

Self-Esteem Levels of South Korean Third-Culture Kids

Does an Individual's Identity as a Third-Culture Kid

Impact His/ Her Self-Esteem Level?

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I. Abstract

This study was designed to explore the impacts of being a third-culture kid (TCK) on having different self-esteem levels in a representative sample of South Korean high school students ages 13-19 studying in Woodstock School, India. Findings revealed that third-culture kids' self-esteem levels were significantly and positively correlated with their cultural, linguistic, and racial identities. Generally, while weak correlation was found between the concept of home and self-esteem, the study concludes that social identity and the sense of "belonging" have a significant effect on the self-esteem level of a Korean TCK. Through this research, it can be seen that those with higher self-esteem levels are more "included" and "involved" in a particular community in comparison to those who aren't. This study, however, does not generalize for the entire Korean TCK population but is a representative of Korean TCKs in a small community in Mussoorie, India. The methodology section of this study can be adopted and applied by future researchers willing to examine different psychological impacts on self-esteem in a particular population.

Keywords: Korean third-culture kid, self-esteem, cultural identity, social identity, community, belongingness, multiculturalism

II. Introduction

When the “sense of community,” a feeling that “members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together,”¹ is fulfilled, the self-esteem level of an individual is positively impacted. There are multiple factors, both negative and positive, that affect people’s self-esteem levels and several research studies have been conducted in the past regarding this topic. However, this research paper particularly aims to examine the factors that influence self-esteem levels of Korean female third-culture kids (TCK) ages 13-19 in Woodstock School, an international school in India with a student-staff body population of approximately 600. The study focuses on whether a correlation between being a third-culture kid and self-esteem exists, and is ultimately designed to discover the effects of being a third-culture kid on the self-esteem level of an individual.

Firstly, a “third-culture kid” is defined as a “person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture.” According to American sociologist David C. Pollock, TCKs “frequently build relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any.”² As a Korean TCK myself, this personal and possibly vulnerable topic came to my mind as I struggled with low self-esteem and questioned my identity. By observing other Korean TCKs struggling with low self-esteem, I noticed a similarity and thus I came to believe that our “third-cultural” identity may have shaped our self-esteem levels. By tackling the question, “does living as a TCK lower one’s self-esteem?,” I wanted to know if there is a definite and objective correlation between the two.

¹ (Chung & Lim, 2014)

²(Pollock & Van Reken, 2012)

It is important to acknowledge and analyze this issue on a larger scale. This correlational study is examined from a psychological lens and may be relevant to psychotherapists and counselors who aim to better understand and emphasize with their patients.

III. Literature Review

While previous research on the definition and measures of self-esteem, factors that affect self-esteem, the definition of a “third-culture kid,” and self-esteem levels of white and black third-culture kids have been extensive, there has been a gap in research that measures the correlation between self-esteem and being a South Korean third-culture kid.

Definition of Self-Esteem

Sociologist Jan Stets and Dr. Peter Burke define self-esteem as the “negative or positive attitude that individuals have of themselves” that takes into consideration “people’s overall feelings of acceptance and respect.”³ According to them, people who have high self-esteem levels would have high self-worth levels, the “degree to which individuals feel positive about themselves, that is, they feel that they are good and valuable.”⁴

Self-esteem has two aspects to it: personal identity, which includes “attributes of the individual such as competence, talent, and sociability,” and one’s social identity, which is “defined as that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance

³(Stets & Burke, 2014, p. 409)

⁴(Stets & Burke, 2014, p. 410)

attached to that membership.” In short, “personal identity refers to how people view themselves as individuals, [while] social identity refers to how they view the social groups to which they belong.”⁵ Appropriate self-esteem scales will be used in this research based on this definition of self-esteem.

Measures of Self-Esteem

There are several methods that were created to assess self-esteem levels. These “evaluations are very personal in nature, based on how individuals see themselves in the context of specific reference groups and group activities.”⁶ Among many is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, a “10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self,” which is commonly used in many self-esteem-related research studies. Other self-esteem scales include the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale that “assesses self-esteem in the physical, moral, personal, family, and social domains,” Janis and Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale that measures “self-esteem in social areas,” and the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, a “multidimensional self-esteem scale covering a variety of areas such as school and family.”⁷ Among these, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Janis and Field Feelings of Inadequacy will be utilized for this particular study.

Factors that Affect Self-Esteem

Research shows that factors that affect self-esteem vary from the environment one grew up in and the experiences he/ she had. Generally, having low self-esteem is said to be

⁵(Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 302)

⁶(Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 304)

⁷(Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 303)

“at the root of personal and social problems.”⁸ Some express that “having a relationship with God influenced self-esteem.”⁹ Others say that “family closeness related to self-esteem and role models enhance identity development as well as self-esteem.”¹⁰ William James’s identity theory states that “self-esteem [is] an outcome that depend[s] upon the relationship between one’s successes relative to one’s pretensions.”¹¹

A major factor that affects people commonly is reflected self-appraisal, a term used to describe a person’s perception of “how the self is evaluated by others,” where “individuals judge themselves by the reaction of others to them and in their interaction with others.”¹²

Another crucial factor that multiple researchers emphasize is the “sense of belongingness” a.k.a. a “we in social/ group identities.”¹³ After conducting a research on Turkish youth living in the Netherlands, sociologist R.M. Kramer says, “[t]he way in which one is identified in the larger society (as well as where one is located in the social structure) affects the way in which one identified oneself.”¹⁴ For this research study, we will be able to see how some of these factors come into the context of Korean third-culture kids.

Past Research on Self-Esteem Levels of White and Black Third-Culture Kids

Quite a few past research studies tackled the question, “from what sources do [third-culture kids] obtain their self-worth?”.¹⁵ These studies focus on the African American

⁸(Stets & Burke, 2014, p. 409)

⁹(Byrd & R., 2013, p. 249)

¹⁰(Byrd & R., 2013)

¹¹(Stets & Burke, 2014, p. 412)

¹²(Byrd & R., 2013)

¹³(Stets & Burke, 2014, p. 414)

¹⁴(Verkuyten, 1994, p. 22)

¹⁵(Byrd & R., 2013, p. 259)

peoples and the white race. Rarely do we see these studies focus on Asians, especially of South Koreans.

For example, a study that has been conducted by psychologist Diane Byrd and social worker Sonja Shavers concentrate on the factors that affect the self-esteem levels of African American women.¹⁶ Byrd's study questioned the impacts of African American women's race on their self-esteem levels. Through the use of several methods, they were able to come up with a conclusion that "major sources of self-esteem... include religion, familiar influence, and role models."¹⁷ Interviews were conducted and scales were used to gather data and information about African American women's self-esteem levels and the factors that affect them. "data triangulated in two ways: data and method of data collection." Firstly, the data were "reduced to categories based on the grounded theory methodology of constant comparison. Quantitative scores were used to support qualitative responses to provide a more descriptive picture of self-esteem scores." Secondly, "data collection included interviews and scales to provide more evidence. Patterns emerging about self-esteem from the qualitative scales... of each participant were compared with sources of self-esteem (family, role model, sexism, racism, religion) from the qualitative data."¹⁸ Through this, the study came up with tables as such (See below):

¹⁶(Byrd & R., 2013)

¹⁷(Byrd & R., 2013, p. 258)

¹⁸(Byrd & R., 2013, p. 254)

Table 3: Integration of the Data

Qualitative Response	Womanist Identity	Quantitative Scales			SE	RAS
		Feminist Identity	Racial Identity	Internal Identity		
Self-esteem response	Immer/Emer high SE no match	Revelation high SE no match	Internal high SE match	match	match	
Parental Influence	n/a	n/a	n/a	match	match	
Role Models	match	no match	match	match	no match	
Religion	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no match	
Sexism	match	match	n/a	no match	match	
Racism	n/a	n/a	match	no match	match	
Reference Group	match	no match	match	no match	match	
Work	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	

1. SE = Self-esteem
 2. RAS = Reflected Appraisal Scale
 n/a = not applicable

By analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data that stated, “the sample mean for the reflected appraisal score was low indicating that African American women in this sample were unlikely to base self-worth on opinions of others, even close others,”¹⁹ the study concluded that “stigmatized groups are inclined to have high self-esteem... because of the use of protective strategies.”²⁰ Although my hypothesis is the opposite of this research, the study that I will conduct will aim to come up with a conclusion on the correlation of self-esteem and the Korean third-cultural identity.

Past Research on the Well-Being of Korean Adolescents

¹⁹(Byrd & R., 2013, p. 254)

²⁰(Byrd & R., 2013, p. 260)

As aforementioned, the sense of community is defined as a “feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.”²¹

A research study conducted on Korean non-TCK by Dr. Grace Chung emphasizes the importance of the “sense of neighborhood community” and examines how this may “influence Korean adolescents’ psychosocial well-being, such as peer relations and self-esteem.”²² Like the aforementioned study, this research aimed to find the factors that affect the self-esteem level of a Korean non-TCK teenager. After going through multiple methods, the study has concluded that i. “[a]s teenagers spend increasingly more time with their peers, peers take on a greater meaning and importance for them. In this context, positive peer relations are significantly related to their social well-being,”²³ ii. “adolescents who feel that they belong and are connected to their neighborhood community will espouse higher levels of self-esteem,”²⁴ and iii. “social connectedness is one of the five core developmental competencies (i.e. positive sense of self, self-control, decision-making skills, moral system of beliefs) that adolescents should acquire.”²⁵

Though the subjects of my research are different from this study, the purpose of the investigation is fairly similar to mine. By referencing this study, I will find out the differences between the factors that affect the self-esteem levels of a Korean non-TCK and a TCK.

As explained, many studies have been done on topics of self-esteem and third-culture kid; however, no research has extensively focused on these topics in relation to South Korean

²¹(Chung & Lim, 2014)

²²(Chung & Lim, 2014, p. 352)

²³(Chung & Lim, 2014, p. 352)

²⁴(Chung & Lim, 2014, p. 353)

²⁵(Chung & Lim, 2014, p. 352)

female high school students. This research is therefore conducted to complete the missing parts in this field of research.

IV. Methodology

This study was performed from August 2018 to February 2019. The first step taken to conduct the research was to define the term “self-esteem” by reading previous similar research papers for greater credibility. I tested several self-esteem scale measures to decide which would fit for evaluating the self-esteem levels of the subjects. According to several research studies in the past, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale was considered as highly credible, and thus this scale was chosen as the primary scale reference for the study. In addition, to reconfirm the validation of the Rosenberg survey, a selected group of 15 people from Woodstock studentsgrades 9-12 took the survey.²⁶

²⁶(Open Source Psychometrics Project, n.d.)

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel that I have a number of good qualities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to do things as well as most other people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel I do not have much to be proud of.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take a positive attitude toward myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I wish I could have more respect for myself.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I certainly feel useless at times.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At times I think I am no good at all.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For later comparison between the self-esteem levels of Korean TCKs and Korean non-TCKs, I separated the results of the Rosenberg survey into High/ Low (for self-esteem) and TCKs/ non-TCKs.²⁷

The next steps were to define the subjects of the study and define the term “third-culture kid” (TCK). Emeritus professor Dodie Limberg of University of Southern California et. al define third-culture kids as people “raised in a culture different from that of their parents or primary caregivers.”²⁸ But for the purpose of this study, I selected 20 Korean female students in grades 9-12 to take part in defining the term. I asked subjects to self-identify themselves as TCKs or non-TCKs on a “How Korean Are You?” scale that I created, where the subjects labeled themselves out of 1-10; I divided the scale into two major categories where those who marked 1-5 on the scale considered themselves TCKs and 6-10

²⁷ See Appendix I

²⁸(Limberg & Lambie, 2011)

identified themselves as non-TCKs.²⁹ By looking at the results, I requested two 17-year-old Korean TCKs (who self-identified as one) to further participate in my study to investigate my question.

At first, I planned to investigate both white and Korean TCKs; however, due to limited time, I decided to decrease the scope of my study to examine Korean TCKs only. I also decreased the age range of my study from between 10-30 to only high school teenagers ages 13-19 due to time restrictions.

The two 17-year-old female Korean TCKs who participated in my study come from different backgrounds. Through several personal interviews and interactions, I was able to gain knowledge of their experiences as TCKs and further examine the matter. The participants signed both digital and paper-based informed consent forms for greater safety and confidentiality.³⁰

The first subject of the study is H. Cho, a Korean female student who lived in India for 13 years (as of 2018) due to her parents' business in the country. Cho recalls that she was surrounded by a bigger community of Indians than Koreans in her childhood years. Though she is fully Korean by nationality, she identifies herself as a "complete" TCK, where she marked herself a 1 out of 10 on the aforementioned "How *Korean* Are You?" scale (see below).

²⁹ See Appendix II

³⁰ See Appendix III

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Levels of Cultural Integration Research

Name: Hyunjin Cho

Please indicate: "How Korean are you?" Rate 1 for being a complete third-culture kid and 10 for being completely "Korean."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

To answer the question, “what is the correlation between being a Korean TCK and different levels of self-esteem?,” I firstly requested Cho to respond to the Rosenberg self-esteem survey, which was validated in the earlier process of the study. Later, an interview was conducted to listen to her personal experiences of growing up in a foreign country and how that affected her self-esteem levels. In addition to taking personal notes, this interview was recorded with consent and thus I was able to recall the maximum information possible.

The same process was held when interviewing the second subject D. Lee, also a Korean female student who lived in India for 17 years (as of 2018). Similar to Cho, Lee grew up amongst a big Indian community. However, due to her parents' occupation as Christian missionaries, Lee was more regularly exposed to the Korean church community than Cho was as a child. According to her response in the "How Korean Are You?" scale, she marked a 4 out of 10, considering herself a TCK.

Woodstock School
Levels of Cultural Integration Research

Name: Daeun Lee (Victoria)

Please indicate: "How Korean are you?" Rate 1 for being a complete third-culture kid and 10 for being completely "Korean."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

As Cho was, Lee was requested to respond to the Rosenberg self-esteem survey. I conducted an interview with Lee where I asked similar questions as Cho. This interview, however, was not recorded, as I did not have a recording device on me. Although I took personal notes, I am not able to recall as many details as compared to Cho's interview. Due to this mistake, Cho's interview content is also not included in the final results section of the study.

Some of the important questions I asked when interviewing the subjects were:

- i. What are some of your earliest childhood memories living in a foreign country?
- ii. How did people perceive you when you first joined the Indian community?
- iii. Did people treat you the same way they treated people from their country?
- iv. Did you feel like an outsider in the country you grew up as a child/ teenager?
- v. Where is Home for you?
- vi. How have your parents described the concept of home to you?
- vii. Do you feel that being a TCK has impacted your self-esteem levels? If so, to what extent did your identity as a TCK affect your ability to regard yourself as important?

Although these questions have a central theme and are related to the main question of the study, questions were slightly modified into deeper personal discussions when interviewing the subjects (which I will be analyzing in the final results section).

After the few steps held, I once again asked Cho and Lee to respond to the revised Janis and Field Feelings of Inadequacy assessment,³¹ which "measures self-esteem in social areas."³² The assessment consists of a total of 36 questions. The subjects are to answer between 1-5, where 1 indicates "very often" and 5 indicates "practically never." Through

³¹ See Appendix IV

³²(Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 303)

this assessment, I was able to reauthenticate my results and match these results with the / attained from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. A majority of the questions asked in the Janis and Field scale were based on how an individual responded to others' perception of him/ her. Many were based on an individual's acknowledgment of his/ her accomplishments and society's recognition of his/ her achievements. (See below).

- i. How often do you feel inferior to most of the people you know?
- ii. How often do you have the feeling that there is nothing you can do well?
- iii. How confident are you that others see you as being physically appealing?
- iv. Do you often feel uncomfortable meeting new people?
- v. In general, how confident do you feel about your abilities?

For further examination, an additional in-depth interview was conducted with the subjects. While the first interview focused on the past experiences of the subjects, the purpose of this interview was to understand their future plans and decisions they make for themselves, and to understand how the subjects would view the concept of non-TCKs having higher self-esteem levels than TCKs. These interviews were both recorded, and thus I was able to retain possible maximum information from these. Below listed are some of the questions I asked:

- i. If you were not a TCK, would you still think that you would have the level of self-esteem you have right now?
- ii. What do you hope to do in the future? Has being a TCK shaped your future decisions/ plans?
- iii. Will you live outside your mother country?
- iv. What are some actions that people with low self-esteem do? Do these actions come out on you too?

- v. If you could go back to the past and decide whether you could live as a TCK or a non-TCK, what would you live as? Why?
- vi. Do you think that non-TCKs have higher self-esteem levels than TCKs like yourself?
- vii. Do you think that non-Korean TCKs would have lower or higher self-esteem than Korean TCKs?
- viii. What factor do you think most affects your self-esteem level?

The two subjects were asked to share photographs of their childhood (only with approval) to find the similarities between the two of them as well as to find the definite correlation between being a Korean TCK and how this identity affects self-esteem levels. Furthermore, I hoped to discover signs of lack or “oversufficiency” of self-esteem by looking at their childhood photographs. Cho and Lee willingly agreed to share a childhood picture of themselves; however, due to lack of time, I wasn’t able to analyze it.

Once data was compiled and interviews were coded, the next step was to triangulate Cho and Lee’s similarities and differences as well as the general population (who took the survey).³³ The interviews were coded into seven different categories: physical appearances, social isolation from both local and foreign sides, pretentiousness, the concept of home, language barriers and miscommunication, cultural differences, and self-esteem levels. (See below).³⁴

Subject	Physical Appearances	Social Isolation	“Defensive Front”
Cho	Body shape different with Indian kids	Felt left out—isolated herself b/c she was different Not many friends, only	Excessive compliments to others to earn their favor

³³(Cho, 2018)

³⁴(Lee, 2018)

		few in neighborhood Little uncomfortable with Korean peers in church People didn't treat her very nicely	
Lee	Moved to India after 27 days of birth Racial discrimination/ bias in school Stand out in international school in Hyderabad	Feels "alienated" in a way—feels like a foreigner "Kind of an outcast"	Targeted race & religion—wasn't very confident of religion to the extent that she tried to deny own religion Avoided talk of religion

Subject	Concept of Home	Language Barriers	Cultural Differences	Self-esteem Levels
Cho		Language barrier at first—had troubles socializing Left out from the Korean community also b/c she wasn't good at Korean	Has a negative view on mainstream Korean culture—can't relate to them as she doesn't know slang; way they think and process is different eg. plastic surgery conversation	Low self-esteem at first; was a "clingy friend" and was taken advantage of Worked on self-esteem; its' okay not to be like them Does feel insecure and scared, but don't necessarily need to fit in, but instead attract people who don't fit in Living in different country shaped self-esteem level More degradation of self-esteem due to minority and getting too much attention
Lee		Everyone around her was Korean, so there was no "social discrimination" within the Korean community in India Everyone around her were TCKs too	Korean TV shows feel weird as it's very new and different Don't understand and empathize with the idea of K-pop: "it's very exposed and idealized/ unrealistic"	Low self-esteem—tries to overcome that by working harder to achieve more

The information collected allowed for viable presumptions, which were later thoroughly investigated for conclusions, limitations, and possible implications. Essentially, the methodology in this study was focused on finding how being a Korean TCK has affected

self-esteem levels, which, as mentioned in the **Literature Review** section, effectively fills in the possible gaps of previous research studies conducted.

Outside the scope of this investigation, I interviewed a female western TCK to gain knowledge of her experience of living as a TCK and her thoughts on the correlation between being a TCK and self-esteem levels. This information, although isn't included in the final results section, is useful to gain a grasp a better sense of the general topic.

A major ethical issue of this study includes invasion of personal privacy, as it requires subjects to fully engage and explain possible traumas in their lives (solely for research purposes). This was addressed at the start of the study. Subjects were asked to meticulously read and sign the informed consent form for detailed information about the study to avoid any misunderstandings and miscommunications while participating in the study. All subjects were given the rights to withdraw from the study, refuse to answer, and keep their anonymity.

V. Results/ Data Analysis

In this section, data collected during the period of study will be analyzed. Data that will be discussed such as the results of the Rosenberg Self-esteem scale and interviews with subjects is mentioned earlier in the **Methodology** section.

Below is a codified table displaying the 20 Korean female students' levels of self-identified "third-culturedness" and the results of the Rosenberg Self-esteem survey they were requested to take.

Name	Year Born	Level of TCK (/10)	Self-Esteem Scale (/30)				
I	2001	8	20				
L	2002	7	17				
S	2002	7	14				
H	2002	7	10				
H	2002	6	19				
H	2001	7	13				
H	2002	7	10				
Y	2001	9	20				
M	2001	10	19				
B	2000	6.5	27				
H	2001	8	19				
C	2003	9	24				
S	2003	4	26				
J	2002	3.5	30				
S	2001	1	21				
H	2000	4.5	6				
S	2001	5	25				
H	2001	1	24				
H	2001	4	11				
N	2001	5	11				

	Non-TCK	TCK
High	8	5
Low	4	3
	12	8

This information sets up a base in finding a correlation between being a third-culture kid and self-esteem levels of an individual; it provides a basic structure of the general Woodstock Korean female student population, which allowed deeper investigation on this topic.

No conclusion about the direct correlation between third-cultural identity and level of self-esteem could be made by solely looking at the ambiguous results. As shown above, 12 out of 20 participants considered themselves as non-TCKs (highlighted in yellow) and 8 participants identify themselves as TCKs (not highlighted). It can be observed that the proportion of the students is imbalanced, which is a significant factor that contributes to an error in the study. Furthermore, seeing that the ratio of those who have high self-esteem (font in red) to those who have low self-esteem (font in black) is reasonably balanced, it is difficult to assume the answer to the question at an early stage of the study.

By further analyzing and triangulating personal interviews, a more constructive conclusion is made. The table in the **Methodology** section (footnote 8-9) summarizes the critical information collected from Cho and Lee’s first interviews.

Subject	Physical Appearances	Social Isolation	“Defensive Front”
Cho	Body shape different with Indian kids	Felt left out—isolated herself b/c she was different Not many friends, only few in neighborhood Little uncomfortable with Korean peers in church People didn’t treat her very nicely	Excessive compliments to others to earn their favor
Lee	Moved to India after 27 days of birth Racial discrimination/ bias in school Stand out in international school in Hyderabad	Feels “alienated” in a way—feels like a foreigner “Kind of an outcast”	Targeted race & religion—wasn’t very confident of religion to the extent that she tried to deny own religion Avoided talk of religion

Subject	Concept of Home	Language Barriers	Cultural Differences	Self-esteem Levels
Cho		Language barrier at first—had troubles socializing Left out from the Korean community also b/c she wasn’t good at Korean	Has a negative view on mainstream Korean culture—can’t relate to them as she doesn’t know slang; way they think and process is different eg. plastic surgery conversation	Low self-esteem at first; was a “clingy friend” and was taken advantage of Worked on self-esteem; it’s okay not to be like them Does feel insecure and scared, but don’t necessarily need to fit in, but instead attract people who don’t fit in Living in different country shaped self-esteem level More degradation of self-esteem due to minority and getting too much attention
Lee		Everyone around her was Korean, so there was no “social discrimination” within the Korean community in India Everyone around her were TCKs too	Korean TV shows feel weird as it’s very new and different Don’t understand and empathize with the idea of K-pop: “it’s very exposed and idealized/ unrealistic”	Low self-esteem—tries to overcome that by working harder to achieve more

The information in their first interviews was grouped into seven different categories that the subjects had in common. These categories included: physical appearances, social isolation from both local and foreign sides, pretentiousness, the concept of home, language barriers and miscommunication, cultural differences, and self-esteem levels.³⁵

Through this data, possible factors that affect self-esteem levels can be analyzed. Firstly, both the subjects mentioned their insecurities of having different body shapes and color than people in the third-cultural place they were brought up. Secondly, both mentioned that they felt like “outcast[s]” in their third-cultural community.³⁶ Thirdly, they stated that they put on a “defensive front” by excessively complimenting others to earn their favor and avoided topics that put them on the center of attention. They also indicated that there were language barriers that hindered them from building relationships in the foreign Indian community.

Unfortunately, they expressed that they not only felt alienated by the Indian community but also by their own home Korean community, as they could not relate to the mainstream, “idealized” K-pop culture.³⁷ Furthermore, Cho revealed that she wasn’t fluent in her mother tongue thus she also felt ostracized within the Korean community.

Both the subjects explained that they felt a sense of alienation in the places they went because they weren’t able to fit in any of the communities: in the Indian community, people discriminated them for having different body shapes, color, religion, and language; in the Korean community, they couldn’t get along with the others due to cultural differences and language inarticulation. In every way, they were considered different, which excluded them from society.

³⁵ See table above.

³⁶ (Lee, Childhood Experiences, 2018)

³⁷ (Lee, Childhood Experiences, 2018)

Contrary to my hypothesis about the positive correlation between the concept of home and self-esteem levels, both subjects did not speak about the “concept of home” (as shown in the table above).³⁸ This is interesting as factors that affect self-esteem revolve around the sense of belonging and inclusivity. This may require further research and could be a possible direction for future researchers.

This data allows for an interpretation that TCKs may have lower self-esteem than non-TCKs. In this study, Cho and Lee revealed that they suffered from low self-esteem at some point in their lives but now are working on improving their self-esteem levels. Though there may be other factors, they said that “living in a different country shaped [their] self-esteem level[s]” to a certain extent. Cho stated that living as a “minority” degrades the self-esteem level of a person.

The following information provides an idea to the factors that affect self-esteem. However, to understand whether Korean non-TCKs have higher self-esteem levels, the subjects answered the Janis and Field survey. The results are as follows:

*1= low/ 5=high

Cho	1	2	3	4	5
No. of Responses	0	2	11	16	7
Lee	1	2	3	4	5
No. of Responses	5	19	9	3	0

From the results, it could be concluded that Cho has comparatively higher self-esteem than Lee. These findings allowed for a reauthentication before moving on to the second interview that focused on finding the differences between the self-esteem levels of a TCK

³⁸ See table above.

and a non-TCKs. In the second interviews with Cho and Lee, they answered questions to whether they believe there is a correlation between one’s self-esteem levels and their identity as a third-culture kid; furthermore, they were asked about their thoughts on non-TCKs’ self-esteem levels. Their responses are shown in the table below:³⁹⁴⁰

	If you were not a TCK, would you still think that you would have the level of self-esteem you have right now?
Lee	Maybe a little higher b/c walls that TCKs are “alienation” and “inclusivity”
Cho	Different; depends on what the experience is; might have been similar due to personality

	What do you hope to do in the future? Has being a TCK shaped your future decisions/ plans?
Lee	Psychologist; there are people who are willing to help; cost of medical counseling decreasing; foreign kid in a foreign school; money has limited her life—“money is god” --affected self-esteem
Cho	I want to travel around and making art; experience whatever she can; to some degree—exposed to different culture and exploration for more experiences

	Will you live outside your mother country?
Lee	Yes; when go to Korea feels “segregated” in the community; how they talk, what they talk about, topics different; language in Korea; unfamiliar of culture (looks, idols, pop culture); awkward with big community of Koreans; in India, more connected than to Korea; used to the festivals, culture, politics; fit in neither categories, so make own
Cho	Not permanently; have a place in Korea for relaxation

	What are some actions that people with low self-esteem do? Do these actions come out on you too?
Lee	Yes; notice herself acting like low self-esteem; don’t credit themselves more often, complimenting others, acknowledging themselves
Cho	Care too much of what other people think; seen that in herself when she was younger—influenced by everyone around her; personality in herself is quite turbulent

	If you could go back to the past and decide whether you could live as a TCK or a non-TCK, what would you live as? Why?
Lee	Live as TCK; does teach you a lot about your own and others’ countries;

³⁹ (Lee, 2019)

⁴⁰ (Cho, 2019)

	insecurity→ cautious
Cho	There were hard times; more mature and more knowledge of different types of experiences

	Do you think that non-TCKs have higher self-esteem levels than TCKs like yourself?
Lee	“acceptance in a community”
Cho	May confuse your identity; more solid ground amongst themselves

	Do you think that non-Korean TCKs would have lower or higher self-esteem than Korean TCKs?
Lee	Depends where they lived; environmental effects; similar effects/ self-esteem levels
Cho	Korean TCKs→ conservative society→individualistic freedom constricted

	What factor do you think most affects your self-esteem level?
Lee	Social skills; WS diverse society; distanced when someone talks about topic; approach is different than others; way of maintaining relationships different and solving conflicts
Cho	Not being able to fit in the Indian kids—language barrier; Korean community→ didn’t understand their thinking and conversation (trendy, slang, TV shows)—can’t relate—feels like an outsider; if something is not perfect (work-based), then that affects self-esteem

In the second interview, Lee stated the likeliness of non-TCKs having higher self-esteem levels than TCKs. She specifically said that she herself may have had a higher self-esteem level if she were a non-TCK as they know the feeling of “acceptance [to] a community.”⁴¹

On the other hand, Cho believes that one’s self-esteem level depends on each individual’s experiences, how he/ she deals with it, and his/ her personality, thus one cannot conclude that being a TCK would equal to having low self-esteem levels. As mentioned earlier, she acknowledges the fact that one’s identity as a TCK would impact his/ her self-esteem levels; however, it does not conclude all.

⁴¹(Lee, 2019)

Although they have different views on this issue, both believe that the environment plays a significant role in shaping one's self-esteem level. Whether an individual is a TCK or a non-TCK, his/ her self-esteem level may vary depending on their experiences in a community. It is difficult, therefore, to conclude whether one's identity as a TCK defines his/ her self-esteem level; however, we can conclude from this study that the sense of belonging contributes in refining a person's self-esteem.

VI. Discussion

To summarize, it is difficult to conclude that there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship between being a TCK and having low self-esteem levels. However, it can be said that there is a correlation between the two variables as one's identity plays a part in refining his/ her self-esteem. This conclusion was made by observing and analyzing the data gathered during the initial stages of the study.

However, there are possible limitations and implications in this study. Firstly, due to the limited number of Korean females ages 13-19 in Woodstock School, the results of the study may have altered with a different number of participants. With a larger population, the results could be more credibly generalized compared to the results from the current population. For example, as mentioned in the **Results/ Data Analysis** section, no conclusion could be made by solely analyzing the results of the Rosenberg survey as there were only 20 participants. Furthermore, due to the limited duration of the study, the scope of research had to be narrowed from observing the entire Woodstock TCK population to only Woodstock Korean female high school population, which may question the generality of the study.

Although there are limitations in this study, the methodology used in this investigation makes the study replicable. Broader patterns and trends can be observed, which

may be useful for researchers interested in third-cultural lives and experiences. This not only can be replicated on Korean TCKs but also to the larger general TCK population around the world.

There are spaces for improvement too. Although this is a qualitative research study, aspects of quantitative research could be brought in by adding graphs for more efficient comparison if this research could be conducted in a larger population. Additionally, a longitudinal study would be a practical idea for a psychological study like this. Though it may be hard for generalization, by observing the changes of one's development and progress, the researcher may be able to come up with a more valid conclusion to defining the factors that affect self-esteem.

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VIII. Appendix I

Name	Year Born	Level of TCK (/10)	Self-Esteem Scale (/30)				
	2001	8	20				
	2002	7	17				
	2002	7	14				
	2002	7	10				
	2002	6	19				
	2001	7	13				
	2002	7	10				
	2001	9	20				
	2001	10	19				
	2000	6.5	27				
	2001	8	19				
	2003	9	24				
	2003	4	26				
	2002	3.5	30				
	2001	1	21				
	2000	4.5	6				
	2001	5	25				
	2001	1	24				
	2001	4	11				
	2001	5	11				

	Non-TCK	TCK
High	8	5
Low	4	3
	12	8

IX. Appendix II


Woodstock School
Levels of Cultural Integration Research

Name: _____

Please indicate: "How Korean are you?" Rate 1 for being a complete third-culture kid and 10 for being completely "Korean."

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

X. Appendix III



Woodstock School
Informed Consent Form

[This informed consent form is for female third-culture kids in Woodstock School who I would like to invite to participate in my research study titled, “Correlation between levels of self-esteem and being a third-culture kid.” This study will focus on Koreans but will need non-Korean participants.]

Name of Investigator: Y***** J***

Name of Organization: Woodstock School

Name of Sponsor: Miss A** S*****

Title of Study: Correlation between being a Korean third-culture kid and levels of self-esteem

Introduction:

I’m Y***** J***, a student at Woodstock School, India, and I am working on a research paper for my AP Research class. Through my research, I want to look for a correlation between being a Korean third-culture kid and having high or low self-esteem. As a third-culture kid myself, I struggled to value myself and appreciate my existence. To see if the cause of my low self-esteem is related to being a third-culture kid, I want to conduct this research. Furthermore, I believe that my research is unique, as not many studies have been done on this topic on Korean females. I am going to provide you with all necessary information, and you are also free to ask questions about this study to me. This research will include some intrusion in your private space as I will be asking about your personal experiences in life. It is completely your choice to say what you want. If you need more explanation on this, please feel free to contact me via email or phone written on the following pages.

Purpose of the research:

The purpose of this research is to find out the answer to the question of my own identity, where I can learn to appreciate myself and the experiences I have. The final research paper will be submitted to the College Board.

Type of research intervention:

This research will involve your participation in a few surveys, questionnaires, and personal interviews. This will take up approximately 3 months and will take 30 minutes to an hour per meeting. More details on the duration of the study are written in the “Duration” section of the form.

Participant Selection:

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a third-culture individual who is willing to share your personal experiences to contribute to the study. You are a female, and you are from Korea.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You should not be pressured to participate in this research. Any information that you do not want to be publicized will not be done so. You will be allowed to withdraw out of the study if you wish to do so.

Procedures:

- I will ask you to fill in surveys and questionnaires related to self-esteem and your personal experiences. One example of a survey that will be used in the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.
- During interviews, I will ask you several questions about your childhood and current experiences, as well as how you felt during those times. This *may* be sensitive topics to you, so again, you are allowed to refuse to answer the questions. Any information you wish not to be revealed will remain confidential.

Duration:

The study will take place over the months of November and December 2018, and February 2019. I will be conducting several interviews and will ask you to fill in surveys and questionnaires during this time. Each meeting will take 30 minutes to an hour.

Risks:

There are no possible risks that may arise from this study; however, if you feel that the questions asked are personal and sensitive, you may refuse to answer. You may also refuse to meet or hold an interview if you feel vulnerable in any way.

Benefits:

You (the participant) may not gain personal benefits from this study; however, this research study may be beneficial for further identity-related psychological studies. Also this may be an opportunity for you to look back on your identity.

Reimbursements:

There will not be any incentives to ask for your participation in the study. If any inappropriate incentives or threats are given by the investigator, you may report it to the research sponsor Miss A** S***** via email.

Confidentiality:

Although your information will be used, your identity will remain undisclosed to the public. Your name and any other information that may lead to revealing your identity will be changed to mask your identity.

Sharing the Results:

The results of the study will be submitted to the College Board. Additionally, I may use the results for future reference in college projects. Information that you provide will be presented

to the College Board as well as in my future projects. If you would like a copy of the final research paper via email, please check the box under the "Consent" section of the form.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw:

This is to reconfirm that you, the participant, have the right to withdraw out of the study at any given time. You do not have to participate in this research if you do not wish so. You may refuse to answer questions that may be personal to you. You will be allowed to choose what information to include and exclude in the study. Any unwanted information will be destroyed. You will be given a chance after every interview, survey, or any other forms of study to review, revise, or remove you answers.

Contacts:

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me anytime through:

- Email: y*****@woodstock.ac.in
- Phone: +91 7** **** 8**

You may also contact my research sponsor Miss Amy Seefeldt through:

- Email: a*****@woodstock.ac.in

Consent:

By signing the blanks below, you are agreeing that you have read and understood the procedures, objectives, and other necessary information about the study. If you have any questions, you agree that you will contact the principal investigator or organizer of the study. Questions that you have regarding this study were clearly answered to your satisfaction. You are voluntarily agreeing to be a participant in the study.

Please check if you would like to receive a copy of the final research paper.

Full Name of Participant (print): _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Email of Participant (please write clearly): _____

Date Signed: _____

[RESEARCH HELD AS PART OF THE AP RESEARCH CURRICULUM UNDER THE COLLEGE BOARD, USA.]

XI. Appendix IV

Assessment

Revised Janis and Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale

Response Format

1= Very Often or **Very Confident**

2= Fairly Often or **Fairly Confident**

3= Sometimes or **Slightly Confident**

4= Once in a Great or **While Not Very Confident**

5= Practically Never or **Not Confident At All**

1. How often do you feel inferior to most of the people you know?
2. How often do you have the feeling that there is nothing you can do well?
3. When in a group of people, do you have trouble thinking of the right things to talk about?
4. How often do you feel worried or bothered about what other people think of you?
5. In turning in a major assignment such as term paper, how often do you feel you did an excellent job on it? (R)
6. How confident are you that others see you as being physically appealing? (R)
7. Do you ever think that you are a worthless individual?
8. How much do you worry about how well you get along with other people?
9. When you make an embarrassing mistake or have done something that makes you look foolish, how long does it take you to get over it?
10. When you have to read an essay and understand it for a class assignment, how worried or concerned do you feel about it?
11. Compared with classmates, how often do you feel you must study more than they do to get the same grades?
12. Have you ever thought of yourself as physically uncoordinated?
13. How confident do you feel that someday the people you know will look up to you and respect you? (R)
14. How often do you worry about criticisms that might be made of your work by your teacher or employer?
15. Do you often feel uncomfortable meeting new people?
16. When you have to write an argument to convince your teacher, who may disagree with your ideas, how concerned or worried do you feel about it?
17. Have you ever felt ashamed of your physique or figure?
18. Have you ever felt inferior to most other people in athletic ability?
19. Do you ever feel so discouraged with yourself that you wonder whether you are a worthwhile person?

20. Do you ever feel afraid or anxious when you are going into a room by yourself where other people have already gathered and are talking?
21. How often do you worry whether other people like to be with you?
22. How often do you have trouble expressing your ideas when you have to put them in writing as an assignment?
23. Do you often feel that most of your friends or peers are more physically attractive than you?
24. When involved in sports requiring physical coordination, are you often concerned that you will not do well?
25. How often do you dislike yourself?
26. How often do you feel self-conscious?
27. How often are you troubled with shyness?
28. How often do you have trouble understanding things you read for class assignments?
29. Do you often wish or fantasize that you were better looking?
30. Have you ever thought that you lacked the ability to be a good dancer or do well at recreational activities involving coordination?
31. In general, how confident do you feel about your abilities? (R)
32. How much do you worry about whether other people regard you as a success or failure in your job or at school?
33. When you think that some of the people you meet might have an unfavorable opinion of you, how concerned or worried do you feel about it?
34. How often do you imagine that you have less scholastic ability than your classmates?
35. Have you ever been concerned or worried about your ability to attract members of the opposite sex?
36. When trying to do well at a sport and you know other people are watching, how rattled or flustered do you get?

Note: Most items are reverse-scored so that a high self-esteem response leads to higher scores. Items with (R) are not reverse-scored. Some researchers use 7- point scales with different anchors, depending on the wording of the item.