

Multiple mediation effects of peer relationship and social withdrawal in relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth participating in physical activity

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the mediating effect of peer relationship and social withdrawal on the relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance of multicultural adolescents participating in physical activity. 192 multicultural adolescents were selected as research participants. First, the results suggest that self-esteem and peer relationships positively affect multicultural acceptance but social withdrawal does not affect multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth participating in PE activities. Second, the results show that self-esteem positively affects peer relationships and negatively affects social withdrawal in multicultural youth. Lastly, the results on the effects of multiple mediation of peer relationships and social withdrawal in the relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance showed that only peer relationships had a mediating effect. In conclusion, the role of peer relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance is important, and a variety of physical activity programs for multicultural youth should be developed in order to form a friendly relationship.

KEY WORDS: Multicultural Youth, Self-esteem, Multicultural Acceptance, Peer Relationship, Social Withdrawal.

Introduction

South Korea is rapidly evolving from a mono-ethnic state to a multicultural society as a result of globalization. According to the Korean Ministry of

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the Interior and Safety, the number of foreign residents increased approximately 3.5-fold between 2006 and 2017 from 536,627 to 1,861,084; the proportion of foreign residents also grew over 3-fold during the period from 1.1% to 3.6% (2018). However, the multicultural society is facing serious challenges due to social issues that policies and systems cannot keep up with. Multicultural youth, the youth from multicultural families, may experience discrimination in school due to attitudes and values they acquired from their parents that are different from those of their peers. Moreover, language issues may pose added challenges for them in adjusting to school life, and their appearance can also be a source of discrimination and exclusion from peers in adolescence. These issues may become barriers for multicultural youth to adjust to school life and even pose risks for them to be subject to social exclusion, teasing, and cold shoulders from peers. These problems should not be overlooked because they may drive multicultural youth to engage in deviant behaviors. Not understanding each other can lead to social problems, and education can help solve them. Multicultural education aims to strengthen the cultural capacity of everyone through self-understanding as well as understanding of others, and the establishment of social relations is very important for academic and social success in school (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016).

Physical activity has been reported to have many physiological and psychological benefits (Brown, Pearson, Braithwaite, Brown, & Biddle, 2013; Dishman, Hales, Pfeiffer, Felton, Saunders, Ward, Dowda, & Pate, 2006). Specifically, activity can improve mental health including depression, anxiety, and self-esteem, as well as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and obesity (Alpert, Field, Goldstein, & Perry, 1990; Babyak, Blumenthal, Herman, Khatri, Doraiswamy, Moore, Craighead, Baldewicz, & Krishnan, 2000; Holley, Crone, Tyson, & Lovell, 2011). Other benefits of physical activity include cost efficiency and self-perpetuating tendency (Larun, Nordheim, Ekeland, Hagen, & Heian, 2006). Among many benefits of physical activity, its effect on self-esteem has been demonstrated in many studies. Liu, Wu, and Ming (2015) demonstrated that both students and adults showed positive effects of physical activity on self-esteem. Khanlou (2004) reported that exercise helped improve students' self-esteem, suggesting it as a potentially effective mental health improvement strategy in multicultural and immigrant community settings. Physical activity plays a major role in adolescents because competition allows young people to interact with and compare themselves with peers and be exposed to different perspectives as well as provide opportunities to interact with peers (Smith, 2003). In other words, physical activity including competitive activities can enhance self-esteem among multicultural youth, which can promote harmonious social integra-

tion. In addition, the results show that children from multicultural families in Korea help develop mood and sociability through Taekwondo training, indicating that physical activities are essential for better social relations for multicultural youths (Roh, Cho, & So, 2018). This can be said to be the result of promoting intercultural development through exposure to people from different cultural backgrounds (Hammer, 2012).

According to literature, self-esteem has the following positive effects on various psychological variables. Individuals with high self-esteem tend to have positive relationships with others (Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004; Lakey, Tardiff, & Drew, 1994); this is because they engage in adaptive cognitive interpretation that can help them when they build interpersonal relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006). Self-esteem enhanced through physical education (PE) activities likely plays a major role in cognitive interpretations of peers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the effects of self-esteem on peer relationships among multicultural youth participating in PE activities.

Participation in physical activities is also closely related to multicultural acceptance. Multicultural acceptance is interchangeable with intercultural communication skills, intercultural effectiveness, and comparative cultural competence and refers to the ability to engage in appropriate behavior and thinking in response to cultural differences (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003). Positive functions of PE activities for multicultural youth include social integration and resolving group conflicts (Gaspirini, 2010). Multicultural youth develop intimacy and sense of belonging as they engage in PE activities with others from different racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds and languages, which positively affects their multicultural acceptance (Olympia, Eva, Panagiotis, & Argyris, 2014). Multicultural acceptance is also strongly associated with self-esteem. Bennett (2009) suggested that individuals with positive self-view are more receptive toward other races and ethnicities, and Banks (1984) also noted that high self-esteem is required for a positive view of others. In fact, a number of researchers have shown that those with higher self-esteem have more positive and tolerant attitudes toward other ethnicities (Aboud & Skerry, 1984; Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977; Lambert, Mermigis, & Taylor, 1986). In summary, positive self-esteem facilitated by physical activity is likely to have a positive impact on multicultural acceptance. Furthermore, the attitude of respecting and accepting diverse cultures likely helps individuals get along better and facilitates peer relationships.

Conversely, multicultural youth may be socially withdrawn due to low self-esteem. Social withdrawal refers to delays in social or emotional development manifested by anxiety with being with someone new or in a new envi-

ronment or difficulties in forming and maintaining relationships with people (Rubin & Burgess, 2001). Nelson, Rubin, and Fox (2005) reported that children with low self-esteem experience social withdrawal that causes negative outcomes. This is because individuals with low self-esteem evaluate and perceive their own value as low and think they lack social skills (Altmann & Gotlib, 1988). Moreover, avoidance of social relationships and defensive behaviors due to low self-esteem may be major constraints in interpersonal relationships (Sommer, Williams, Ciarocco, & Baumeister, 2001). In contrast, enhancing self-esteem with participation in PE activities likely reduces social withdrawal, which in turn likely facilitates positive relationships with peers.

Despite the close relationships between self-esteem, multicultural acceptance, peer relationships, and social withdrawal, few researchers have examined their relationships in an integrative manner. Research, however, has shown causality between two or more of those variables. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the roles and importance of self-esteem, multicultural acceptance, peer relationships, and social withdrawal in improving school life for multicultural youth by addressing the limitations of previous studies. Study hypotheses are as follows, and Figure 1 shows the associated research model:

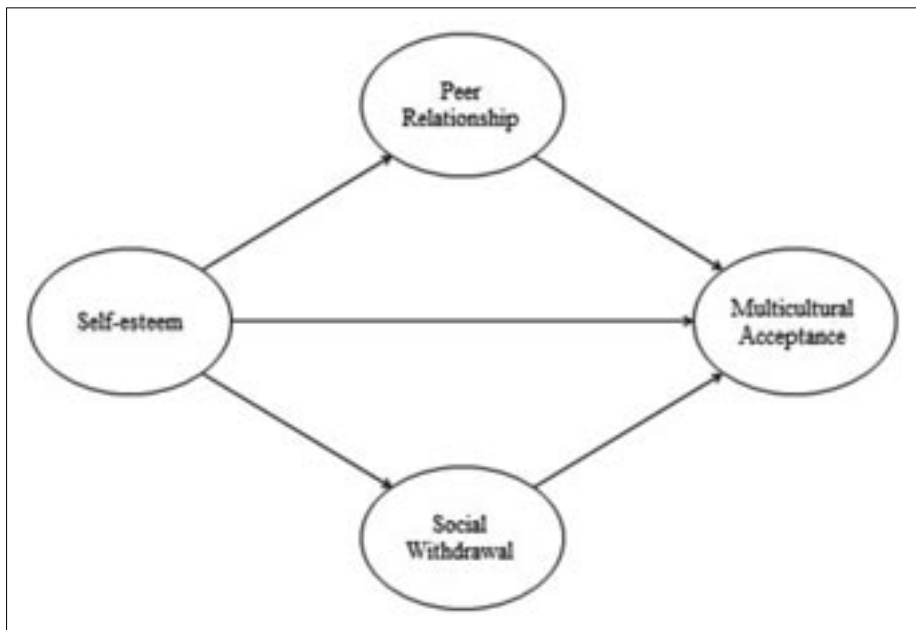


Fig. 1. - Research model.

Hypothesis 1. Self-esteem and peer relationships positively influence multicultural acceptance, and social withdrawal negatively influences multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth participating in PE activities.

Hypothesis 2. Self-esteem positively influences peer relationships and negatively influences social withdrawal in multicultural youth participating in PE activities.

Hypothesis 3. Peer relationships and social withdrawal mediate the relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth participating in PE activities.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

The study employed the fifth year's (2015) data from the Multicultural Adolescents Panel Study (MAPS) conducted by National Youth Policy Institute (NYPI). For the MAPS, NYPI conducts annual follow-ups of multicultural youth who were fourth graders in 2011. For the present study, the data analyses included 192 students who participated in PE activities as part of extracurricular activities in the fifth year's (2015) data. The participants were 132 males (68.75%) and 60 female students (31.25%).

INSTRUMENTS

Self-esteem. Self-esteem was measured using a modified version of the scale used in MAPS (Park & Oh, 1992) to fit the present study's purpose. The scale comprised four items such as "I am proud of myself" and "I value myself." Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Cronbach's α was .824.

Multicultural Acceptance. Multicultural acceptance was measured using the scale used by Lee, Baek, Lee, and Kim (2011), a modified version of Yang and Jung's multicultural acceptance scale (2008). The scale comprised five items such as "I can accept someone with a cultural background different from mine as my neighbor" and "I can be the best friend of a youth with a cultural background different from mine." Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Cronbach's α was .912.

Peer Relationships. Peer relationship was measured using the scale used by Kim, Baek, Im, and Lee (2010), who modified Jeong's scale (2009). The scale comprised five items such as "I get along with my classmates well" and "I apologize first when my friend and I have a quarrel." In the present study, four of the five items were used, excluding the one item that had factor loading of less than .5 in confirmatory factor analysis. Cronbach's α was .694.

Social Withdrawal. Social withdrawal was measured using Lee et al.'s (2011) scale, which they modified from Kim and Kim's social withdrawal scale (1998). The scale consisted of five items such as "I feel awkward when I have many people around me" and "It is difficult for me to clearly express my opinion to someone." Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Cronbach's α was .909.

Finally, fit indices for the full model confirmatory factor analysis (TLI = .899, CFI = .914, RMSEA = .084) met the cutoff criteria for fit indices proposed by Hu and Bengler (1999).

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using SPSS 18.0 and AMOS 20.0. The descriptive analyses were frequency analysis of participants' general characteristics and the analysis to obtain descriptive statistics (for means and standard deviations) for measured variables. Validation of measures included confirmatory factor analysis to test validity and reliability analysis to test consistency. Correlational analysis was conducted to determine correlations among variables and multicollinearity. Hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling; phantom variables were used to test the effects of multiple mediation of multicultural acceptance and social withdrawal in the relationship between self-esteem and peer relationships.

Results

DESCRIPTIVE AND CORRELATION ANALYSES

Table I shows the results of descriptive and correlation analyses of self-esteem, multicultural acceptance, social withdrawal, and peer relationships. Correlations between self-esteem, multicultural acceptance, and peer relationships were positive; social withdrawal was negatively correlated with self-esteem and peer relationships but was unrelated with multicultural acceptance.

TABLE I
Descriptive And Correlation Analyses.

Variables	M(SD)	1	2	3	4
Self-esteem	3.29(.53)	1			
Multicultural Acceptance	3.21(.58)	.335**	1		
Social Withdrawal	2.30(.77)	-.334**	-.133	1	
Peer Relationship	3.25(.43)	.430**	.337**	-.329**	1

** $p < .01$

TEST OF CAUSALITY

Table II shows fit statistics for the research model for testing the relationships between self-esteem, multicultural acceptance, social withdrawal, and peer relationships in multicultural youth participating in PE activities. The fit indices met Hu and Bentler's (1999) cutoff criteria.

TABLE II
The Fit Of The Research Model.

χ^2	<i>df</i>	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
309.253	130	.896	.912	.085

Table III and Figure 2 show the results of testing the causality hypothesized between variables. First, the effect of self-esteem on peer relationship was statistically significant with a standardized coefficient of .524 ($t=5.051$). Second, the effect of self-esteem on social withdrawal was statistically significant with a standardized coefficient of $-.304$ ($t=-3.737$). Third, the effect of peer relationships on multicultural acceptance was statistically significant with a standardized coefficient of .309 ($t=2.799$). Fourth, the effect of self-esteem on multicultural acceptance with a standardized coefficient of .224 ($t=2.263$). Fifth, the effect of social withdrawal on multicultural acceptance was not statistically significant with a standardized coefficient of .018 ($t=.245$).

TABLE III
Path Analysis Results.

Path	Estimate	SE	t
SE → PR	.524	.086	5.051***
SE → SW	-.304	.132	-3.737***
PR → MA	.309	.152	2.799**
SE → MA	.224	.113	2.263*
SW → MA	.018	.053	.245

SE: Self-esteem; PR: peer relationship; SW: social withdrawal; MA: multicultural acceptance * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

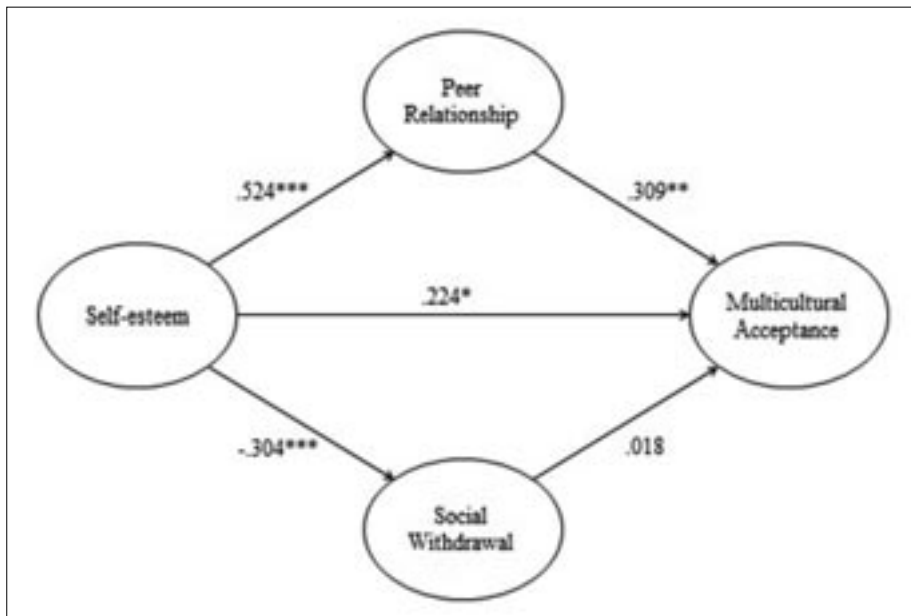


Fig. 2. - Results of the research model.

TEST OF MULTIPLE MEDIATION

Analysis of Total Mediating Effects. The mediating effects of peer relationships and social withdrawal in the relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth participating in PE activities were tested using bootstrapping. Table IV shows the total effects, direct effects, and indirect effects in 1,000 repeated tests with a 95% confidence interval. The total indirect effect of peer relationships and social withdrawal was statistically significant with a standardized coefficient of .179 ($p=.012$).

Analysis of Individual Mediating Effects. The total mediating effects shown in Table 4 reflect the combined mediating effect of multicultural acceptance and social withdrawal but does not allow for identifying individual mediating effects. This limitation can be addressed using phantom variables (Ledermann & Macho, 2009; Macho & Ledermann, 2011). Table V shows the results for individual mediating effects tested using phantom variables, and the indirect effect of peer relationships was statistically significant with a standardized coefficient of .191; the indirect effect of social withdrawal was not statistically significant.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to test relationships between self-esteem, multicultural acceptance, social withdrawal, and peer relationships in multi-

TABLE IV
Total mediating effects.

Effect	Estimate	SE	Bias-corrected	<i>p</i>
Total effect	.435	.107	(.264, .711)	.001
Direct effect	.256	.126	(.029, .520)	.031
Indirect effect	.179	.089	(.028, .385)	.012

TABLE V
Individual Mediating Effects.

Path	Estimate	SE	<i>t</i>
SE → PR → MA	.191	.074	2.574*
SE → SW → MA	-.015	.027	-.548

SE: Self-esteem; PR: peer relationship; SW: social withdrawal; MA: multicultural acceptance * $p<.05$

cultural youth participating in PE activities in order to offer insight into enhancing their social adjustment. Furthermore, the effects of multiple mediation of self-esteem and multicultural acceptance were tested to determine the relationships between variables in greater depth. Regarding the first hypothesis, the results suggest that self-esteem and peer relationships positively affect multicultural acceptance but social withdrawal does not affect multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth participating in PE activities.

As the proportion of multicultural youth grows gradually, school education needs to keep up with the trend. Bennett (2009) argued that individuals without positive self-view cannot have positive attitudes or tolerance toward other ethnicities or races, and Chen and Starosta (2000) also indicated that individuals with high self-esteem have intercultural sensitivity. These reported findings suggest that multicultural youth with high self-esteem are likely to build good relationships with peers with cultural and other backgrounds that are different from theirs. In this regards, various sports activities designed for social integration of youth with diverse cultural backgrounds are likely to serve as a catalyst to enhance problem-solving skills among them. Therefore, schools need to put in place PE programs to allow students to interact one another.

Peer relationships were also found to positively affect multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth. Peer relationships in adolescence are crucial because they affect behavior in adulthood as well as social and cognitive development (Hartup, 1993). Moreover, peer relationships in adolescence are closely related to development of sociability including intimacy and prosocial behavior (Berndt, 2002). Good peer relationships refer to having intimate interactions with peers, which reportedly has positive effects on multicultural acceptance (Hunter & Elias, 1999). That is, communications with peers through good relationships offer youth experiences in peer conflicts and relationship problems and opportunities for them to learn how to improve maladaptive relationships on their own. Through these social experiences, they can develop problem-solving skills in their peer relationships and positive attitudes toward peers who are socially and culturally different from them. The findings of this study suggest that self-esteem and peer relationships play a major role in development of multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth. Furthermore, PE activities, which are optimal in improving self-esteem and peer relationships, are an important tool that can break the barriers between peers; therefore, more systematic PE activities programs for multicultural youth need to be developed and implemented.

Regarding the second hypothesis, the results show that self-esteem positively affects peer relationships and negatively affects social withdrawal in

multicultural youth. While good peer relationships facilitate cooperation, ethical thinking, and interactions, bad peer relationships may cause antisocial behavior, mental illness, and problems in social adjustment (Bolger, Patterson & Kupersmidt, 1998). However, it has been reported not only that interactions in physical activities likely help build good peer relationships but also that self-esteem has positive effects on peer relationships. Self-esteem refers to individuals' positive and negative attitudes toward themselves and does not reflect others' evaluations of the individuals' objective abilities or talents or the individuals as a whole (Orth & Robins, 2014; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995).

Organized sports and PE activities offer opportunities to interact with peers in which they can compare themselves with their peers and have exposure to different perspectives, which serves as an important context in adolescent development (Smith, 2003). In light of this theoretical context, it is possible to conclude that improved self-esteem through PE activities likely had significant impact on good peer relationships in multicultural youth. In a meta-analysis of the effects of physical activity on self-esteem, Liu, Wu, and Ming (2015) suggested that school- and gym-based interventions were more effective than family-based, clinic-based, or detention facility-based interventions. The results can be interpreted that interventions in students' everyday environments are more effective than those in settings specifically set up for intervention; participation in everyday PE activities in a school setting is also likely to be very appropriate for demonstrating the effects of PE activity participation.

Moreover, self-esteem was found to negatively affect social withdrawal in multicultural youth; this suggests that higher self-esteem may prevent social withdrawal. Multicultural youth are more likely to be socially isolated due to exclusion and neglect by peers. In contrast, positive self-perception and self-assessment developed through PE activities may increase self-esteem, helping overcoming shame and sense of inferiority and preventing social withdrawal. Furthermore, while individuals with high self-esteem tend to be prosocial, individuals with low self-esteem more likely show antisocial behavior and therefore may experience social withdrawal (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003).

The results on the effects of multiple mediation of peer relationships and social withdrawal in the relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance showed that only peer relationships had a mediating effect. The fact that the mediating effect of mediating variables suggests that the former has greater impact than the latter. It is another point for close examination that the effect of social withdrawal on multicultural acceptance was not sta-

tistically significant. Research has shown that social withdrawal is related to problems in interpersonal relationships as well as to variables such as loneliness and depression (Katz, Conway, Hammen, Brennan, & Najman, 2011; Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009). This suggests that variables other than those included in the present study mediate the relationship between social withdrawal and multicultural acceptance.

Peer relationships played a greater role in multicultural acceptance than did social withdrawal likely for the following reason: Youth peer relationships are likely to be horizontal peer relationships but not social withdrawal was significant when both were simultaneously included as in nature unlike relationships in other groups such as at work, and participation in PE activities in horizontal relationship is the best way to understand and learn how to accept peers from diverse cultures. Therefore, teachers who lead PE activities for multicultural youth need to fully understand other cultures first and then design a PE activities program tailored for participants adapting to new circumstances for good peer relationship building. Multicultural education is not considered a compulsory curriculum in South Korea, but values should be applied naturally and gradually to other subjects (Shen, 2019). Physical education class can be said to be a very suitable subject for realizing its value through participation in a horizontal relationship. Accordingly, for physical education classes that consider the value of multicultural education, a teacher education program is needed to improve the curriculum without cross-cultural experience (Ko, Boswell, & Yoon, 2015).

Conclusions

In this study, the mediating effects of peer relationships and social withdrawal in the relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance in multicultural youth participating in PE activities were investigated. The study results showed that peer relationships but not social withdrawal mediated the relationship between self-esteem and multicultural acceptance, suggesting the importance of the role of peer relationships. Interactions with peers in horizontal relationships in PE activities likely facilitate good peer relationship building, an effective strategy to improve acceptance of peers with different cultural backgrounds. While this study offers helpful suggestions for multicultural youth, there are some recommendations for future research based on the limitations of this study.

First, this study included only the multicultural youth who had participated in PE activities. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether any

changes in self-esteem, multicultural acceptance, peer relationships, or social withdrawal resulted from their participation in PE activities. Although research has shown that these variables improve with PE activities, future research needs to test the effects of PE activities on the individual variables. Second, causality between variables was investigated using a cross-sectional study design; based on the findings of the cross-sectional study, future researchers need to investigate the longitudinal relationship according to the length of the period of PE activity participation. Lastly, PE programs for multicultural youth need to be developed and implemented based on the findings of this study, and the effects of the programs need to be tested. PE activities programs for multicultural youth need to be developed with a focus on perception and acceptance of diverse cultures, and such programs can be implemented as important and practical programs for enhancing peer relationships.

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