashionable, being perceived as attractive (especially by boys), and ‘doing heterosexuality’ but without being sexually ‘too forward’ (e.g. Adler et al., 1992; Chambers et al., 2004; Currie et al., 2007; Merten, 1997; Read et al., 2011; Renold, 2000).

However, the concept of the ‘nice’ and ‘passive’ girl, traditionally considered salient in the case of White middle-class girls, has been challenged from multiple

directions. First, it has been shown that although overt competition for status (a traditional ‘masculine’ trait) is considered less acceptable for girls, more covert ways of status competition, in particular relational aggression, gossiping and ‘meanness’ are often considered central to popularity (e.g. Currie et al., 2007; Duncan, 2004; Merten, 1997; Wiseman, 2002). Although these popular girls are often not widely liked (e.g. Eder, 1985), they tend to be both envied and feared for their social power (Currie et al., 2007). Peers also often consider them ‘snobs’, who feel that they are ‘better than other kids’ (Currie et al., 2007). Second, other alternative constructs have also been discussed recently in the literature, such as the ‘tough’ and confident ‘ladettes’ (e.g. Jackson, 2006), or the ‘alpha’ girls (Kindlon 2006 cited by Bettis et al., 2016) who are assumed to be both assertive and competitive (traditional ‘masculine’ traits) *and* collaborative and relationship-oriented (traditional ‘feminine’ traits) (for a criticism of the ‘alpha’ girl discourse see Bettis et al., 2016). Finally, ‘niceness’ is sometimes also challenged by working-class and ethnic minority girls. For instance, Ingunn Marie Eriksen describes the aggressive rejection of school values and engagement in disruptive behaviour (including physical fights) among ethnic minority girls with immigrant background in a Norwegian secondary school (Eriksen, 2019). This example underlines the importance of the intersectionality of gender, race/ethnicity, and social class, as similar ‘oppositional cultures’ have also been observed with regards to race (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986) and social class (Willis, 1977).

Discourses of masculinity might also be undergoing some changes. For instance, Read and colleagues found in a sample of secondary school students in the United Kingdom that being kind, friendly and helpful were as frequently mentioned by boys as by girls as characteristics of popular students (Read et al., 2011). The authors argue that being kind and helpful *towards peers* might not be considered as feminized characteristics any more, but being helpful and obedient *towards the teacher* is still devalued and feminized. Another study by the authors on the same sample found that academically successful popular students needed to ‘balance’ popularity and school achievement: almost all of them were good-looking and fashionable, and in the case of boys almost all of them were good at sports, so that they could present themselves as ‘authentically’ masculine, in spite of their engagement in schoolwork (Francis et al., 2010). Additionally, in order to avoid being identified as ‘boffs’, both high-achieving boys and girls put

considerable effort into presenting their performance as ‘effortless achievement’ (Francis et al., 2010). Moreover, these academically successful popular students were found to be loud, assertive, and involved in the demonstration of ‘gender-typical’ interests: fashion, celebrities and the production of ‘maturity’ in the case of girls, and more physicality (throwing things at each other and fighting) in the case of boys (Francis et al., 2010; see also Skelton et al., 2010).

Although the concepts of masculinity and femininity might be changing and the scope of ‘acceptable’ masculinities and femininities might be expanding, a large body of literature demonstrates that popularity is still overwhelmingly ascribed to those students who possess the most ‘gender-typical’ traits and perform the most ‘gender-typical’ behaviour. As we have seen in Chapter 3, Mayeux and Kleiser argue in their *gender prototypicality theory* that popularity is a ‘byproduct’ of intensifying cross-sex interactions and competition for opposite-sex attention in early adolescence, and thus it is disproportionately ascribed to ‘gender-typical’ peers, since they are the most likely to attract opposite-sex attention (Mayeux and Kleiser, 2019). Francis and colleagues also found that the most popular students were the ones who had frequent interactions with the opposite sex and appeared to be ‘at ease’ in these interactions (Francis et al., 2010). In addition, feminist criticism argues that the discourses of femininity are inherently contradictory and insupportable which results in girls becoming ‘impossible subjects’: too fat or too thin, too clever or too stupid, too free or too restricted, etc. (Griffin, 2004; Read et al., 2011). Popular girls face pressure from contradictory expectations of having to look ‘perfect’ while not being too ‘self-absorbed’ about their appearance, having to gain boys’ attention but in ‘the right way’ in order to avoid being labelled a ‘slut’, and so on (Currie et al., 2007). Finally, both boys and girls seem to be concerned with ‘authenticity’. Unsuccessful attempts to increase one’s status by trying to be ‘more cool’ than one actually ‘is’ often leads to a pariah status and the ‘wannabe’ stigma (Read et al., 2011). However, non-popular students (especially the ones around the middle of the status hierarchy) sometimes challenge the dominant discourses of ‘coolness’ (Paechter and Clark, 2016) and authenticity (Read et al., 2011), often arguing that popular students are the ‘inauthentic’ ones.

As we have seen, in certain school settings, academic engagement and the perception of ‘inauthenticity’ contributes to students’ unpopularity and can also make

them the targets of teasing/bullying. Additionally, students who are perceived to lack certain social skills (e.g. being ‘shy’ or ‘quiet’) are also widely reported to be unpopular (e.g. Read et al., 2011; Warrington and Younger, 2011). Connecting unpopularity to personality implies that it is the students’ ‘own fault’ that they are unpopular, while in reality these individualized characteristics are, to a great extent, socially constructed (Scott 2007 cited by Read et al., 2011). In general, kids who ‘stand out from the crowd’ or are perceived to be ‘different’ in any ways, including appearance (clothes, disability, body shape, attractiveness), behaviour (e.g. being ‘shy’ or expressing opinions contrary to the dominant group), abilities (being too ‘smart’ or too ‘thick’, lacking athletic abilities in the case of boys) or financial background are most commonly the unpopular ones (Warrington and Younger, 2011).

Finally, the importance of inter-school variability needs to be emphasized. Qualitative studies involving more schools have found that the role of such factors as school engagement or substance use varied from school to school (e.g. Warrington and Younger, 2011). Additionally, while most studies on popularity discourses were conducted in the United Kingdom and other ‘Western’ settings, in countries with different value systems and cultural traditions results might be significantly different. For instance, Cobbett found in an Antiguan sample that association between popularity and traditional gender norms and expectations were particularly strong (Cobbett, 2014). Similarly, Xi and colleagues found in a Chinese sample that popular girls were considered to be friendly and prosocial, contrary to most of the ‘Western’ results (Xi et al., 2016).

6.3. Foucauldian discourse analysis

As the present analysis draws, to some extent, on a Foucauldian understanding of discourse and power inequalities, some important points for (a possible) Foucauldian discourse analysis will be briefly summarized in this section (it is important to note that, due to the nature of Foucault’s approach to discourse, no formalized method of Foucauldian discourse analysis exists, see Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008; Hook, 2001). In his inaugural lecture at the *Collège de France* in 1970 titled *The order of discourse*, Foucault outlined those discourse-internal and discourse-external procedures that he believed ‘controlled, selected, organised and redistributed’ the production of

discourse in a given society as well as the methodological requirements they implied (Foucault, 1981; for a close reading see Hook, 2001). Importantly, he argued that the opposition between true and false (the ‘will to truth’) is ‘a historical, modifiable, and institutionally constraining system’ (p. 54) that relies on institutional support and is reinforced by multiple layers of social practices that, at the same time, constrain other alternative discourses. Not surprisingly, the strongest discourses are the ones that attempt to ground themselves in the ‘natural’, the scientific and other arguments that are considered ‘reasonable’ by the dominant standards (Hook, 2001). An important question for Foucault is how different types of *subject positions*, including the privileged position of the author of a text or utterance, are made possible within the given discourse as well as what it is that *cannot* be said from those certain positions (Hook, 2001). Additionally, Foucault outlines four methodological principles for discourse analysis: reversal, discontinuity, specificity, and exteriority (Foucault, 1981: 67–73). The *principle of reversal* suggests that we should focus on the forms of exclusion, limitation and approbation of discourse, while the *principle of discontinuity* argues that discourses need to be treated as ‘*discontinuous*’ practices, which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other’ (p. 67). Discontinuities help destabilizing the otherwise assumed coherence, unity and ‘ahistory’ of discourse, showing that even some of the most fundamental concepts are to a great extent discursive entities (Hook, 2001). The *principle of specificity* argues that discourses cannot be resolved into ‘a play of pre-existing significations’, instead we should consider discourses as a practice that we ‘impose on things’ (Foucault, 1981: 67). We understand meanings and distinguish ‘truth-claims’ based on the discourse itself, as our knowledge of the world, estimation of truth, and speaking capacity are governed by certain discursive formations (Hook, 2001). The *principle of exteriority* suggests that, instead of going towards the ‘interior’ of the discourse, we should go towards the external conditions of possibility, ‘towards what gives rise to the aleatory series of these events, and fixes its limits’ (Foucault, 1981: 67). Foucault argues that discourses must be considered most importantly as ‘sets of discursive events’. This ‘eventualization’ means that one should approach discourse less as language and more as something ‘active’ that implements power and action, and is power and action at the same time (Hook, 2001).

While Foucault's ideas on discourse may be appealing to a social scientist, their practical limitations in the case of a research like the present one are also apparent (Foucault himself applied these methods on a historical scale when he observed the emergence and transformation of discourses related to such social phenomena as madness or sexuality). For instance, investigating the external conditions and events that enhance or limit certain discourses, in particular at the local but also at the national level, would be an ambitious task even for an extensive ethnographic fieldwork. Nevertheless, the techniques used to problematize or normalize certain behaviours and/or power relations, different subject positions and 'rarefactions' of discourses (i.e. what can and cannot be said from those positions), and, to a limited extent, the external social context that influences such discourses can be involved in the analysis.

6.4. Data

Even though the data were not collected with a particular focus on gender, the salience of gender differences clearly emerged during the interviews. A potential benefit of this situation might be that obtaining consent from educational authorities, schools and parents for a data collection on gender-related topics would have been much more challenging, if possible at all, in the current Hungarian context. In the data analysis below, I will present some of the salient discourses and narratives that emerged in relation to the participants' accounts of popularity. I will focus on areas where gender differences were the most apparent as well as on pupils' discourses about relations with the other sex. The analysis will be both descriptive, when presenting these discourses, and critical, when trying to uncover the underlying assumptions, power inequalities, subject positions, and conditions under which certain statements can or cannot be said. The intersections of gender and ethnicity will also be covered in the last section. The focus group data and the data collection procedure was described in Chapter 2 (section 2.1.2.).

6.5. Results

Overall, much of the description of popular boys and girls, and girls and boys in general, was in line with the international literature. Girls were primarily seen by boys as

‘(over)sensitive’ and often gossipy and manipulative, while boys were seen by girls most typically as immature and (physically) fighting among one another, but sometimes also as ‘only having a big mouth’ when it comes to actually ‘doing things’. Both sexes thought that popular girls were typically ‘big mouthed’ and somewhat aggressive and ‘bossy’, and popular boys were typically seen as good at sports, strong, and able to ‘protect themselves’. Additionally, the importance of physical appearance came up in many of the girl groups, in a way that being ‘too attractive’ and ‘too ugly’ could both have negative effects. Among boys, physical weakness was often seen negatively, in particular if one was only ‘pretending to be strong’ but in fact was weak. Due to the age of the participants (mostly 12-13 year-olds), contacts and blending among boys and girls were limited, although the importance of being popular among members of the other sex, primarily being considered attractive and/or having a romantic relationship, came up occasionally. Some boys expressed their *preference* for girls who were ‘similar’ to them, e.g. sporty, outgoing, and funny; while this type of preference did not come up among girls. Importantly, when asked about popular students in the class, boys predominantly named other boys, while girls named both boys and girls with approximately similar frequency. When asked about the meaning of popularity, students most typically related it to being ‘cool’ or to being known and ‘famous’, while they also sometimes related it to being liked by many. In one group, students distinguished between popularity ‘in the good sense’ (preference/likeability) and ‘in the bad sense’ (being ‘cool’ or popular in the ‘traditional’ sense). However, these different interpretations are, mostly, clearly identifiable in the group discussions, and in the following sections I will primarily focus on discourses related to reputational popularity and ‘coolness’.

6.5.1. ‘Sporty’ boys and ‘sensitive’ girls

The characteristics most frequently mentioned in the group discussions were being good at sports and being too ‘sensitive’. The former came up predominantly in relation to boys as an important component of popularity, while the latter was attributed to certain boys and girls alike, and was reported to be the most important factor behind unpopularity. Being ‘sensitive’ seemed to be rather an umbrella term for a variety of categories involving being shy, reserved, and prone to cry, but also being irritable and lashing back

verbally or even physically.

Susan: David, Lisa, Nancy, they cannot talk to everyone and are not popular.

Moderator: Why not?

Tom: They are very sensitive, and when anyone talks to them they run away.

Ron: Or lash at you.

Moderator: Alright, thank you. Anyone wants to add anything to this?

Brian: Yes, in connection to this, when anyone talks to them [the 'sensitive' children], they're like [*imitating*] 'oh leave me alone', and they hit me, and they go away together.
(*Boy-majority group with one girl, mixed ethnicity, capital city*)

The excerpt above exemplifies the multiple layers and ambiguities related to 'sensitivity'. As students who created the 'sensitivity' discourses were the dominant ones in virtually all classes (although not necessarily the ones in numerical majority), those students who were more reserved, somewhat introverted, or in other ways less resilient to their peers teasing them got labelled easily as lacking the necessary social skills. Not being able to 'talk to everyone' is clearly presented here as the fault of these students (and not, for instance, the fault of those whom they are 'not able' to talk to), while it suggests that high peer status should be attributed to those pupils who, assumedly, can get along with everyone else. Since not getting along is a two-way relationship, 'everyone' primarily refers to the dominant students, who set the norms and rules of class life. Not being open and/or resilient to mocking and teasing not only leads to the stigma of being 'sensitive', but the lack of being in tune with these dominant students also leads to the essentialization of both positive and negative characteristics, e.g. not getting on with the popular students is easily interpreted as being shy, sensitive, etc. in general. Interestingly, 'arrogance' was sometimes also related to 'sensitivity' and unpopularity, primarily in the case of girls, which also strengthens the interpretation that 'sensitivity' refers to all kinds of lack of rapport with the popular students (however, 'arrogance' was more frequently related to girls' popularity than unpopularity, see below). Just as we have seen in the literature, while popular students often attributed popularity and unpopularity to interpersonal skills, their less popular peers were more negative about popularity and primarily attributed it to physical appearance, sports, and different forms of 'bad behaviour' (in fact, popular students most typically attributed popularity to the combination of these with interpersonal skills). Importantly, in many of the groups students mentioned 'not fitting in' or 'not adapting to the community' when asked to

elaborate on ‘sensitivity’, expressions that are typically used by teachers and other adults when they describe ‘problematic’ students in Hungary. It would be interesting to investigate to what extent the argumentation and discursive frames that put the blame on students ‘unable to fit in’ are provided and reinforced for these students by teachers and other adults. However, unfortunately, the present data do not provide sufficient information for such an analysis.

Not surprisingly, ‘sensitivity’ was much more frequently related to girls, and certainly considered as a ‘feminine’ characteristic. In cases when it was associated with boys, it was considered ‘unmanly’ and sensitive boys were sometimes labelled as ‘little girls’. Around the middle of the interviews, students were provided with two pictures, one showing a group of boys, one of them clearly excluded, the other picture a group of girls in the same situation. Students were asked what they saw in the pictures, why it happened, and whether there were similar situations in their class. Soliciting examples and reasons for exclusion in the class worked out well in most of the groups in a way that the third question was often not even necessary to ask, and sometimes students immediately started talking about their classmates without paying much attention to the kids in the pictures. The following excerpt shows one example when students associated sensitivity with being feminine, first related to the excluded boy in the first picture then in relation to one of their classmates.

Mark: This is sensitive, that’s why, [*to the moderator*] look at him, how sensitive he is. He’s a little girl.

Paul: This is Billie, and this is whatshisname.

(Mixed gender, mixed ethnicity group, small town)

While ‘sensitivity’ was most frequently mentioned in relation to unpopularity, ‘arrogance’ was sometimes a characteristic used to describe popular girls. These girls were considered popular even though they were widely disliked and they were perceived to ‘look down on others’ while having a ‘huge ego’. Coolness and popularity was frequently interpreted as denigrating, mocking and taunting others; however, this was a more typical association in the case of girls. The following extended excerpt (a shorter version of which was already shown in Chapter 4) provides a good example for this.

Moderator: And Sandra, why is she arrogant?
Several students: Because she denigrates everybody, she taunts everyone.
Barbara: And that [she thinks] she's the best at everything. [*others agree*]
Moderator: [*asking another girl*] What do you think?
Carolyn: She's a loudmouth.
 [...]
 Amanda: She denigrates everyone...
Martha: But when we say the same to her, she gets offended immediately.
Carolyn: She gets outraged.
Moderator: And Martha, why do you think it's possible that Sandra is so arrogant and still popular?
Martha: She's not popular at all.
Moderator: She's not. [*others disagree*] Uhm, so she's popular but not in the good sense?
Several students: yes, yes.
Amanda: And if someone dares talk to her, she denigrates them, and shouts at them. So I think because of this. No one dares to taunt her, they look up on her because of fear.
 (*Mixed gender, mostly Roma group, small town*)

Interestingly, in some groups, probably due to the lack of sufficient cross-sex contacts, boys were insecure about what would make someone popular among girls, while, as we have seen, they were very clear about the characteristics that made a girl unpopular among them. When asked about the traits that would make someone from the opposite sex popular among them, it was typical both among boys and girls that respondents verbalized these characteristics as the negation of negative 'gender-typical' traits (e.g. 'not a jerk', 'not sensitive/hysterical').

Sports, in particular football, were presented as of central importance in every boy group. Additionally, boxing and the ability of 'being able to protect oneself' physically also came up frequently. Being good at football was a source of proudness among boys and sometimes they also hinted that they would be more attractive to girls for that reason. Interestingly, in spite of its central importance to popularity, the assumption that not being skilled in sports would hinder one's chances to become popular was downplayed or rejected in every boy group. However, in many groups it was reluctantly admitted that there might have been such an association. For girls, sports only occasionally came up and did not seem to be of central importance. In particular, in cases when the dominant participants in the group discussion were not fond of sports, girls who were originally more positive about them also joined in underplaying their importance.

6.5.2. Physical strength and violence

As mentioned already in Chapter 4, the topic of physical strength was central in boys' discourses about popularity. In many cases, those who were strong and fought a lot were reported to be more popular and an ethos of 'toughness' was often verbalized. Occasionally, fighting together was mentioned as one of the major bonding experiences and an integral part of school life for boys. Physical violence was almost always framed by the perpetrators as a proportional reaction to another person's verbal or physical attacks, or at least was presented in neutral terms (e.g. 'there was a fight'), and respondents hardly ever positioned themselves as initiators of these conflicts. This shows that, on the one hand, physical violence needs to be 'justified' for peers (or at least for the adult moderator) in order to be considered as 'acceptable', while, on the other hand, the openness in which respondents talked about such events might show that, under certain circumstances, the surrounding adult environment does not judge these events as unacceptable as some other undesirable behaviours (e.g. smoking, see below), at least not in the case of boys. Nevertheless, trying to participate in these demonstrations of strength without the right physical capacities ('pretending to be strong') resulted in extreme unpopularity. These unsuccessful attempts to increase one's status (without having the 'right' physical capabilities) are related to the question of authenticity, and just as we have seen in the literature, students who 'pretend' to be someone else than they 'really are' can become extremely unpopular. In addition to strength being an important 'masculine' trait, the demonstration 'fearless' attitudes were just as important. The following excerpt shows the difficulty, and almost impossibility, of boys admitting being afraid of violent peers, or 'anyone else'.

Moderator: And, by the way, does it make someone more popular, if s/he is a bit more violent, fights [physically]? Or are you afraid of them?

Daniel: We are afraid.

David: It's not that we are afraid of him but... [*hesitates*]

Moderator: So you're not afraid of them?

Andrew: I'm not afraid of anyone either.

Chris: I'm not afraid of anyone either.

(Mixed gender, mostly Roma group, small town)

Reports of physical fights were rare among girls, and in the few occasions when they were mentioned, these stories were about students not present in the group, or the

statements were phrased in very general terms (e.g. ‘there are fights’). Realistically, one could expect that such confrontations *actually* occur more rarely among girls; however, the lack of ‘owning up’ such activities shows that these fights might be less acceptable (for adults) in the case of girls, or at least they are less the source of ‘proudness’ (for an exception see the analysis of some of the only-Roma classes below). However, while physical strength and fights were not central to girls’ identities, *never* was it mentioned related to any of these reports that such activities would be ‘unfeminine’ or unacceptable in the case of girls.

It is important to emphasize that prosocial traits such as ‘kindness’ and ‘friendliness’ were at least as frequently mentioned by boys related to popularity as aggression, typically in combination with physical strength. Similarly, ‘kindness’ was more frequently mentioned by girls in relation to girls’ popularity than ‘arrogance’ and different forms of verbal aggression. However, intensive discourses similar to the ones related to strength, sensitivity, or arrogance, were not created around these prosocial traits, and, even after further questions by the moderators, their elaboration remained limited.

6.5.3. Physical appearance and romantic relationships

Although due to the age of the participants physical attraction and romantic relationships were less emphatic as they are in older age groups, the importance of physical appearance, especially in the case of girls, came up frequently. On the one hand, it involved being physically attractive and having the ‘right type’ of body, while on the other hand it included being ‘fashionable’ and ‘having a style’. While boys were talking about attractiveness in rather general terms, pointing out that it can contribute to popularity among members of the other sex, among girls it was often the source of both popularity and jealousy. In one girl group, interestingly related to the visual stimulus about the excluded boy, girls argued that the other boys reject him since they are ‘fatter’ and jealous (although some boys in the picture are somewhat larger, it never came up in other groups). In another group, in relation to popularity, girls argued that pretty girls were popular while their less attractive peers were rather rejected (‘no one wants the ugly one’).

Physical attraction and romantic relationships are areas that are difficult to talk

about for most pupils at this age even among themselves and this is particularly true when talking to adults. The following excerpt exemplifies this difficulty, where participants in one of the girl groups were asked (in this case by a female moderator) about their popular peers in the class.

Several girls: Lisa, you Lisa

Lisa: Why me?

Pam: I'd rather not say that now...

Amy: Because you love boys.

Lisa: It's not true.

[...]

Moderator: So, girls, why did you name Lisa?

Pam: You only have to look at her.

Moderator: So you think if someone is good-looking then she can be popular among girls.

Pam: Let's say if she's better at something than them.

(Only-Roma girl group, rural area)

In this example we can see that, in line with the general gender stereotypes, 'loving boys' is framed somewhat pejoratively in the case of girls, in particular in the case of girls who are pretty and attractive. This negative association is clear from Lisa's rejection of the assumption of 'loving boys', as well as from the seemingly evasive answers of Pam, which were in fact clear and straightforward references in this particular situation. However, in spite of the pejorative connotations, it is admitted that being pretty and attractive to boys does contribute to one's popularity, and Lisa was indeed one of the most dominant participants in this group.

While being pretty and attractive to boys were related to popularity, having *actual* romantic or even physical relationships were seen much more negatively among girls, and in one girl group physical relationships were even labelled as 'lame'. In particular, having more than one (former) boyfriends or 'switching' between boys had the risk of being labelled 'slutty'.

Amy: And they [the boys] share their girlfriend.

Moderator: Can you tell me a bit about this? What does it mean?

Amy: There is Jennifer for instance who is together with Jason and...

Lisa: ... And brother took his brother's girlfriend.

Moderator: Okay, so there are two brothers and one takes away the girlfriend from the other.

Several girls: No, rather the girl is switching [*others agree in the background*]

Moderator: And why do you think the boys are not bothered by this?

Lisa: Well, the girl is a big slut [*others agree*].
(*Only-Roma girl group, rural area*)

While having ‘too much’ interest in boys had negative effects on girls’ popularity, no such tendency was reported among boys. In fact, present and former relationships were reported to be important parts of some of the dominant boys’ popularity, while no stigma was attached to having more relationships at once.

In relation to physical appearance, ‘coolness’ in appearance (e.g. hair and clothes), being fashionable and having a ‘good style’ were occasionally mentioned by both girls and boys. As the sample included schools mostly in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and/or classes with a high proportion of disadvantaged students, financial background and the ability to buy ‘trendy’ clothes and gadgets were less emphatic than they would have been among predominantly middle-class students. However, while explicit references to financial inequalities were mostly missing, discourses around being ‘stylish’ as well as around personal hygiene (e.g. being smelly, wearing the same clothes) were often mentioned. Both areas, while seemingly related to the ‘character’ of the pupils in question, are, to a significant extent, related to socioeconomic differences as well. Not everyone can afford to be stylish even according to the ‘local standards’, and, similarly, even the ability of attending to the requirements of personal hygiene are often determined by the housing conditions of the students’ families in these disadvantaged regions.

6.5.4. Substance use and other forms of ‘bad behaviour’

Different forms of bad behaviour in the school, including swearing, fighting, taunting others and showing disrespect towards teachers, frequently came up in the conversations. In some classes, bad behaviour was considered as an important component of popularity, and dominant participants were boasting about their ‘acts’ and the consequences of their bad behaviour (e.g. disciplinary hearings). However, whether ‘bad behaviour’ was a source of ‘proudness’ or talked about disapprovingly was rather connected to the local class and school atmosphere than to gender differences. Similarly, the acceptance and prevalence of substance use, almost exclusively smoking, seemed also to be related to the local ‘milieu’ and not that much to gender. Interestingly, as we have seen in Chapter 4, smoking was initially almost always denied and students frequently expressed their

discontent with moderators asking about it. However, after getting assured that neither their parents nor their teachers would learn about their answers, they gradually admitted that it was an important part of popularity, as they often looked up on those peers who ‘dared’ to smoke. Even after admitting its importance, they frequently emphasized that the ones who smoked were ‘in the other group’ and controlled each other to ensure that no one said names. This silence and reluctance related to smoking clearly reflects the value system of an adult environment that most probably strongly punishes such activities. Some pupils even mentioned that their parents would ‘kill’ them if they learnt about them smoking, while such fears were never verbalized, as we have seen above, in relation to violence and other forms of ‘bad behaviour’.

6.5.5. Academic engagement

The stereotype of the ugly, anti-social, and ‘lame’ nerd frequently came up in some of the groups, where negative attitudes and hostility towards good students were often explicitly verbalized. In these groups studying, and following school rules in general, was considered ‘oldish’ and ‘lame’. However, similarly to the topics in the previous section, this was rather related to the class and school ‘milieu’ than to gender differences, therefore it will not be covered here in detail. The following excerpt gives an illustrative example of good academic performance *and* the lack of social skills being conflated into the category of a ‘nerd’, where one of the good students, Rob, had to ‘defend’ himself with emphasizing that he was ‘not learning too much’, while his friend, Brian, one of the most dominant and popular students in the class, needed to emphasize the social skills of Rob.

William: Rob is not a nerd, not a nerd because he can talk to anyone.

Rob: I’m not learning too much.

William: Because nerds are studying only for themselves.

(Boy-majority group with one girl, mixed ethnicity, capital city)

However, while Rob and Brian are fighting the stigma of Rob being labelled as a ‘nerd’, the underlying narrative that conflates diligence and lack of social skills and thus stigmatizes ‘nerds’ are not challenged in any ways.

6.5.6. Ethnicity and ‘oppositional culture’

Finally, some points about the intersections of gender and ethnicity are worth emphasizing. Although ethnic Roma students were overrepresented in the whole sample, three out of the four classes in rural areas were in segregated, (practically) only-Roma schools. We have hypothesized in earlier chapters that the social exclusion and academic difficulties of most Roma students may create an ‘ideal’ breeding ground for the emergence of ‘oppositional cultures’. Accordingly, in two of the three only-Roma classes anti-school values were dominant in students’ discourses, including the strong rejection of academic engagement and following school rules, as well as an ‘ethos’ of physical fights and disruptive behaviour, and strong negative sentiments towards the academically engaged and the ones who follow the rules. Interestingly, while these discourses were dominant among both boys and girls, they were more powerfully and vociferously verbalized by girls. Additionally, for the dominant girls in these classes being ‘tough’ and ‘Gypsy-like’ (i.e. ‘not sensitive’) was of central importance. The following excerpts show two examples from the same class of the appraisal of disruptive behaviour and the resentment towards students who follow school rules.

Moderator: And how does behaving badly make someone popular?

Linda: That’s just the way it is with us, we dig it if someone behaves badly.

Moderator: And what does s/he do, what does it mean if someone behaves badly?

Linda: Swears with teachers, talks during the class, hits, taunts others.

Moderator: And someone who behaves well?

Linda: That’s not really [popular].

Kimberly: That’s not good.

Jessica: That’s not.

Linda: Quiet, a dog.

Moderator: A dog?

Linda: Someone who is not bad, just is [there]. That’s not good.

Linda: Just sitting at your desk [all day], so oldish, that’s not [cool].

Kimberly: That’s not [cool].

Linda: I’d like to hit them in the head.

Moderator: So it’s not possible for someone to be both [a good student and cool]?

Linda: No, not in this class.

(Only-Roma girl group, rural area)

6.6. Discussion

The chapter presented a discourse analysis of the qualitative data with gender differences in its focus. The analysis intended to take both a descriptive and a critical approach towards the discourses and narratives presented by the students. We have seen that, mostly in line with the international literature, boys' popularity discourses primarily centred around sports abilities, physical strength and verbal and physical dominance over other peers, while girls' discourses were, to a great extent, centred on physical appearance, verbal aggression, 'arrogance', and kindness. 'Sensitivity', i.e. the lack of resilience to mocking and taunting, was seen as negative in the case of both genders, and it was considered 'unmanly' in the case of boys. While the lack of physical strength and the 'ability to protect oneself' were strongly connected to the lack of masculinity in the case of boys, similar discourses of 'unfemininity' did not emerge. In fact, among girls primarily 'liking boys too much' was disapproved in a way that followed a gendered pattern, while no such prohibitions on 'bad behaviour' or academic disengagement emerged. Since ethnic Roma students constituted approximately two thirds of the sample, in the end of our analysis we could also briefly refer to the intersections of gender and ethnicity. We saw that in two out of the three classes in ethnically segregated school environments, a strong rejection of pro-school values and a strong approval of disruptive behaviour were verbalized, and this was particularly visible in the case of the dominant, 'tough' girls in these only-Roma classes.

7. Summary and conclusion

7.1. Summary of the main findings

The dissertation focused on informal status among Hungarian early adolescents (grade 5-6 students, age 11-13). In line with the empirical literature, I distinguished two dimensions of informal status: an affective dimension, which is related to the extent one is liked or disliked by their peers, and a reputational dimension, which is related to power, prestige, and visibility within the peer group (see also Cillessen and Marks, 2011). In the dissertation, the former dimension was measured with the construct of acceptance and the latter with the constructs of popularity and coolness. In reflection to the complexities of status, multiple methodologies were applied; the three empirical chapters provided a mixed (Chapter 4), a quantitative (Chapter 5), and a qualitative (Chapter 6) analysis of the available data. Both the quantitative and the qualitative data suggest that the two status dimensions were correlated but distinct constructs for the pupils in my sample.

Chapter 4 investigated informal status by taking a mixed approach; the findings of the thematic analysis of the focus group interviews conducted at the end of grade six were integrated with the results of the multilevel regression models on the RECENS wave four primary school database, the survey of which pupils completed only a few months prior to the interviews. The integrated analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data was informed by the ‘exploratory bidirectional’ framework (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017), where the qualitative and quantitative data are analysed separately but the qualitative results inform the quantitative analysis before the two sets of results are brought together for the final interpretation. The results underlined the importance of *athleticism* (being good at sports) in boys’ reputational status; however, contrary to the findings of the ‘Western’ literature, the quantitative analysis found several other correlates that were more strongly associated with this status dimension even for boys (e.g. physical appearance, acceptance, verbal aggression). Interestingly, acceptance was not associated with athleticism in the quantitative models. With regards to *aggression*, the findings were somewhat surprising. While the international literature suggests that the overt forms of aggression are more strongly or only associated with boys’ reputational status, in this Hungarian early adolescent sample verbal aggression was more closely associated with girls’ coolness/popularity. Even more surprisingly, in the quantitative models physical aggression was only associated with reputational status for Roma girls, which was also

supported by some of the focus groups conducted in ethnically-segregated schools. Regarding the affective dimension of status, the results only supported the negative relationship between physical aggression and acceptance. Additionally, the interview results also indicated that relational aggression could be used strategically by some girls to maintain high reputational status (popularity), even though these girls were widely disliked by peers. With regards to *academic achievement and engagement*, the quantitative models did not find any association with reputational status ('coolness'), while the group interviews did find that too much engagement or kindness towards the teachers can harm someone's popularity. On the other hand, a positive relationship between grades and acceptance was found by the quantitative models. The potential for some degree of 'oppositional culture' in some ethnically segregated classes provides a good example for how the qualitative results can inform the quantitative models in the 'exploratory bidirectional' framework. After identifying this phenomenon, a three-way interaction between ethnicity, GPA, and the proportion of Roma students in the class was included in the quantitative models, which did find a sizeable negative interaction between these variables in the acceptance model. The quantitative models also underlined the importance of *physical attractiveness* which was, surprisingly, more strongly associated with boys' reputational status ('coolness'). Finally, the case of *smoking* further demonstrates the usefulness of applying multiple methods: this was not significant in the quantitative models, possibly due to the low proportion of students selecting this option, while the qualitative results unveiled that it was more prevalent among pupils in the sample, but strongly sanctioned by adults.

Chapter 5 further elaborated on informal status by providing a quantitative analysis of the first four waves of the RECENS primary school database. This chapter formulated its hypotheses based on the findings of Chapter 4 and tested whether the associations discovered in that chapter still held in the larger, panel database. The application of a relatively novel multilevel technique, the within-between random effects model (REWB) (Bell et al. 2019), made a more refined analysis possible, where the effects of within-individual changes and between-individual differences could be decomposed. The database was separated to a male and a female subset and the models were run on these subsets separately. Additionally, some models including gender interactions were also run on the whole sample in order to test whether there were gender

differences in the strength of association in the case of variables that were statistically significant in both subsamples. Similarly to the findings in Chapter 4, the REWB models found that being good at sports was associated with coolness for boys; however, this association was not particularly strong (which may be due to the binary nature of this variable in the panel database). Furthermore, contrary to the findings of the cross-sectional model, *athleticism* was not associated with coolness for girls, and the significant association was weaker for Roma boys than non-Roma boys. With regards to *aggression*, most of the effects related to between-individual differences in the REWB models are in line with the findings of the previous chapter, for instance the positive association between physical aggression and coolness was only statistically significant for Roma girls. Additionally, within-individual increases in verbal aggression were negatively associated with acceptance only in the case of Roma girls. Further, the full sample models including gender interactions showed that the negative association between verbal aggression and acceptance was weaker for boys. The results related to *academic achievement and engagement* show a more refined picture than the cross-sectional models. In line with the international literature, there was a slight negative association between coolness and GPA for boys and a slight positive association for girls, which was true for both Roma and non-Roma pupils. However, these associations were (mostly) related to within-individual changes but not to between individual differences, which demonstrates the usefulness of the REWB model. Acceptance was slightly but positively associated with GPA for all groups; however, within-individual improvements had a slight negative effect on Roma girls' acceptance (while the between-individual effect was positive in their case too). The positive interaction effect between GPA and sports in the coolness models for boys showed that well-performing male students had to 'balance' their increasing academic achievement with increased athletic ability in order not to lose reputational status. Interestingly, academic engagement was only positively associated with coolness in the case of Roma girls. The REWB models also underlined the importance of physical attractiveness in both forms of status; similarly to the cross-sectional results, the stronger association between attractiveness and coolness still held for boys while there were no gender differences with regards to acceptance.

Chapter 6 conducted a discourse analysis of the qualitative data with a focus on gender differences in popularity discourses. While this analysis is also strongly connected

to the two previous empirical chapters, its focus and methodological perspective is somewhat different, as it puts larger emphasis on the discursive construction, negotiation, and representation of popularity and popularity dynamics than on the actual correlates/factors that may contribute to status, in line with the constructivist epistemology of discourse analysis. Similarly to the findings of the international literature on the gendered patterns of popularity discourses, this analysis found that boys' accounts were primarily centred on sports, physical strengths, and physical and verbal dominance, while girls' accounts were centred on physical appearance, verbal aggression, 'arrogance', and kindness. The topic of 'sensitivity', mostly referring to one's lack of resilience to mocking and taunting, frequently came up during these discussions, and was considered particularly negative and 'unmanly' in the case of boys. Interestingly, while the lack of physical strength and the 'ability to protect oneself' were connected to the lack of masculinity in the case of boys (these peers were occasionally referred to as 'little girls'), no discourses of 'unfemininity' were observable, not even in the case of occasional accounts of girls' physical aggression or other forms of 'bad behaviour' and school disengagement. Among girls, primarily 'liking boys too much' was disapproved that followed a gendered pattern (with boys not having similar negative sanctions). The chapter also briefly discussed anti-school discourses most strongly verbalized by Roma girls in some of the ethnically-segregated classes.

7.2. Scientific contribution

After providing a brief summary of the empirical chapters, it is time to revisit the research goals and questions outlined in the first chapter of the dissertation. The two research goals were exploring the correlates of informal status (acceptance, coolness, and popularity) among Hungarian early adolescents and applying a mixed methods framework to the primary school data in order to test its applicability in peer status research. In line with these research goals, and rooted in the international and Hungarian empirical literature, the following four research questions were identified:

RQ 1: Are the correlates and their associations with the affective (acceptance) and reputational (popularity, coolness) dimensions of peer status similar to the

‘Western’ literature? In case there are differences, how can these differences be positioned relative to the ‘Western’ and Chinese findings?

RQ 2: To what extent are the correlates of peer status different for boys and girls? How does it relate to the findings of the international literature?

RQ 3: Are there differences in the correlates of informal status between Roma and non-Roma students? How do these differences (or the lack of them) relate to the findings of the international literature?

RQ 4: To what extent do the qualitative and quantitative results converge, diverge, or complement each other? Can a mixed methods integration framework be applied to the investigation of informal status?

It is important to emphasize at this point, once again, that the early adolescent sample I analysed is not a representative sample, similarly to the overwhelming majority of samples used in peer relations research, therefore the conclusions drawn here are related to this particular sample and cannot be generalized to all Hungarian early adolescents. Nevertheless, since only a few quantitative researchers have investigated these (or similar) status dimensions in Hungarian samples, and none of them involved a similarly wide range of correlates or applied mixed methodology, I believe the results presented here provide an important empirical contribution to the literature. Naturally, research conducted on other Hungarian samples with different characteristics could modify or refine the picture, and the inclusion of other variables in the quantitative surveys (e.g. prosociality or personality traits) could also clarify some of the associations presented here. Similarly, the application of ethnographic methods could provide a deeper understanding of the qualitative aspects.

The first three research questions will be discussed together since several of the differences between my results and the findings of the international literature are related to ethnic and gender differences, and most ethnic differences also have a gendered aspect. Similarly to the findings of the ‘Western’ literature, athletic abilities, some forms of aggression, physical appearance, acceptance (being liked), prosocial behaviour, and in

some cases possibly smoking (risk behaviour) all had a positive relationship with the reputational dimension of status, whereas physical aggression was generally negatively and GPA positively associated with acceptance. However, although athletic abilities were found to be important for boys, they were not the most important correlates in the quantitative models, which underlines the less central position of athleticism in Hungarian than American school life.³⁶ Furthermore, this less central position is further supported by the lack of association between being good at sports and acceptance. With regards to the different forms of aggression, the gendered patterns are fairly different from what the ‘Western’ literature suggests. In our sample, overt verbal aggression was more strongly associated with reputational status for girls than for boys, whereas physical aggression was only associated with coolness for Roma girls. Furthermore, while physical aggression generally had a negative association with acceptance, verbal aggression typically did not. This also underlines the importance of distinguishing different forms of overt aggression, which the (quantitative) international literature rarely does. The results of the focus groups imply that relational aggression may also be associated with girls’ popularity, which is more in line with the ‘Western’ findings.

The slight negative association between the GPA and reputational status for boys, and the positive association with acceptance for all groups are also in line with the literature. Additionally, the trend that academically high-achieving boys can ‘balance’ this performance with athletic abilities in order to avoid losing popularity is also similar to the ‘Western’ findings (e.g. Francis et al., 2010). However, the slight positive association between the GPA and reputational status in the case of girls is less typical among the ‘Western’ findings. Nevertheless, all the associations with GPA are relatively minor in size, thus the negative impacts may also be less emphatic than in many international samples. With regards to academic engagement, the focus groups implied that, in line with the international literature, academically ‘too’ engaged pupils can suffer losses in status; however, the quantitative models did not really find evidence for this. This may be due to the way academic engagement was measured in my quantitative models, which is not perfectly in line with the behaviours students described during the interviews.

³⁶ Although sport was the most central topic in the interviews with boy groups, the *relative strength* of the different correlates/factors cannot really be assessed based on interviews, as the most important aspect may not be the one they talk the most (or the most emotionally) about.

All things considered, to answer the first research question, my results do imply that Hungary may be a different cultural context from the ‘Western’ and the Chinese contexts with regards to peer relations. Although my findings can be related to only this particular sample, I found several differences from the ‘Western’ context including the role of athleticism, aggression, and the GPA, as described in the previous paragraphs. On the other hand, the results are clearly different from the (so far scarce) Chinese findings, where popularity was positively associated with the GPA and often negatively with aggression (e.g. Tseng et al., 2013; Xi et al., 2016).

With regards to the second research question, my quantitative results showed some gender differences in either the direction, significance, or strength of most variables where such differences were tested. The somewhat surprising findings related to different forms of aggression were already discussed above, while the stronger association between reputational status and physical appearance for boys also contradicted the prior expectations. On the other hand, gender differences in the relationship between reputational status and athleticism (stronger for boys), and reputational status and the GPA (negative for boys, positive for girls), are mostly in line with the international findings, whereas the lack of positive association between acceptance and athleticism is not (especially in the case of boys). Additionally, the discourse analysis presented in Chapter 6 found that gender norms were emphatic in the case of boys, in particular in relation to physical strength and reaction to aggression (e.g. being ‘tough’, ‘manly’, and not ‘sensitive’), while similar restrictions did not really apply to girls, e.g. there was no prohibition/disapproval of physical violence or school disengagement verbalized as ‘unfeminine’. The only exception was related to romantic interests: girls’ status could suffer seriously, at least according to the interviews, for ‘liking boys too much’, which supports the assumptions of the sexual double standard hypothesis (Reiss, 1960 cited by Crawford and Popp, 2003).

With regards to the third research question, the results showed that assumptions based on the differences in status dynamics between Black and White American students mostly do not hold for Roma pupils. The assumption that athleticism would be more important for the reputational status of Roma than non-Roma students was supported in

the case of Roma girls by the cross-sectional models;³⁷ however, no similar evidence was found in the case of boys. Similarly, the assumption that aggression would contribute to the coolness/popularity of Roma students more was supported in the case of Roma girls (physical aggression), but not in the case of Roma boys. Furthermore, the focus groups found some evidence of an ‘oppositional culture’ in some ethnically segregated classes, and the quantitative models also found some support for the negative interaction between GPA, ethnicity, and ethnic proportion in the cross-sectional acceptance model, and between GPA and ethnicity in the REWB acceptance model for girls. However, the REWB models for coolness found a positive association between ethnicity and academic engagement for Roma girls. In any case, although these results may touch upon some important and not fully explored dynamics, these findings cannot be considered as a direct test of the ‘acting white’ hypothesis, since the ethnicity of the nominators was not taken into consideration; contrary to the two empirical findings which directly addressed this phenomenon with similar measures on Hungarian samples (Habsz and Radó, 2018; Hajdu et al., 2019).

Finally, with regards to the methodological research question, it seems that the ‘exploratory bidirectional’ framework (Moseholm and Fetters, 2017) provided a good scheme for the integration of the qualitative and quantitative findings, as the qualitative results could inform the quantitative analysis (ethnic ‘oppositional culture’) and the two groups of results complemented each other well in the final interpretation (e.g. when clarifying the role of smoking or physical attractiveness, or when the qualitative interviews added new aspects to the analysis, for instance physical strength). However, with a more integrated research design, the ‘integrative potential’ could be exploited even better.³⁸

³⁷ Since the variable used in the cross-sectional models measured athleticism with a score calculated from peer nominations, while the variable in the panel database was a binary variable based on teachers’ nominations, I would trust the cross-sectional results more in this particular instance than the panel regression results.

³⁸ The current research was an emergent mixed methods research as the focus groups joined one wave of an already ongoing survey research, thus not all aspects of the research design could be harmonized perfectly.

7.3. Policy implications

Since peer relations are one of the most central aspects of early adolescents' and adolescents' school experience, they are also important from a policy perspective. As the most emphatic declared goals of academic institutions are knowledge-transfer and personality development, peer dynamics that conflict with these goals and/or harm pupils' mental health clearly need to be addressed. These impacts can be divided into two groups: dynamics that are clearly harmful for students and dynamics that are not harmful by themselves but undermine the importance of academic knowledge/learning and thus incentivise pupils not to put efforts into their studies. From the perspective of peer status, examples for the first group involve the positive association between high status and bullying, aggression, or risk behaviour, while for the latter the too strong association, and thus obsession, with athleticism (cf. Coleman, 1961a). Intervention programmes typically aim at changing the class atmosphere that associates high status with the undesirable behaviour (e.g. bullying or substance use). Anti-bullying intervention programmes are relatively widely known and many of them have been proved to be effective in reducing the level of bullying in the classroom (Gaffney et al., 2019).

7.4. Directions for future research

As the research presented in this dissertation was novel with regards to its methodology and the range of correlates it involved in the analysis of peer status among Hungarian early adolescents, there are a lot of potential directions for future investigation. As mentioned above, since the findings are not representative for the Hungarian early adolescent population, research on other Hungarian samples with different characteristics (ethnicity, financial background, geographical area, etc.) would provide important empirical contributions. Additionally, larger-scale research involving multiple countries and thus providing a cross-cultural perspective would be particularly desirable. Future surveys should certainly include peer nominations measuring prosociality in order to better understand the interactions between aggression and prosociality, while they could potentially also include some other factors such as physical strength, being humorous/funny, and some measures of extraversion. Ideally, future mixed methods investigations should have a more integrated research design, although emergent mixed

researches as well as solely qualitative or quantitative investigations could also provide important contributions. With regards to the method of analysis, social network analysis could carry important benefits over regression models, as network characteristics probably influence one's judgement about coolness, popularity, or acceptance. Finally, ethnographic research could also provide an alternative method of qualitative data collection and analysis.

8. References

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9. Appendices

9.1. Additional figures

Figure 2: Distribution of the coolness score (wave four, limited database)

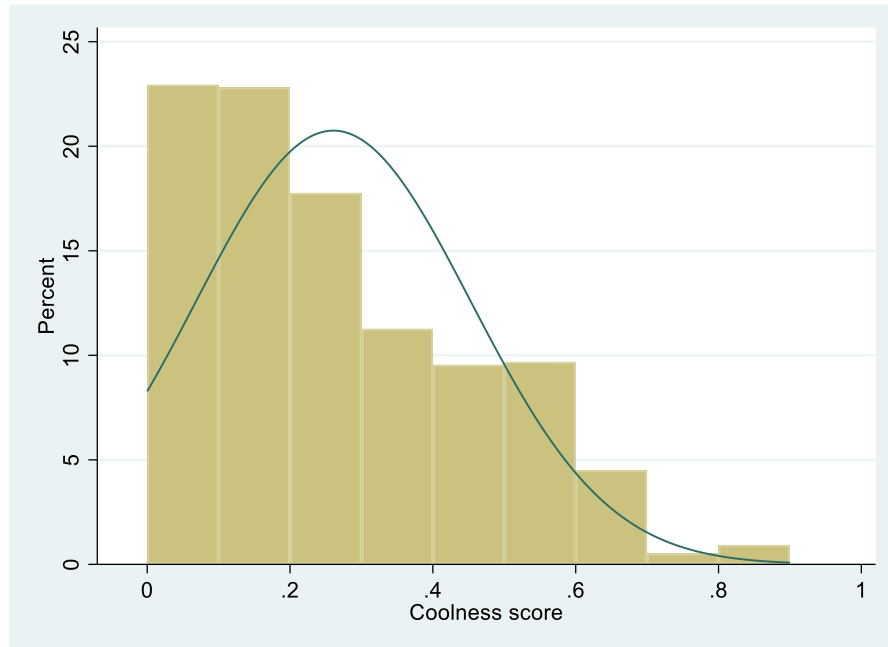
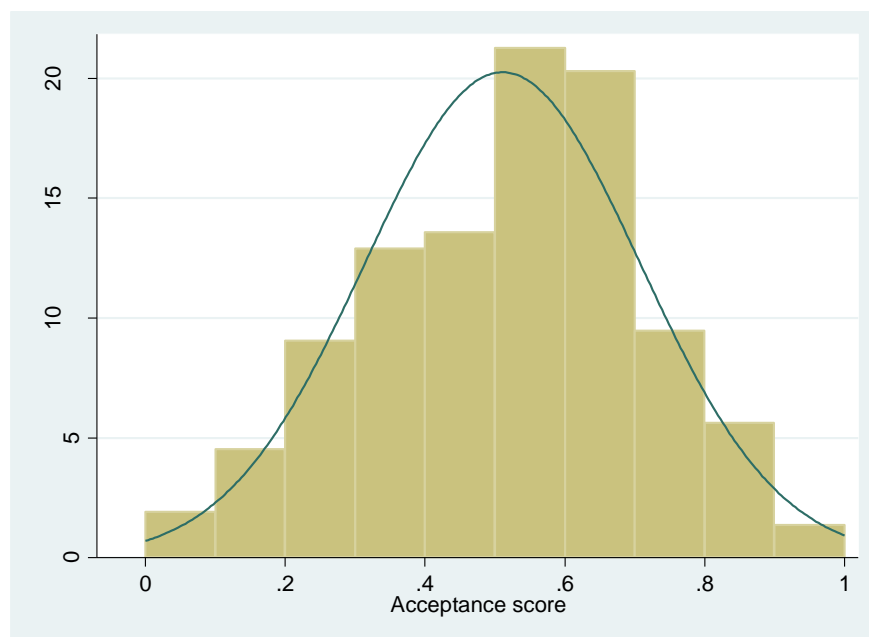


Figure 3: Distribution of the acceptance score (wave four, limited database)



9.2. Additional tables

Table 13: Correlation table (wave four, limited database)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. Coolness	1.00													
2. Acceptance	0.47***	1.00												
3. Sport	0.58***	0.35***	1.00											
4. Mock	0.27***	-0.19***	0.24***	1.00										
5. Hit	0.23***	-0.21***	0.21***	0.70***	1.00									
6. Looks	0.48***	0.53***	0.18***	-0.07	-0.09*	1.00								
7. Teacher's favourite	0.086*	0.33***	0.09*	-0.15***	-0.14***	0.32***	1.00							
8. Smart	0.19***	0.54***	0.18***	-0.22***	-0.23***	0.39***	0.68***	1.00						
9. Engagement	-0.11*	0.26***	-0.07	-0.33***	-0.30***	0.12**	0.44***	0.52***	1.00					
10. GPA	0.00	0.38***	0.04	-0.28***	-0.25***	0.19***	0.60***	0.78***	0.65***	1.00				
11. GPA (dev)	0.01	0.41***	0.01	-0.32***	-0.28***	0.25***	0.64***	0.77***	0.61***	0.92***	1.00			
12. GPA (class)	-0.02	0.02	0.08*	0.06	0.03	-0.08*	0.05	0.18***	0.22***	0.39***	0.00	1.00		
13. Roma (prop)	0.12***	0.16***	0.06	-0.01	-0.03	0.11**	0.03	-0.07*	-0.15***	-0.24***	0.00	-0.60***	1.00	
14. Disadv. (prop)	0.09*	0.11**	0.09*	0.02	0.00	0.10**	-0.03	-0.09*	-0.06	-0.15***	0.00	-0.39***	0.59***	1.00

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 14: Predicted values of the multilevel coolness models (wave four, limited database)

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	N of observations
Model 1	0.27	0.15	-0.11	0.69	459
Model 2	0.27	0.16	-0.08	0.75	459
Model 3	0.27	0.16	-0.10	0.83	627
Model 4	0.26	0.16	-0.08	0.81	729

Predicted values below zero for 15 observations in each model

Table 15: Predicted values of the multilevel acceptance models (wave four, limited database)

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	N of observations
Model 1	0.54	0.13	0.21	0.89	459
Model 2	0.54	0.13	0.16	0.91	459
Model 3	0.52	0.14	0.20	0.92	648
Model 4	0.51	0.14	0.19	0.91	754

Table 16: Fractional regression models of coolness (wave four, limited database)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Sport	0.92***	-0.21	0.31	0.54
Mock	0.61	3.11***	2.80***	3.03***
Hit	1.46*	-0.59	1.60	1.18
Looks	2.35***	3.08***	2.62***	2.42***
Teacher's favourite	-0.29	-0.23		
Acceptance	1.44***	1.41***	1.47***	1.51***
Engagement	-0.04	-0.03		
Smoker	0.17	0.22		
Boy	0.67***	0.49*	0.51**	0.48**
Roma	0.25**	0.63	0.51	0.45
Disadvantaged	-0.11	-0.06		
GPA (dev)	0.02	-0.02	-0.04	
Smart				-0.06
GPA (class)	0.06	0.02	-0.07	
Roma (prop)	0.15	0.10	-0.47	-0.33
Disadvantaged (prop)	-0.23	-0.36		
Roma x Sport		0.47	0.12	-0.06
Roma x Mock		-1.23	-1.57	-1.57*
Roma x Hit		3.17	1.25	1.46
Roma x GPA (dev)		0.05		
Roma x Looks		-1.21**	-0.61	-0.35
Boy x Sport		1.67**	0.96	0.71
Boy x Mock		-1.54	-0.86	-0.92
Boy x Hit		0.73	-1.49	-1.05
Boy x GPA (dev)		-0.04		
Boy x Looks		0.45	0.50	0.71
Boy x Roma		0.38	0.31	0.30
Roma x Boy x Sport		-1.01	-0.51	-0.27
Roma x Boy x Mock		-2.36	-1.03	-1.14
Roma x Boy x Hit		-2.20	-0.46	0.09
Roma x Boy x GPA (dev)		-0.15		
Roma x Boy x Looks		-0.01	-0.34	-0.61
Roma x Roma (prop)		0.05	0.17	0.18
Roma x Roma (prop) x GPA (dev)		0.17		
Constant	-3.43***	-3.43***	-3.10***	-3.40***
N	459.00	459.00	627.00	729.00

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 17: Fractional regression models of acceptance (wave four, limited database)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Sport	0.52***	0.87**	0.66*	0.51
Mock	-0.04	-0.26	-0.66	-0.16
Hit	-1.91***	-3.07	-3.09*	-3.38*
Looks	1.39***	1.36***	1.32***	1.32***
Teacher's favourite	-0.10	-0.08		
Acceptance	1.05***	1.14***	1.09***	1.11***
Engagement	0.00	0.01		
Smoker	-0.13	-0.12		
Boy	0.08	0.22	0.19	0.27
Roma	0.05	0.00	-0.16	0.08
Disadvantaged	-0.05	-0.05		
GPA (dev)	0.22***	0.22***	0.22***	
Smart				1.12***
GPA (class)	0.32*	0.33*	0.26*	
Roma (prop)	0.24	0.00	0.17	0.17
Disadvantaged (prop)	0.12	0.13		
Roma x Sport		-0.57	-0.14	-0.11
Roma x Mock		-0.37	-0.47	-1.17
Roma x Hit		2.11	2.60	3.28*
Roma x GPA (dev)		0.19		
Roma x Looks		0.08	0.15	-0.37
Boy x Sport		-0.45	-0.15	-0.05
Boy x Mock		0.95	0.54	-0.26
Boy x Hit		0.10	0.79	1.71
Boy x GPA (dev)		0.02		
Boy x Looks		-0.25	-0.28	-0.89*
Boy x Roma		-0.43	-0.28	-0.47*
Roma x Boy x Sport		0.87	0.24	0.27
Roma x Boy x Mock		-0.05	-0.06	0.98
Roma x Boy x Hit		-0.27	-1.27	-2.52
Roma x Boy x GPA (dev)		-0.03		
Roma x Boy x Looks		-0.22	0.15	0.80
Roma x Roma (prop)		0.44	0.48	0.36
Roma x Roma (prop) x GPA (dev)		-0.41		
Constant	-1.69**	-1.73**	-1.48**	-1.05***
N	459.00	459.00	627.00	729.00

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 18: Correlation table (panel data, **BOY** subsample)

	Coolness	Likeability	GPA	Engagement	Diligence	Behaviour	Smartness	Mock	Hit	Looks
Coolness	1.0000									
Acceptance	0.4710*	1.0000								
GPA	0.0054	0.3401*	1.0000							
Engagement	-0.0368	0.2575*	0.5673*	1.0000						
Diligence	-0.0267	0.3398*	0.8813*	0.5861*	1.0000					
Behaviour	-0.1238*	0.2892*	0.6908*	0.5898*	0.7402*	1.0000				
Smartness	0.2709*	0.5779*	0.6965*	0.4590*	0.6393*	0.4738*	1.0000			
Mock	0.0847*	-0.3098*	-0.3478*	-0.3074*	-0.3628*	-0.4532*	-0.2989*	1.0000		
Hit	0.0621*	-0.2758*	-0.3391*	-0.3281*	-0.3572*	-0.4433*	-0.2718*	0.7002*	1.0000	
Looks	0.4268*	0.4047*	0.1221*	0.0133	0.0717*	-0.0464*	0.3449*	0.0131	0.0458*	1.0000

*p<0.05

Table 19: Correlation table (panel data, **GIRL** subsample)

	Coolness	Likeability	GPA	Engagement	Diligence	Behaviour	Smartness	Mock	Hit	Looks
Coolness	1.0000									
Acceptance	0.4841*	1.0000								
GPA	0.1039*	0.2997*	1.0000							
Engagement	0.0186	0.2268*	0.5626*	1.0000						
Diligence	0.0493*	0.2613*	0.8706*	0.5615*	1.0000					
Behaviour	-0.1122*	0.2006*	0.6577*	0.5272*	0.7017*	1.0000				
Smartness	0.3677*	0.5534*	0.7153*	0.5130*	0.6455*	0.4588*	1.0000			
Mock	0.1424*	-0.1995*	-0.2624*	-0.1620*	-0.2828*	-0.3839*	-0.1943*	1.0000		
Hit	0.1378*	-0.1115*	-0.1881*	-0.1340*	-0.1779*	-0.2691*	-0.1358*	0.5499*	1.0000	
Looks	0.6539*	0.5881*	0.1531*	0.1025*	0.1054*	-0.0302	0.4501*	0.0425	0.0687*	1.0000

*p<0.05

Table 20: Joint significance tests for the coolness models (p-values)
(panel data, **BOY** subsample)

	Model 2	Model 3
Mock (change) + Roma x Mock (change)	0.19	0.15
Mock (mean) + Roma x Mock (mean)	0.41	0.19
Hit (change) + Roma x Hit (change)	0.23	0.34
Hit (mean) + Roma x Hit (mean)	0.46	0.32
GPA (change) + Roma x GPA (change)	0.00	-
GPA (mean) + Roma x GPA (mean)	0.52	-
Engagement (change) + Roma x Engagement (change)	0.17	-
Engagement (mean) + Roma x Engagement (mean)	0.21	-
Sport (change) + Roma x Sports (change)	0.65	0.80
Sports (mean) + Roma x Sports (mean)	0.07	0.01
Smart (change) + Roma x Smart (change)	-	0.07
Smart (mean) + Roma x Smart (mean)	-	0.79

Table 21: Joint significance tests for the coolness models (p-values)
(panel data, **GIRL** subsample)

	Model 2	Model 3
Mock (change) + Roma x Mock (change)	0.27	0.29
Mock (mean) + Roma x Mock (mean)	0.16	0.43
Hit (change) + Roma x Hit (change)	0.95	0.75
Hit (mean) + Roma x Hit (mean)	0.00	0.00
GPA (change) + Roma x GPA (change)	0.00	-
GPA (mean) + Roma x GPA (mean)	0.56	-
Engagement (change) + Roma x Engagement (change)	0.00	-
Engagement (mean) + Roma x Engagement (mean)	0.27	-
Sport (change) + Roma x Sports (change)	0.36	0.34
Sports (mean) + Roma x Sports (mean)	0.41	0.13
Smart (change) + Roma x Smart (change)	-	0.00
Smart (mean) + Roma x Smart (mean)	-	0.65

Table 22: Joint significance tests for the acceptance models (p-values)
(panel data, **BOY** subsample)

	Model 2	Model 3
Mock (change) + Roma x Mock (change)	0.48	0.48
Mock (mean) + Roma x Mock (mean)	0.00	0.00
Hit (change) + Roma x Hit (change)	0.01	0.00
Hit (mean) + Roma x Hit (mean)	0.18	0.42
GPA (change) + Roma x GPA (change)	0.17	-
GPA (mean) + Roma x GPA (mean)	0.04	-
Engagement (change) + Roma x Engagement (change)	0.55	-
Engagement (mean) + Roma x Engagement (mean)	0.06	-
Sport (change) +Roma x Sports (change)	0.72	0.97
Sports (mean) + Roma x Sports (mean)	0.27	0.36
Smart (change) + Roma x Smart (change)	-	0.00
Smart (mean) + Roma x Smart (mean)	-	0.00

Table 23: Joint significance tests for the acceptance models (p-values)
(panel data, **GIRL** subsample)

	Model 2	Model 3
Mock (change) + Roma x Mock (change)	0.01	0.00
Mock (mean) + Roma x Mock (mean)	0.79	0.66
Hit (change) + Roma x Hit (change)	0.68	0.30
Hit (mean) + Roma x Hit (mean)	0.01	0.13
GPA (change) + Roma x GPA (change)	0.02	-
GPA (mean) + Roma x GPA (mean)	0.00	-
Engagement (change) + Roma x Engagement (change)	0.04	-
Engagement (mean) + Roma x Engagement (mean)	0.49	-
Sport (change) +Roma x Sports (change)	0.15	0.12
Sports (mean) + Roma x Sports (mean)	0.40	0.39
Smart (change) + Roma x Smart (change)	-	0.00
Smart (mean) + Roma x Smart (mean)	-	0.00

Table 24: REWB models of coolness with gender interactions (**WHOLE** sample)

	Model 1	Model 2
Sport (change)	-0.01	0.00
Sport (mean)	0.04***	0.04***
Mock (change)	0.01	0.05
Mock (mean)	0.31***	0.31***
Hit (change)	0.01	0.02
Hit (mean)	0.09	0.10
Looks (change)	-0.25***	-0.25***
Looks (mean)	0.65***	0.66***
Acceptance (change)	0.20***	0.14***
Acceptance (mean)	0.10***	0.08***
GPA (change)	-0.01	
GPA (mean)	0.01	
Engagement (change)	0.00	
Engagement (mean)	-0.02***	
Smoke (change)	0.03*	0.04*
Smoke (mean)	0.03	0.04
Disadvantaged (change)	0.01	0.00
Disadvantaged (mean)	-0.02*	-0.01
Roma	0.02*	0.02**
Boy x Mock (change)	0.16*	0.15*
Boy x Mock (mean)	-0.27***	-0.25***
Boy x Looks (mean)	0.19***	0.18***
Boy x Like (change)	0.11*	0.16***
Boy x Like (mean)	0.09***	0.11***
Roma x Boy	0.00	0.01
Smart (change)		0.26***
Boy x Smart (change)		-0.18***
Constant	-0.04**	-0.04***
N of observations	3005	3400
N of individuals	1113	1153
sigma_e	0.12	0.12
sigma_u	0.06	0.06
r2_w	0.12	0.13
r2_b	0.65	0.67
r2_o	0.55	0.56

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Table 25: REWB models of acceptance with gender interactions (**WHOLE** sample)

	Model 1	Model 2
Sport (change)	0.02**	0.02**
Sport (mean)	-0.01	0.00
Mock (change)	-0.28***	-0.26***
Mock (mean)	-0.57***	-0.49***
Hit (change)	-0.17***	-0.19***
Hit (mean)	-0.15	-0.08
Looks (change)	0.18***	0.13***
Looks (mean)	0.31***	0.29***
Coolness (change)	0.18***	0.17***
Coolness (mean)	0.34***	0.28***
GPA (change)	-0.03***	
GPA (mean)	0.02***	
Engagement (change)	0.00	
Engagement (mean)	0.02**	
Smoke (change)	0.00	0.01
Smoke (mean)	-0.01	-0.04
Disadvantaged (change)	0.01	0.02**
Disadvantaged (mean)	-0.01	-0.01
Roma	0.02	0.02
Boy x Mock (change)	0.14*	0.18*
Boy x Mock (mean)	0.27**	-0.06
Boy x Looks (mean)	0.04	-0.01
Roma x Boy	-0.01	0.20***
Smart (mean)		0.20***
Smart (change)		0.07**
Boy x Smart (mean)		0.00
Boy x Smart (change)		0.34***
Constant	0.31***	0.31***
N of observations	3005	3400
N of individuals	1113	1153
sigma_e	0.11	0.11
sigma_u	0.10	0.10
r2_w	0.11	0.15
r2_b	0.51	0.56
r2_o	0.44	0.48

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

9.3. Student questionnaire (wave four)³⁹

QUESTIONNAIRE

2015 March - April

MTA TK „Lendület”
RECENS Research Group



Before you start, please read this!

The questionnaire is anonymous – it does not contain your name or any information by which you could be identified.

Filling the questionnaire is voluntary – if you do not wish to answer any of the questions, please leave it blank.

*The questionnaire is not a test – **there are no good or bad answers.***

*Please answer the questions **honestly and thoughtfully.***

Thank you for your help!

³⁹ The questionnaire was translated to English by the author solely for the present dissertation (unofficial translation).

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3. Your sex

- What is the postal code of the place where you live?**

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8. What grade would you be satisfied with from the following subjects?

1. Mathematics:
2. Hungarian literature:

9. How satisfied are your parents with your grades? Circle the answer.



10. Where would you like to continue your studies after primary school?

1. General secondary school (I would like to take the maturity exam)
2. Vocational secondary school (I would like to take the maturity exam and learn a vocation)
3. Vocational school (I would like to learn a vocation, but would not like to take the maturity exam)
4. I would not like to continue my studies.
5. I do not know yet

11. Did you apply to a six-year general secondary school?

1. Yes
2. No

12. Which statement is true for your class? Circle the answer.

1. They accept someone if he/she gets bad grades
2. They better accept someone if he/she gets bad grades.
3. They do not care about what grades someone gets.
4. They better accept someone if he/she gets good grades.
5. They accept someone if he/she gets good grades.

13. In your opinion, what score would you get on a test where you can get maximum 100 points and the majority of your class got 70 points? Please write the number below.

..... points

14. Please indicate in the table HOW MUCH YOU LIKE/LOVE your teacher.

Grade the same way as your school grades: 1: I really do not like him/her ... 5: We have a really good relationship.

	How much do you like/love your teacher?				
Mathematics	1	2	3	4	5
Hungarian literature	1	2	3	4	5

Your form teacher	1	2	3	4	5
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15. Please indicate in the table HOW MUCH YOUR TEACHER LIKES/LOVES YOU.

Grade the same way as your school grades: 1: S/he really does not like me ... 5: We have a really good relationship.

	How much does your teacher like/love you?				
Mathematics	1	2	3	4	5
Hungarian literature	1	2	3	4	5
Form teacher	1	2	3	4	5

16. What characteristics make someone POPULAR in your class? Circle the answer. You can select multiple answers.

1. Smart, intelligent.
2. Good at sports.
3. Gypsy/Roma.
4. Smokes.
5. Drinks alcohol.
6. A nerd.

17. What characteristics make someone UNPOPULAR in your class? Circle the answer. You can select multiple answers.

1. Smart, intelligent.
2. Good at sports.
3. Gypsy/Roma.
4. Smokes.
5. Drinks alcohol.
6. A nerd.

18. What characteristics DO NOT MATTER for popularity in your class? Circle the answer. You can select multiple answers.

1. Smart, intelligent.
2. Good at sports.
3. Gypsy/Roma.
4. Smokes.
5. Drinks alcohol.
6. A nerd.

In the following questions we will ask you about your friends, classmates and teachers.

19. In the first column you can read statements, while the top of the other columns contain the names of your classmates. Please put an X in the cells which you think are true. For example, if you think your classmate in the second column is pretty/handsome put an X in the first row.

Pretty girl/handsome boy							
Cool							
He/she does not belong to our class							
I listen to him/her							
I think he/she is Gypsy/Roma							
Smart, intelligent							
I often sit next to him/her during classes							
I want to be better than him/her							
I look up to him/her							
I look down on him/her, despise him/her							
S/he is a good athlete							
The teachers' favourite							

20. Please tell us how much you like or dislike your classmates. Put an X in every row to the right column.

[illegible]

21. What do you think your classmates think? Mark your answers with an X. You can also select yourself.

Whom do your classmates look up to?								
Whom do your classmates look down on? (Whom do they despise?)								
Whom do your classmates look up to, but they should not?								
Whom do your classmates listen to?								

The following questions are related to you.

22. Which group do you belong to?

1. Hungarian
2. Roma / Gypsy
3. both Roma / Gypsy and Hungarian
4. Other:

23. Have they ever pick on you because you belong to this group?

1. Yes
2. No

24. There are youngsters who have already tried cigarette. Do you smoke?

1. No, never.
2. No, but I have already tried it.
3. Yes, but only in company.
4. Yes, regularly.

25. There are youngsters who have already tried alcohol. Do you drink alcohol?

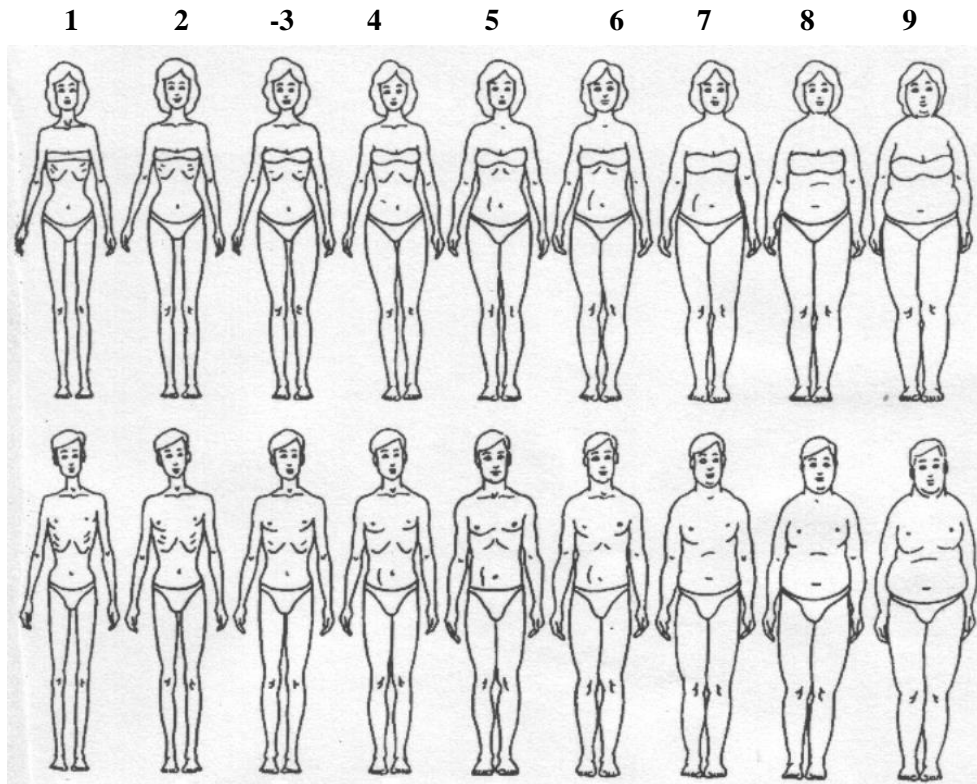
1. No, never.
2. No, but I have tried it.
3. Yes, but rarely.
4. Yes, at least once a week.

26. How tall are you? Please answer in centimetres. cm

27. How many kilos are you? kg

28. Please select and indicate the number of that picture which in your opinion is the most similar to You. Girls can select from the first row, boys from the second one.

I am most similar to the boy/girl in picture



29. How much time do you spend on the internet a day?

1. None at all
2. Some minutes or maximum half an hour
3. An hour
4. One or two hours
5. More than two hours

30. Are you in love with someone from the class?

1. Yes
2. No

If yes, please write his/her name here

31. You can read some statements in the following table. Please indicate with an X to what extent you think the statement is true.

	Absolutely not true.	Not really true.	Partly true partly not true.	Mostly true.	Absolutely true.
I like competing with others.					
I try to be a better students than my classmates					
Our class is cooler than most classes in the school.					

32. How important are the following things for you? Indicate it with an X in the table.

	Important	Neutral	Not important.
Good performance.			
That my parents are satisfied with me.			
To have many friends.			
That my classmates look up to me.			
To have a good relationship with my teachers.			
To not have enemies.			
To be a better student than my classmates.			
To be a better athlete than my classmates.			

33. Who are hostile to each other in your class? You can select more answers.

1. boys and girls
2. Roma and non-Roma students
3. Good and bad students
4. Locals and those who live in another village/town/district
5. other:

There is often taunting, mocking, fighting among kids. In the following questions we would like to know how typical it is in your class.

34. You can read some statements in the first column and the top of the other columns contain the names of your classmates. Please put an X to the cells you feel are true. For example, if you classmate in the first column MOCKS OR INSULTS YOU then put an X in the first row.

Who mocks or insults YOU regularly?								
Who pushes, hits or beats you regularly?								
Who picks on you in sms, email or Facebook regularly?								

35. You can read some statements in the first column and the top of the other columns contain the names of your classmates. Please put an X to the cells you feel are true. For example, if YOU MOCK OR INSULT your classmate in the first column then put an X in the first row.

Who do YOU mock or insult regularly?								
Who do YOU push, hit or beat regularly?								
Who do YOU pick on in sms, email or Facebook regularly?								

36. You can read some statements in the first column and the top of the other columns contain the names of your classmates. Please put an X to the cells you feel are true. For example, if you talk with your classmates about the classmate in the first column behind his/her back then put an X in the first row.

WHO do you regularly talk about with your classmates behind his/her back?								
WITH WHOM do you regularly talk about other classmates behind their back?								
Who talks ABOUT YOU with your classmates behind your back, in your opinion?								

37. When you mock or insult someone, do you start it in most cases or do you do it because they also mock you? Put an X in the cell which you feel is the truest.

	Usually I start it	Usually I do it because others also do it to me	I don't do it
I mock or insult someone			
I push, hit or beat someone			
I pick on someone in sms, email or Facebook.			

38. If you classmates hurt you, who do you tell about it? You can select more than one answers.

1. My parents/foster parents.
2. My sibling
3. One of my friends
4. One of my teachers
5. Someone else
6. I don't talk about it to anyone
7. They never hurt me

In the following questions we will ask your opinion about others and the school.

39. People have different relationships to each other. How would you react if a new HUNGARIAN kid whom you do not know would move to your town/village and attend your school?

	Possible	Not possible
I would be happy to be friends with him/her.		
I would be happy to go to the same class with him/her.		
I would be happy to live next to him/her.		
I would be happy to live in the same town/village with him/her		

40. People have different relationships to each other. How would you react if a new ROMA/GYPSY kid whom you do not know would move to your town/village and attend your school?

	Possible	Not possible
I would be happy to be friends with him/her.		
I would be happy to go to the same class with him/her.		
I would be happy to live next to him/her.		
I would be happy to live in the same town/village with him/her		

41. Indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 to what extent you agree with the following statements. 5 means that you fully agree and 1 means that you fully disagree.

Circle the number that is most true for you

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I like attending school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I feel safe in the school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. There is a good atmosphere in the class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Our class is a cohesive community. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I feel well in my class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I feel others accept me the way I am in the class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

The following questions ask you about your family. If you live with foster parents or someone else, please relate your answers to them. For example, if you have both a father and a foster father then think about the one who has a larger role in your education.

42. Who do you live together with? You can select more than one answers.

1. My mother
2. My father
3. My foster mother
4. My foster father
5. My grandmother
6. My grandfather
7. My sibling or siblings
8. Other relatives (aunt, uncle, cousin, etc.)
9. Other people (not relatives)
10. I live in an orphanage

43. How many people live in your flat/house? Do NOT count animals/pets.

Include yourself too in the total number.

.....

44. How many siblings do you live together with?

..... siblings

Do NOT count yourself!

45. How old are your siblings whom you live together with?

Please list the age of each of your siblings!

.....

46. What is your mother's highest level of education? If you live together with a foster mother then select her highest level of education!

1. She did not finish primary school
2. Primary school
3. Trade school
4. Vocational school
5. Maturity exam
6. College
7. University

47. What is your father's highest level of education? If you live together with a foster father then select his highest level of education!

1. He did not finish primary school
2. Primary school
3. Trade school
4. Vocational school
5. Maturity exam
6. College
7. University

48. Please select those things that are available to YOU at home.

You can select more than one answers.

1. Desk
2. Your own room
3. A peaceful environment where you can study
4. Your own computer, laptop
5. Access to the Internet
6. Literature (fiction)
7. Poems
8. Artworks (for example paintings)
9. Books which help you prepare for school
10. Lexicons
11. Dictionaries
12. Dishwasher
13. DVD player
14. MP3/MP4 player
15. Digital camera (not part of a phone)
16. Your own smartphone, tablet
17. Air-conditioning
18. Video game console (for instance PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo Wii)

49. How many rooms for living/sleeping are there in your flat?

Does not count: kitchen, bathroom, pantry, toilet, hall, corridor, storage room, cellar, workshop, garage

..... (number of rooms)

50. How often do you go to the cinema or the theatre with your family?

1. Once a week
2. Once a month
3. About every half a year
4. Once a year
5. We do not go to the cinema or the theatre

51. How often do you go hiking with your family?

1. Once a week
2. Once a month
3. About every half a year
4. Once a year
5. We do not go hiking

52. How often do you play together or play card games with your family?

1. Once a week
2. Once a month
3. About every half a year
4. Once a year
5. We do not play together or play card games

53. Has it happened to your family in the last 12 months? Circle those ones that happened.

1. You went on a holiday inlands
2. You went on a holiday abroad
3. Your father (foster father) was unemployed
4. Your mother (foster mother) was unemployed
5. Your family did not have enough money for food
6. You family heated the flat less or only heated some parts of the flat because of the lack of money
7. The electricity/gas/water was turned off
8. Your family had to borrow money to pay the bills

54. How many books do you have at home, your parents and you combined? Do not count the schoolbooks, newspapers, magazines and journals.

1. Less than one bookshelf (about 0–50 books)
2. One bookshelf (about 50 books)
3. 2-3 bookshelves (maximum 150 books)
4. 4-6 bookshelves (maximum 300 books)
5. Enough for 2 bookcases (300–600 books)
6. Enough for 3 or more bookcases (600–1000 books)
7. More than 1000 books

55. You can read 10 statements below about how you usually feel about yourself. Grade the statements on a scale from 1 to 5 where 5 means that you fully agree and 1 means that you fully disagree.

Circle the number that you feel is the truest.

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I feel I am valuable, at least compared to others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I feel I have many good qualities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I consider myself untalented, unsuccessful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I can do things as well as others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I feel I cannot be proud of many things. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I have a good opinion about myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I am satisfied with myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I wish I could respect myself more. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I sometimes feel worthless. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Sometimes I think I am not good at anything. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Thank you for your answers!

If you want to know why we asked you or are interested in our results, visit our webpage:

<http://recens.tk.mta.hu>

9.4. Teacher questionnaire (wave four)⁴⁰

Dear Form Teacher!

The MTA TK “Lendület” RECENS Research Group conducted a survey research in your class. Please help our work with answering the following questions. Answering the questionnaire is anonymous and voluntary. Your help is very important for us since You as the form teacher of the class can observe such details that no one else can.

Thank you for your help in advance!

Class code	
Time of the interview (year/month/day/hour):	

I. In this part, we will ask you about the students and the class community

1. What subject(s) do you teach to the class besides the form class? How many classes a week?

Subject	Classes per week

2. If there are any students who left the class since the last semester, please tell us why they left and where they study currently?

Name of the student	Why did he/she leave? / Where did he/she go?

⁴⁰ The questionnaire was translated to English by the author solely for the present dissertation (unofficial translation).

3. If there are any students who arrived since the previous semester, please tell us where they came from and why they left their previous school/class?

Name of the student	Why did he/she come? / Where did he/she come from?

4. Have you visited any of your students' family since the survey research in the autumn semester? If yes, which students' family?

1. I have not visited any families since the survey research in the autumn
2. I visited the following students' families:
.....

5. What is your assessment of the class community? 1 – very bad; 5 – very good
1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

6. What is your assessment of your relationship with the students in your class?
1 – very bad; 5 – very good
1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

7. Has it ever happened in this class that the mixed ethnic (Roma/non-Roma) composition of the class caused problematic situations?

1. Yes, the following has happened:
2. No, it has not happened.
3. It is not an ethnically mixed class.

8. In your opinion, Roma and non-Roma students in the class...

1. Rather separate from one another.
2. Rather form a community together.
3. There are no Roma students in the class.
4. There are only Roma students in the class.
5. Other:

9. Has it ever happened in the class that children with different ethnic background would have made friends with each other but their peers prevented it?

1. Yes
2. No
3. I do not know

10. Please circle to what extent you agree with the following statements. (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = rather disagree, 3 = partly disagree, partly agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree)

1. The school can significantly compensate for the socialization disadvantages of Roma children brought from the family.	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
2. The school difficulties of Roma children stem much more from social disadvantage than from cultural differences.	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
3. The school and the teachers need to create a stronger relationship with Roma parents in order for Roma children to be successful at school.	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5
4. It is also the task of the school to deal with the out-of-school problems of the local Roma community.	1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5

11. Is there a seating arrangement in the classroom?

1. Yes, students have to sit at the seat assigned to them by the form teacher.
2. Yes, students have to sit at the seat assigned to them by the subject teachers (seating arrangement only during certain classes).
3. No, but some students have to sit at the seat assigned to them by the form teacher or subject teachers.
4. There is no sitting arrangement at all.
5. There is other type of seating arrangement:

12. What aspects matter during seating? (You can select more than one.)

1. Behaviour: students with good behaviour should sit next to each other
2. Behaviour: students with good and bad behaviour should be mixed
3. Academic performance: good students should sit next to each other
4. Academic performance: good and bad students should sit next to each other
5. Gender: girls should sit together with other girls and boys with boys
6. Gender: girls and boys should be mixed
7. Students with glasses in the front
8. Roma students should sit together
9. Roma and non-Roma students should sit together
10. Friends should sit together
12. Friends should not sit together
11. Other:

13. How often does the seating arrangement change?

1. More than once a month
2. Once a month
3. Once in half a year
4. Once a year
5. Never

14. Please mark how typical are the following characteristics of the students.

Smart, intelligent							
Hardworking							
Good student							
Good athlete							
Helps the progress of others							
Popular							
Roma/Gypsy							
The others look up to him/her							
Has honours notice							
Applied for a six-year general secondary school							
Pulls back the others							
The others look down on him/her							

15. Please mark how typical are the following characteristics of the students.

Aggressive							
His/her parents do not attend parent-teacher meetings							
Disadvantaged							
Multiply disadvantaged							
Special educational needs							
Integration, learning and behaviour problems							
Has official warning							
Failed in the last semester							
Gets free school lunch							
Receives regular child protection support							
Number of unjustified absences (Please write the exact number of classes)							
Number of justified absences (Please write the exact number)							

II. In this part we will ask you about the cohesive factors in the class.

16. In some schools and classes, certain groups of students can largely define the school life of the other pupils. Do you think such group exists in your class?

1. No. → Please continue with question 18.
2. Yes, there is one such group.
3. Yes, there are two such groups.
4. Yes, there are more than two such groups.

17. Which students are the leaders of each group? Please write the full names of the students!

First group
1
2
3
4

Second group
1
2
3
4

Third group
1
2
3
4

Fourth group
1
2
3
4

18. In your opinion, what characteristics does a student need in order to be popular in this class?

.....

19. In your opinion, what characteristics does a student need in order to be unpopular in this class?

.....

20. Is there anything else you find important to tell us about your class?

.....

Thank you for your help!

9.5. Interview guide and moderator instructions for the focus groups⁴¹

Before the interview

- We reorganise the room before the interviews a little bit: we push together two or three tables (depending on the size) and put the chairs around them in a circle.
- We start the audio recording in time (after informing students) and it may be useful to use multiple devices (e.g. phone, mp3 player, dictaphone) just in case
- We put the snacks and soft drinks on table during the break (maybe on another table that we do not use for the interview), they can take them as they like
- The co-moderator (if there is one) should take notes about the most important opinions that are expressed and which students express them. Additionally, he/she can take notes about metacommunication or any other relevant observation.
- The questions marked with a * should be asked in any case, the others only depending on the time and discussion
- It would be nice if you could match the kids with the kids in the survey
- We will need post-it notes and several pens ☺
- We have less than a school class (45 minutes) for the interview – including group formation and acclimatization maybe 35-40 minutes, but if we finish earlier, we still have to stay in the room with the kids until the break. Even if we do not get to the end of the questions, we should let the kids go in the break, unless they still want to talk.

**** Hi! I am _____ from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (and my partner is _____). We are doing these short group discussions as an extension of the tablet research, so that we can understand some topics better and to give you the chance to express your opinion in more detail. What we hear here today stays with us, we will not tell it to others and we ask you to respect it as well, what is said here today should stay among those who are here now. We are recording the discussion with a phone, but this is just so that we don't have to take notes continuously, we will not give it to anyone, just the two of us will hear it. The audio will be deleted later from the phone. During the discussions feel free to eat and drink, but please pay attention not to leave a mess after yourself when you leave. Similarly to the tablet research, we are interested in your opinion, please answer the questions honestly and respect the opinion of the others. If anyone feels that he/she would not like to answer any of the questions, just say that you do not want to answer that question, it is perfectly fine. Can we start?***

[You don't have to read this text out word-by-word, the content is what matters: introduction, short info about the research, assurance of anonymity, asking students to also respect it and each other's opinion even after the research, telling them that they don't have to answer any question they don't want to]

⁴¹ The interview guide was translated to English by the author of the dissertation. However, we did not follow the guide too rigidly during the interviews (especially the time limits for each section) and if students were really enthusiastic about some topics and/or really wanted to talk about them, we let the group discussion take that direction and spent more time with that topic. However, we did give priority to the questions marked with an asterisk (*).

**** First I would like to ask you, just to warm up, to tell your name and the experience you had with the tablet research. Were there any questions that you really liked or really disliked? Which one was that? Why did you like/dislike it? Let's start with you [first kid] let's go around in a circle.***

[We can talk about anything that comes up at this point for some time depending on how interesting or relevant it is. We can also help kids with questions in case they have forgotten what we asked ☺ e.g. did they like/dislike something, etc.]

We should be at about 10 minutes here including the preparation and the warm-up

****Thank you. Now I would like to talk to you about some questions related to popularity. Please everyone take two or three notes [post-it notes] and write on each note one characteristic that you think makes someone popular in the class [1 minute] Thank you. Let's see the characteristics that you have written [we put the notes on the board/wall or we can also read them out]. I would like to ask you to let's try to rank them together, according to their importance. Which ones are the most important in your opinion?***

[Either there is consensus or in case there is not, we can even make them vote between the two most popular alternatives]

**** Alright, what's next?*** [and so on until we have run out of characteristics]

**** Let's see them now one-by-one. The most popular characteristic was _____. Why is it so important? Can you tell me an example when it made someone popular?***

[It may be practical repeat this with the first two or three characteristics]

****By the way, who are the most popular kids in the class? Tell me about them!***

[This question can be asked also after discussing the first most popular characteristic, before we move on to the second most popular characteristic. In this case we should remember to go back to the second characteristic after this discussion]

Approx. 20 minutes

[The following questions ask about some further characteristics. If they have already been discussed in detail above, then they can be skipped. However, if they were mentioned but not discussed in detail, it may be useful to get back to them. („You mentioned____, let's talk a bit more about it.” And asking some of the related questions to that characteristic)]

****Does someone become popular because he/she is a good student? Or maybe the bad students are more popular? Why is that? / What does it depend on?***

[In the survey questionnaire, most students indicated that grades do not matter with regards to popularity. I suspect it may be different during the interviews, especially if we do not provide them this option immediately. If they say the same here as well, we can also discuss the reasons and what matters instead of grades then. It may be that those who are a little bit better than the average are more popular but those who study really well are not. It would be also nice to get an understanding of what counts as being a good student.]

Are there any differences between being smart and being a good student? Can you think about a classmate who is smart but not a good students? Are smart kids more popular in the class?

** How important are sports for you? Does it make someone more popular if he/she is good at sports? Why?/Why not?*

** Does it make someone more popular if he/she has trendy/cool stuff? What counts as cool stuff?*

[You do not need to push all the questions from these three groups of questions, but some of them may be interesting in the particular group]

** There are many young people who smoke or drink [alcohol]. Is it typical in your class? Does it make someone more popular/cool?*

[We will have to emphasize again that we will not tell it to anyone else they know. It would be interesting to have someone in the group who drinks or smokes and is willing to talk about it]

Are the boys or the girls more popular in the class? Is there any girl who is popular among boys or any boy who is popular among girls? Why is he/she popular? Are pretty girls/handsome boys more popular?

[You do not need to push this question either for this age group, but if they want to talk about it, interesting things may come up]

** There was a question during the tablet research that made some excitement in some classes. In one question we asked you which of your classmates were Roma in your opinion. In some classes we experienced students asking each other whether they were Roma/Gypsy, maybe it was similar in your class. Do you know about each other's background? How much are you aware of this or talk about it?⁴²*

** Look at the first four pictures, there are famous Roma people in them. Do you know them? What is your opinion about them? Do you know about other famous Roma? [In the pictures: Csányi Sándor, Gáspár Győző (Győzike), Oláh Gergő, Radics Gigi]*

** Do you think it matters in your class who is Roma with regards to popularity? Why?/Why not? For example, are Roma kids more popular among other Roma kids? How important is it for you personally?*

[We can spend as much time on this group of questions as needed. However, it may be a sensitive topic, so in case they do not want to talk about it, we can move to the next group of questions]

Approx. 30 minutes

⁴² Actually pupils in every group argued that they were perfectly aware of who was Roma and who was not.

**** Thank you. Now I would like to talk about something else. Look at pictures 5 and 6. How do you think the kids feel in the pictures? Why did this situation happen?***

[Or you can use the words they used to answer the first question, e.g. “Why do the other kids dislike him?” just make sure not to suggest anything they have not said yet]

What makes someone unpopular in your class? Why? Could you tell me an example for this?

What characteristics do not matter with regards to popularity?

How do you select friends in the class? Why are these characteristics important for you?

What are the main groups in the class? What is important to know about them? Why are people in the group together? What characteristics/interest do they share?

[It would be nice to explore the main cliques in the class. Feel free to use any other word instead of ‘group’ if seems more appropriate.]

How important is it for you to be better than others? What would you like to be better at? Why?

How important is it for you to get good grades?

[For the last two questions we can make another round so that to hear everyone’s opinion]

Approx. 40-42 minutes

**** Thank you for your participation in the discussion. I will stop the audio recording now.*** [stop the audio recording] ***Please tell me how you felt during this interview.***

**** Do YOU have any questions?***

10. The author's publications on the topic

Peer-reviewed journal articles

Bocskor Á (2021) Reputational Status Dynamics from a Mixed Methods Perspective: Coolness and Popularity in a Hungarian Primary School Sample. *Youth & Society* May 2021. DOI: 10.1177/0044118X211012815.

Bocskor Á and Havelda A (2019) Status Dynamics: Popularity and Acceptance in an Ethnically Diverse Hungarian Primary School Sample. *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 5(4): 110–138. DOI: 10.17356/ieejsp.v5i4.581.

Conference papers

Bocskor Á (2020) Az osztályon belüli népszerűség és státusz vizsgálata észak-magyarországi általános iskolákban: Egy kevert módszertanú kutatás tapasztalatai. In: Bihari E, Molnár D and Szikszai-Németh K (eds.) *Tavaszi Szél/Spring Wind 2019 Tanulmánykötet. III. kötet*. Budapest: Doktoranduszok Országos Szövetsége.

International conference presentations

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