ABSTRACT

Gina Lappé, THEY'RE SPEAKING: GENDER IDENTITY, AGENCY, AND BELONGING IN AN INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

The purpose of the study was to better understand how international school middle school teachers can help cultivate a student's sense of belonging by creating a space for students to explore factors shaping their gender identity. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) study took place at an international school in South Korea that enrolls primarily local Korean students. A group of eight Grade 6 students volunteered as the study group. Through Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs), one-on-one and group interviews, and reflection activities the students identified factors that shaped their gendered identity and how it was expressed, or not, at school. Their stories revealed the following four findings: (1) The Influence of Context, (2) The Role of Relationships, (3) The Importance of Language and Culture, and (4) The Power of Elevating Student Voice. As a result of their participation in the PAR project they demonstrated increased agency, taking action to enact positive change in their community by designing and leading an advisory lesson for their peers, which focused on gender inclusion. The study findings indicate that educators can support students in cultivating a sense of belonging at school by elevating student voices within dialogue-driven spaces designed to explore topics of identity and agency at school. The study has implications for intentional school leaders and researchers interested in learning from students how to better honor diverse identities and support students to cultivate a strong sense of belonging at an international school.

THEY'RE SPEAKING GENDER IDENTITY, AGENCY, AND BELONGING IN AN INTERNATIONAL MIDDLE SCHOOL

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DEDICATION

For the students who generously shared their perspectives and experiences.

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CHAPTER 1: NAMING AND FRAMING THE FOCUS OF PRACTICE (FOP)

"I'm speaking." (Harris, 2020)

Vice President Kamala Harris' words, spoken clearly and with a smile, ring true for all women and girls who experience interruptions and underestimation. Her words highlight how women must find ways to hold power for themselves given the reality that power is often weighted towards men. The quote further exemplifies the long road toward achieving equitable dialogue amongst all people, dialogue in which identities are valued, voices are heard as equal, and everyone is invited to speak up and to listen attentively.

My experiences with the interplay of voice, power, and gender as a female educator and leader drove me to the work of this dissertation. My voice has been questioned, dismissed, and undervalued because of my gender. As a teacher, I watched my students navigate tensions of identity and voice in my classroom every day. While I am eager to support students in growing as leaders, communicators, scientists, and people, I am sometimes at a loss as to how to best support each of them as they develop their voices and sense of self. As a white western educator working in an American international school in South Korea, I noticed gender identity shaping student's academic and social experiences at school. I was curious about how students made sense of their experiences at school, in particular with regards to factors shaping their experiences of gender identity. I wanted to hear directly from them to better understand the patterns I noticed at school.

The Study Setting

I designed the study to explore how understanding the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity can support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school. The setting of a coed American international school in

South Korea was well suited for the study for several reasons, in particular, (a) it had an eager and hardworking student body, but students appeared separated into affinity groups along gendered and linguistic lines, (b) I had cultivated a high level of relational trust within the community, and (c) the dynamics inherent to an American international school serving a majority local student study body situated within a Confucian Heritage Culture setting are compelling.

The study site was a member of a Korean private development initiative designed to provide international education options to students in South Korea. Four international schools located near each other on Jeju Island enrolled over 3,500 students for the 2021–2022 school year. Three schools housed coed students, and one admitted only girls. The presence of an all-girls school created a disproportionately high enrollment of boys at the other schools. Gender enrollment disparity continued for the 2021–2022 school year, the year the study took place. The student body of the four schools was highly affluent with some of the wealthiest families in South Korea represented. The student body consisted of over 90% South Korean national students with the rest mainly children of international faculty. The school maintained membership with the College Board as well as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Enrollment in American universities was a primary goal for families.

At school, gendered student dialogue patterns perpetuate hegemonic power structures and produce skill deficits for male and female students. Male students disproportionately dominated academic conversations. Moreover, male students minimized contributions from female classmates by interrupting, ignoring them, or repeating their statements. In Fall 2019, only nine of 57 sixth graders at the school were girls. Eight girls' report cards included comments such as,

"would benefit from participating in more discussions," and "needs to speak up more in class." Conversely, fewer than half of the boys' report cards included an academic discourse comment.

After teaching middle school in the United States, I am accustomed to the distance students create between themselves along gender lines during adolescence. Girls and boys bemoan seating charts that put them together and rarely work together by choice. In my experience in South Korea, the social gender divide was much more pronounced than in the United States. Such separation into gendered groups, combined with low girl enrollment, increased the urgency of creating a space for students to reflect on factors shaping their experience of gender identity at school with the goal of cultivating a sense of belonging for all students.

Focus of Practice (FoP)

In my classroom, I observed girl students speaking less frequently and behaving more passively than their boy peers. I also noticed students were divided along gendered lines in their social groups. It was rare for boys and girls to be friends or to spend time together socially. Through creating and sustaining space for reflection with students, I wanted to explore the question: How can understanding the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school?

International school students can struggle to feel a sense of belonging at school. Many students move often in service of their parents' jobs or spend much of their lives living outside their parent's home country. Such students, identified as Third Culture Kids (TCKs), can find it particularly challenging to feel that they belong at school (Fail et al, 2004; Useem & Downie, 1976). These dynamics motivated the study. Consequently, I oriented the FoP toward creating a

space within which students could reflect on their own experiences, connect with one another, and hopefully find a sense of belonging as a group.

A cultural element I needed to address was that many students placed a higher value on teacher voice over peer contributions. Classrooms fell into ‘banking model’ patterns of education in which the teacher 'deposits’ information into the students (Freire, 1970). The focus of practice aimed to increase students’ dialogue skills by embracing Freire’s ‘problem-posing’ educational model. Freire (1970) states, “The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teaches" (p. 80). Through supporting students in reflecting on factors shaping their gender identity, I aimed to build students’ skills to engage in equitable learning spaces where all students become advocates, using their self-agency and voice and learning to listen to and respect peer voice. I aimed to create a space where they felt their voices were meaningfully equal to not only one another, but also to that of their teacher. By utilizing ideas from radical pedagogies for empowerment, this research project provided students, girls and boys, the opportunity to powerfully reflect on their identity and the role gender played in shaping their experiences at school.

Assets and Challenges to Focus of Practice

The research study was designed to be highly context-specific and began with reflections on the micro, meso, and macro assets and challenges to the focus of practice (see Figure 1). An exploration of the assets and challenges within the study environment situated the work and illuminated potential barriers and opportunities I considered for the study design and execution. Sixth grade learning spaces were the micro scale of the project. The meso level was the middle school, while the macro level was international school accreditation institutions and Korean cultural influences. My 3 years of middle school teaching experience at the study site provided

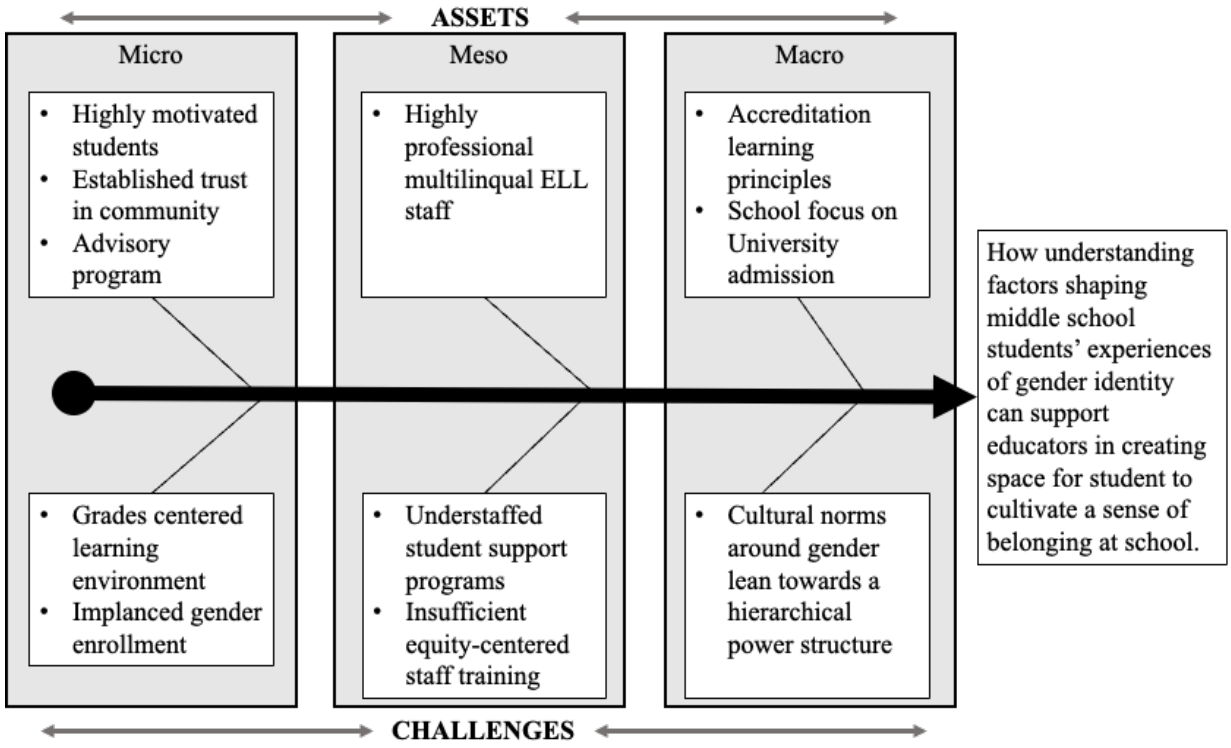


Figure 1. Fishbone driver diagram.

insights into typical student behaviors. These insights were further informed by the 6 years I spent teaching science in the United States. Conversations with colleagues including language support faculty and science teachers provided additional perspectives into assets and challenges.

Micro Assets and Challenges

As I was a teacher and lead researcher simultaneously for the study, the students along with my teaching practices were primary factors to consider. The students themselves were the most significant assets to the study. They were hardworking, eager to please, and highly motivated. Behavioral incidents were rare as students came to school ready to learn. Given that I had worked at the study site for 3 years prior to beginning data collection, I had developed relational trust with the community. This preexisting trust with students enabled us to build a learning environment where students felt safe taking risks and could be vulnerable as they explored their identities. As my practices as an educator are also part of the research process, my years of experience as a student-centered teacher are an additional asset in this work. I have taught science for 9 years and facilitate a trusting, dialogue-driven learning environment in which students are engaged, talking, using materials, and collaborating to grow as scientists and people.

The research project took place with a group of eight Grade 6 students who met during the advisory period. The advisory program, a pastoral care program, was another micro asset for the research. Each advisory group included approximately 10 students and one teacher and met four times a week for 20 minutes. The advisory program did not have a standardized curriculum and was meant to address student needs not met in content courses. Advisory was where students worked on organizing their academic tasks, conflict resolution, team building, and received academic and personal support from their advisor. Parents were directed to their child's advisor

as the primary contact person at school. The advisory session was a convenient vehicle for the research as it was a space within the school day when the research could take place. Also, the focus of the research was consistent with the goals of the advisory program.

The high emphasis students and parents placed on grades and traditional achievement measures presented a micro challenge. Students struggled with ambiguity and valued teacher talk over the contributions of their peers. These behavior patterns were an obstacle to our goal of creating an environment where power was shared equally between myself, the teacher, and the students. Another challenge was class sizes, which were increasing each year. For example, most teachers taught four sections of from 15 to18 students during the 2019–2020 academic year. By the 2021–2022 school year, we taught five sections of from 17 to 21 students. These heavier teaching loads made it challenging to collaborate with colleagues.

Meso Assets and Challenges

The meso level for the research was the middle school. More than 90% of the student population in the middle school was classified as English Language Learners (ELL). This presented an opportunity to learn from a dynamic student body about experiences of identity at school. Another asset of the middle school was its policy of providing language support structures at each grade level that allowed the administration to add one ELL faculty member for each grade level. Furthermore, the administration hired highly qualified South Korean and multilingual staff. Korean faculty provided social and emotional support to students in their first language and contributed valuable insights into Korean language and culture for international staff.

Despite the focus on ELL support, several challenges remained. Each ELL faculty member served over 90 students. Additionally, the school employed just one learning support

faculty member for the entire middle school. This meant ELL teachers often supported not only language learner development, but also students with additional learning needs. Hence, the demands hindered the ELL team's availability to engage in meaningful collaborative planning with classroom teachers.

Finally, the school did not prioritize student agency, identity, or voice in teacher and staff development, which undermined gender equity. Although the school stated support for student voice in leadership, in practice the school administration lacked action that revealed a commitment to equity. In the 2020–2021 student council elections, a female Grade 8 student candidate highlighted the historical lack of a female student body president, which she pointed out in her campaign video. She went on to say, "I would like you to prove that gender does not decide elections." Nonetheless, boys were elected as president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. When discussing my research with colleagues, they acknowledged the limited opportunities for students to assume leadership roles or exercise agency. Faculty believed that such opportunities could provide students with the chance to practice risk-taking without the pressure of grades thereby supporting them in trusting themselves and their power to influence meaningful change.

Macro Assets and Challenges

The macro landscape of the American international school community provided assets for the research. The accreditation goals of NEASC include building inclusive learning environments, supporting risk taking, and elevating student autonomy aligned with the goals of the study. Macro challenges included cultural constructs of gender in Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC), for example, South Korea's use of hierarchical definitions of power (Kye, 2008). Confucian societies are built around the five cardinal human relationships: (1) the parent-

child relationship, (2) the sibling relationship, (3) the husband-wife relationship, (4) economic relationships like employee-boss, and (5) friendships (Kim, 1994; Li, 2012). The first three family relationships are regarded as the most essential, and societal pressure for women primary to assume family responsibilities (Chong, 2006; Kim, 1994; Lee, 2019; Stainback & Kwon, 2012). While women's enrollment in higher education has outpaced men since 2009 (Lee, 2019; Stainback & Kwon, 2012), South Korea has the widest gender pay gap of any OECD country; women earn around 35% less than men as of the most recent data from 2018 (OECD, 2021). Such gendered power dynamics influenced students perception of the intersection of gender, voice, and power generally which also played a role in their sense of self at school.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this study was to explore factors shaping student experiences of gender identity at school with the goal of helping educators better support students in cultivating a sense of belonging at school. The research project's significance to my context at resulted from an uneven distribution of power in the classroom between girls, boys, and the teacher, which resulted in the perpetuation of hegemonic gendered patterns of classroom engagement and dialogue. These patterns negatively affected all students but especially girls as they did not have the same opportunity as boys to be heard in class. I aimed to create a space within the school community for students to explore their own identity, connect with one another, and reveal was can emerge when student voices are treated as equals to their teacher.

Research Questions

The study aimed to address the overarching research question: How can understanding the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school?

In addition, the study explored the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent and how does student agency manifest in response to opportunities to reflect on their experiences of gender identity at school?
2. To what extent does the intersection of students' gender, racial, linguistic, and cultural identities play a role in students' academic and social experiences at school?
3. To what extent can gaining insights into factors shaping student experiences of gender identity inform international school teaching practices, policy, and research?
4. How does my practice as a teacher leader change in response to working with students to explore factors shaping gender identity at school?

Participatory Action Research

The research study was best suited to Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodologies. Whereas traditional research often relies on extractive methods to generate a one-way flow of information, pulling knowledge from the community to be capitalized on by academia, PAR is deeply connected to context, driven by cycles of reflection, planning, acting, and observing; an approach which aligned with the goals of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013). The PAR project engaged students in deep reflection to explore the factors shaping their gender identity at school with the goal of cultivating a sense of belonging for participants. The context-driven and participant-centered nature of the study design aligned with PAR methodologies.

The research aimed to create a space where students could lead discussions on their experiences of gender identity at school. Using PAR methodologies to uncover the factors shaping student experiences of gender identity at school became a productive way to better understand how educators can support students in cultivating a sense of belonging at school.

Student reflections, ideas, and artifacts drove the "messy, iterative, and generative approach" (Hunter et al., 2013, p. 26) of the action research project. They engaged in reflection, guided activities, observations, interviews, and community learning exchanges to reflect on factors shaping their gender identity at school.

Chapter Summary

Centering student voice to better understand student experiences at school is required to generate equitable learning experiences for all students. At an international school in South Korea, students navigated various expectations based on their intersecting identities of gender, culture, language, and race. Each facet of their identity presented untapped potential to create rich environments where student voices are central to learning and student success. Participatory Action Research methodologies provided paths to explore factors shaping student gender identity at school with the goal of supporting educators in building spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature surrounding the focus of practice including gender in society, gender in classrooms, and the power of voice and silence in learning from different cultural perspectives. Chapter 3 explains the Participatory Action Research design, data collection, and methodology including details regarding PAR Cycle One and the Pre-Cycle. Chapter 4 presents student participant data in the form of student vignettes. Chapter 5 outlines PAR Cycle Two, the final cycle of data collection. Chapter 6 presents the study findings. In Chapter 7, I discuss the implications of the study for practice, policy, and research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

How individuals think about and express their identity is influenced by a range of factors including culture, language, race, gender, nationality, and location. For the PAR project I worked with a small group of Grade 6 students to explore the factors shaping their experience of gender identity at an American international school in South Korea. I was curious to explore how exploring experiences of identity with students may illuminate opportunities for educators to support students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school. The literature review presented here is meant to provide insight into gender identity in the cultural environment of South Korea, including the role of gender in teaching and learning in classrooms, in particular, and the role of voice and silence in learning and liberation. The chapter also provides background on the cultural, pedagogical, psychological, and historical literature connected to the PAR project.

Three categories guide the literature review as shown in Figure 2: *Gender in Society*, *Gender in School*, and the *Power of Voice and Silence*. To better understanding a range of thinking regarding gender and culture, I explored research on gender identity from different cultural perspectives including Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC), Western gender theory, as well as, women, power and voice (Chong, 2006; Pateman, 1988; Pyke & Johnson, 2003, Weiler, 1998). For example, the work of Pyke and Johnson (2003) on gendered identity provides insight into how women may navigate patriarchal structures in Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) like that of South Korea. Research into gender identity in school provides a framework for discussions of identity with students in a school setting (Sadker & Sadker, 1984, Weiler, 1998). School-based gender identity research illuminates the conflicting expectations student may face as they build gender and academic identities for themselves in classrooms.

Finally, research on the power of voice and learning explores the role of voice in

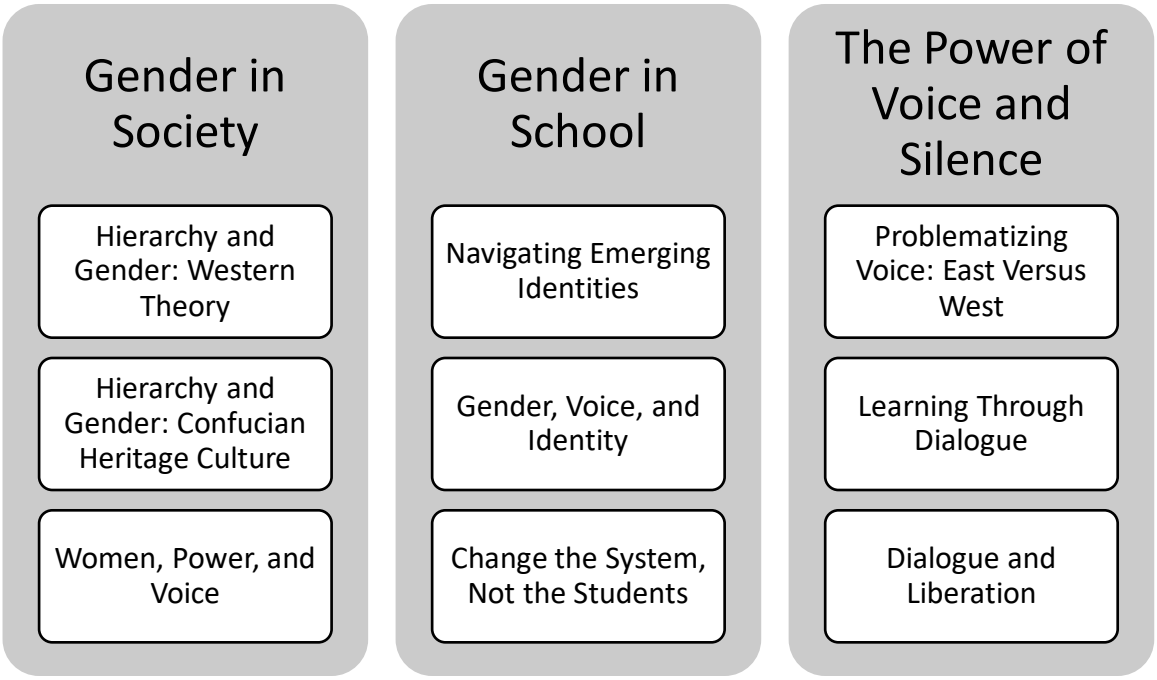


Figure 2. Literature review categories.

educational settings from different cultural perspectives. Western assumptions about the role of voice in learning are problematic given Eastern norms of speaking, silence, and learning. Freire's problem-posing education model and Weiler's work on radical pedagogy for liberation support a reframing of classrooms to center learning around student voices and authentic dialogue as opposed to learning as one-way content acquisition. This research was relevant to the dialogue-centered approaches used in the PAR project as I sought to understand how student agency would manifest in response to opportunities for reflection on experiences of identity at school.

Gender in Society

First, I needed to thoroughly interrogate how gender influences students' experiences of identity in an international middle school. This section aims to present literature on gender identity in Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) like South Korea (Chong, 2006; Kim, 1994; Li, 2012) and compare these authors to Western theorists' work on gender as a socially constructed hierarchy (Gilligan, 1982; Kye, 2008; Pateman, 1988; Pyke & Johnson, 2003; Thompson, 2003). The literature explored in this section provides background on Eastern and Western understandings of gender identity to better situate the PAR amidst a landscape of gender theories. Liberal feminist ideals of equity and leftist feminist challenges to patriarchal structures provide tools to create empowering spaces for student reflection and voice.

Hierarchy and Gender: Western Theory

Gender is not static, but is instead socially constructed and something you 'do' based on cultural and societal expectations (Pateman, 1998; Pyke & Johnson, 2003; Thompson, 2003). Gender encompasses cultural and societal ideas about what counts as masculine or feminine. Different genders are assigned different strengths or deficits and evaluated in school, society, the workplace, and family accordingly. Pateman (1988) identifies the term *gender* as "not dictated

by nature, by biology or sex, but is a matter of social and political contrivance" (p. 248). Separating the term *gender* from the terms *men* and *women* shifts discussions of masculinity and femininity to the cultural expectations associated with those roles as opposed to the biological differences of the sexes.

Hierarchy and Gender: Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC)

Many cultures, including CHC, place men and masculinity above women and femininity (Kye, 2008; Pateman, 1988). In South Korea the hierarchy is based on two foundational Confucian ideas, *ye* (propriety) and *myŏngbun (*distinction between statuses) (Kye, 2008). Women's role is subordinate to men in Confucian structures; men are seen as leaders in society and business while women support them from home by taking care of the family (Chong, 2006). A person's role in CHC society changes as their relationships change in conjunction with the cardinal relationships—parent-child, sibling, husband-wife, boss-employee, friendship. For women, their role within family structures remains centrally important. As women move through life, their "familial role as the mother, wife, or daughter takes precedence over her identity as an individual" (Chong, 2006, p. 718). Family lines were historically only tracked through men, and it wasn't until Korean family law changed in 1991 that women had legal protections regarding divorce, inheritance, and child custody (Kim, 1994).

Western gender theorists also see gender as reinforcing societal hierarchies that places men above women. Pateman (1988) asserted that society rests on patriarchal power structures to define the relationship between masculine and feminine as one in which men and masculinity are placed above women and femininity. Pateman (1988) insists that "the structure of our society and our everyday lives incorporates the patriarchal conception of sexual difference" (p. 15) and adds, "The story of the sexual contract reveals that the patriarchal construction of the difference

between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection" (p. 229). Western gender theorists take different approaches to reframing the role of gender in society. Liberal feminist theorists advocate for systems that value the different but equal strengths brought by each gender (Thompson, 2003). Alternatively, leftist theorists dissent from this view, saying the differences between genders should be ignored or deconstructed as artifacts of a patriarchal structure. For example, liberal theorists lift up the ethic of caring more often embodied by women as something to be valued, leftist theorists would say the caring construct has emerged within patriarchal structures demanding women care more in society (Thompson, 2003).

Societal expectations of women shape the life girls see for themselves and inform the expectations boys develop for girls and women in their lives. Such societal and cultural constructs inform how students come to understand their gender identity at school. At an American international school in South Korea students may be navigating a range of cultural exceptions of gender, including those of the host country, the school, and their families. In the following section I present literature on how voice can be an expression of power that can shape experiences of gender identity.

Women, Power, and Voice

Voice and language are tools for people, as Giroux and Freire state in their introduction to Weiler's (1998) work, to "make themselves *present* in history and to define themselves as active authors of their own worlds" (p. xiii). How people come to understand their voice and its role in society is affected by the societal and cultural expectations we are each immersed within. Pyke and Johnson (2003) investigated the intersection of gender, race, and voice through interviews with 100 daughters of Korean and Vietnamese immigrants and how women struggled

with their dual racial and gendered identities. Many respondents discussed how they adjusted their identities according to the racial makeup of their surroundings. They tended to be much quieter in majority Asian spaces while they felt more comfortable being loud and opinionated in mainstream (white) spaces. The differences in gender construction between white mainstream society and their family and racial community meant women struggled to establish a consistent sense of self. This work provides insight into how young people at an American international school may be using their voice to 'do' gender differently depending on the expectations of the cultural space.

Pyke and Johnson (2003) found women pointing to voice, from volume and tone to how much they spoke at all, as a cue when discussing how they 'do' gender in different spaces. Gilligan (1982) similarly used voice as a measure of how women act in public and make decisions. In the 2003 printing of *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan included an introductory letter to the reader in which she says she has "become increasingly aware of the crucial role of women's voices in maintaining or transforming a patriarchal world" (p. xii). She goes on to say:

> To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act. Voice is natural and cultural. It is composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm, and language. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity, and plurality. (Gilligan, 2003, p. xvi)

Voice as a manifestation of how individuals 'do' gender plays an important role in education as students reflect on factors shaping their gender identity and experiences at school.

Gilligan, a liberal feminist, presented a way of thinking about gender in which women and girls may experience moral decision-making using a different, but not inferior, framework

than men. She argued women frame decisions with more attention to relationships, interdependence, and care than the constructs of male decision-making. In the concluding chapter of the text, Gilligan (1982) says that we have,

> Listened for centuries to the voices of men and the theories of development that their experience informs…. Yet in the different voices of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationships and responsibility.… The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the differences in their voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation. (p. 173)

Gilligan's emphasis on valuing the way women use their voice as different from but as legitimate as that of men, is part of a broader discussion about how to enable people to be heard on their terms regardless of gender.

Summary and Reflection

The study built a space within an American international school in South Korea for eight sixth grade students to reflect on factors shaping their gender identity at school. The literature presented here helped me think about different perspectives on gender in society. On the one hand, asking girls to speak up more could give them more power in the classroom but could also be valuing boys' ways of engaging as worthy of imitation. Alternatively, valuing the girls' quieter tendencies as authentically their own may also play into patriarchal constructions of gender in which women listen to and care for boys (Thompson, 2003). In the dialogue driven space we worked to co-create, I worked to pay attention to both speaking and listening as crucial components of equitable dialogue with the primary goal of creating a space for student voices to be heard as equal to that of the teacher (Gilligan, 1982; Pyke & Johnson, 2003). While gender served as the entry point into discussions of identity people are not one-dimensional. As Pyke

and Johnson (2003) explored in their work, people are experiencing intersecting identities of race and gender in different cultural spaces. Deep reflection guided the work to understand the factors shaping student experiences of gender identity with the goal of supporting them in cultivating a sense of belonging at school.

Gender in School

Students and teachers bring themselves to school each day with their unique understandings of gender, identity, and learning. Schools can be places that empower individual voices and disrupt oppressive societal power structures, or they can reproduce such oppressive systems (Weiler, 1998). School structures and pedagogies affect how students and teachers use their voice as a manifestation of their agency within the institutions of school.

In this research project I provided eight sixth grade students the opportunity to reflect on factors shaping their gender identity at school. In this section, I outline research at the intersection of gender, identity, and voice at school. As a science teacher in the school where the research project took place, I paid particular attention in this section to the tensions students navigate as they develop gendered identities in middle school science classrooms and the teacher's pedagogical role in attending to student identities and voice.

Navigating Emerging Identities

Educational success is highly valued in South Korea and other Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC) (Li, 2012), but academic expectations for men and women in South Korea are divided. Science is largely associated with masculine ways of knowing and therefore a subject for boys (Bahng & Baker, 2013; Kim et al., 2018; Ryu, 2015). Negative stereotypes about girls and science were found in a study conducted in three South Korean public high schools, one all girls, one all boys, and one coed (Bahng & Baker, 2013). The study used survey data from 302

Grade 10 students across the three schools along with in-depth interviews with 11 academically outstanding students, school principals, and science teachers. Bahng and Baker (2013) found “all the principals and science teachers had stereotypical perceptions regarding female students learning science” (p. 37). Many students also held stereotypical beliefs. Principals and teachers believed that girls are not interested in science and that girls did not have the skills to be successful in science nor interested in having jobs in scientific fields. They also saw biological differences between boys and girls as the reason for gender gaps in performance. Such negative beliefs among school leaders and teachers would have a profound impact on girls' identity and sense of power in science classes.

As Pyke and Johnson (2003) identified in their research, voice is a powerful tool for people to express their identity. How people use their voice can change based on how they feel their identity fits in a particular setting. Middle school students are navigating social pressures, physical changes, and transitions which can make it challenging for them to speak up in classrooms (Carlone et al., 2014; Tan et al., 2013; Wonch Hill et al., 2017). Through in-depth interviews with 13 middle school girls, Carlone et al. (2014) found the ways girls “performed” gender became more pronounced over time. As each student grew older, she was confronted with the reality of gender:

> School science is subject to strong institutional and cultural narratives of what counts as legitimate science, is often configured too narrowly, and leaves little room to celebrate and productively leverage different kinds of students' science related interests and identity work. (Carlone et al., 2014, p. 485)

As girls in the study found their gender identity as girls, they found it to be increasingly difficult to maintain their identity as scientists. Girls find themselves confronted with the reality that what

counts as science becomes narrower as you move up in school and who looks like a scientist becomes increasingly gendered and racialized (Archer et al., 2010).

Boys may not have to work as hard to align their identities with particular academic identities because of subtle signals teachers send in classrooms. A flagship study of gender in classrooms, *Promoting Effectiveness in Classroom Instruction* (Sadker & Sadker, 1984) showed that boys "participated in more interactions than their representation in the class would indicate; the reverse was true of girls. Boys received more praise, acceptance, remediation, criticism, and conduct interaction than girls" (Sadker & Sadker, 1984, p. 140). Boys talked more, asked more questions, received more meaningful and targeted feedback and more teacher attention than girls. As girls get less frequent, less targeted, and less meaningful feedback, they are more likely to attribute success or failure to innate ability while boys are more likely to attribute success or failure to effort (Sadker et al., 1991). Class after class, day after day, girls internalize their role as passive observers in class unless teachers shift their practice. When attention is brought to the subtle ways gender bias is reinforced in class, teachers can make meaningful changes to their practice to better include all voices and increase the academic rigor for all students (Sadker & Sadker, 1984; Sadker et al., 1991).

Change the System, Not the Students

Even in the face of negative classroom experiences and limited representation of girls in science, some girls do go on to pursue computer science degrees at South Korean universities. Nonetheless, they remain a distinct minority: as of 2010, women only filled 16.2% of computer science positions nationally (Lee, 2010). Western researchers have identified a "geek culture" in computer science as a barrier for women and people of color to enter the field (Spertus, 1991), but Kim et al. (2018) found that such a narrative does not fit as neatly in Korea where its features

are “more complicated than the dichotomy of male-technical versus female-social stereotypes” (p. 50). Top tier universities in Korea value a deep commitment to academic excellence at the sacrifice of social time and skills, regardless of gender.

While this may be true, society still projects different expectations for men versus women and “puts more emphasis on fixing women, not fixing the institutions” (Kim et al., 2018, p. 38). The authors conclude:

> Korean women in computer science perform double labor to be taken as potentially valuable assets in high-tech industries. First, they assimilate themselves into the highly appreciated geek culture constituted by gendered symbols and valorization of selective learning behaviors. Second, they discursively obscure the structural inequality by describing their geeky tendencies as personal traits. (Kim et al., 2018, p. 51)

Instead of creating more diverse spaces to celebrate a range of identities, schools, universities, and society in South Korea demand women align their identities with the male-dominated spaces they find themselves in. This demand on women and girls to modify their voice to fit into existing power structures plays out in many settings, including international middle schools.

One approach to changing the system instead of asking students to change their identities was demonstration in participatory action research carried out by Barton (1998). Barton worked with homeless students and found aligning science content and pedagogy with student interests and identities to be a powerful way to engage students in deep science learning. Barton argues that science needs to reorient itself away from the idea of objective truths, towards using science as a way of thinking about and solving problems based on the interest and identities of those engaged with it. The result is a much more diverse understanding of what it means to be a scientist (Barton, 1998; Carlone et al., 2014). Educators can use such a reframing to break down

societal and educational structures at the intersection of gender identity and success to create a new space where all individuals, regardless of gender, can fit.

Summary and Reflection

Classrooms are made up of individuals, each constructing and navigating their own identities. Certain academic identities, like science, are more often aligned with masculinity and boys, which can exclude girls from fitting into the norms and power structures of a certain classroom. Teachers can reinforce such biases through whose voices they invite into the learning space and how they give feedback and distribute power in the classroom. By attending to student identities and creating opportunities for students to see themselves as experts, classrooms can be transformed into learning spaces that empower all learners. As a woman scientist myself, I hope to create space for all student to see themselves as successful scientists in class.

The Power of Voice and Silence in Learning

Language and voice are how people make sense of the world around us, how we communicate what we know, and how we build community (Hyland & Paltridge, 2013; Lemke, 1990). According to Weiler (1998), "Teachers and students use language to assert their power and to try to create sense for themselves out of a complex social setting" (p. 127). Classroom discourse provides a window into the cultures, values, identities, and power in the learning space by focusing on the flow of voice, language, and silence (Li, 2012). In this section, I explore literature on the role of student voice in learning from Eastern and Western perspectives (Hyland & Paltridge, 2013; Kim, 2002; Li, 2012; Michaels et al., 2007; Otten et al., 2015; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011), along with investigations of radical pedagogies for empowerment (Freire, 1970; Weiler, 1998) and an overview of the role of classroom discourse in science. It is with

Freire's (1970) words in mind that I explore the role of voice and dialogue in teaching, learning, and equity: "to speak a true word is to transform the world" (p. 60).

Problematizing Voice: East versus West

In *Cultural Foundation of Learning: East and West*, Li (2012) provides an analysis of different approaches to and beliefs about learning from Eastern and Western perspectives. Notwithstanding the limitations of generalizations about culture, her work—along with research by Pyke and Johnson (2003) and Kim (2002)—gives a window into the way voice and discourse may play a very different role in Eastern learning paradigms. Both Li (2012) and Kim (2002) disagree with a foundational Western assumption that speaking has a universally positive impact on learning and problem-solving. They argue that while the Western belief that speaking is a tool to gain deep understanding, this is not always the case.

Li (2012) outlines the tradition of eloquence and value of speaking in Western culture: "[S]peaking in the West is a highly regarded skill… four emphases are particularly noteworthy: speaking as a distinct personal quality, as a right, as a leadership trait, and as art" (p. 277). From the times of the great orators and philosophers of ancient Greece, Western culture is built on a long tradition of verbal expression (Kim, 2002; Li, 2012). Speaking gives Westerner's ownership over ideas, is used to display intelligence as well-spoken people are thought to be smarter, and is often associated with charismatic individuals and leaders. Speaking your mind is a valued tradition in the West, and freedom of speech is among the most highly treasured tenants of democracy. Many of the West's most influential figures are charismatic orators, from presidents to entertainers.

Given the cultural value placed on verbal eloquence, Western classrooms reproduce these qualities in their students. Students are expected to own their ideas out loud and link their

thinking to the ideas shared by others as teachers coach them with prompts such as, “It sounds like A agrees with B’s idea that…”. Western classrooms become incubators for verbal eloquence and norms of communication that educators feel will best prepare students for university and beyond. When such Western-oriented classrooms, like those in American international schools, are located in Korea or other East Asian countries, a silent cultural clash ensues as speaking plays a different role in teaching and learning in the East.

The East places high value on silence in society and in learning. As Lao Tzu said, “Those who understand are not talkers; talkers don’t understand” (quoted in Li, 2012, p. 296). Buddhist and Taoist teaching elevate introspection and contemplation over oration. Confucius also counseled wariness toward people who speak too much, cautioning against boastful speech, a glib touch, and flattery. Confucius thought of such kinds of speech as lost opportunities to grow towards the life-long goal of *ren*, or self-perfection (Li, 2012). The spoken word is of lower value than an individual's actions. Cultural and religious leaders of the East guide people towards using their voice thoughtfully, respectfully, and sparingly. Importance is placed on knowing when to speak and when to stay silent, each word being measured more thoughtfully than in the West.

Linguistically, in East Asian languages including Korean, there are also more rules around respect and deference when speaking to elders or people in respected positions like teachers. Eastern cultural choices about when and how much to speak are taken seriously and judged as skills to be cultivated. When compared generally to Western peers, Eastern students are generally quieter, which through a Western lens can be interpreted as disengaged, inept, or even dishonest (Li, 2012).

A study of university students reveals how foundational ideas in the West linking speaking and thinking may not be true for all learners. Kim (2002) guided two groups of students, one group European American, the other Asian American, through an assessment task to investigate how speaking their thoughts out loud impacted performance for each group. To eliminate the possible confounding effect of linguistic barriers, all study participants spoke English as their dominant language; the Asian American students were second-generation Americans. Over the course of three overlapping tests, Kim found lower performance on assessments for Asian American students who expressed their thinking out loud. For European Americans, the opposite was true.

To explain these findings, Kim describes a cultural difference in problem-solving. Easterners utilize a more holistic approach to problem solving in which people hold all elements of the problem simultaneously and search for how the pieces fit together. In the West, people are taught to break the problem down into steps and move through them sequentially. This piece-by-piece approach lends itself to talking ideas though. To say you're "thinking out loud" while holding a holistic view of the problem, you must start making choices about which piece to think about or discuss first. Kim (2002) concludes:

> Perhaps making students speak up in class might not be the only way to make them better thinkers for the colleges who are concerned about East Asian students' silence. Another way might be for the colleges to realize that the meaning of students' silence can be the engagement in thoughts, not the absence of ideas. Perhaps instead of trying to change their ways, colleges can learn to listen to their sound of silence. (p. 840)

Creating space for students to explore factors shaping their identity at school also provided insights into the role of voice in learning for students from different cultural backgrounds.

Learning Through Dialogue

Voice, language, dialogue, conversations, and discourse are tools of learning. While Eastern and Western cultures treat voice and silence differently in learning spaces, at an American international school students are tasked with becoming skilled in Western norms of learning. Verbal and non-verbal skills including body language, eye contact, argumentation skills, turn-taking, and listening are largely defined by Western institutions and are tools students will need at international universities or in professional settings (Hyland & Paltridge, 2013; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011; Zwiers, 2007). Zwiers and Crawford (2011) outline the importance of rich oral discourse in schools: "Oral language is the cornerstone on which we build out literacy and learning throughout life" (p. 7). Classroom dialogue builds academic language by giving students the chance to listen, talk, and negotiate meaning through verbal and nonverbal strategies. Students begin to acquire academic language and vocabulary as they incorporate it into classroom conversations (Zwiers, 2007). Building a repertoire of academic language allows students to engage nimbly in conversations about increasingly diverse topics.

Discourse in a classroom is a skill that must be taught to students learning in a Western classroom setting, including one located in South Korea. Culturally and linguistically diverse students may need to change how they engage with others when they transition from their lives outside of school into the academic demands of classrooms. This student population needs the most explicit education in how to engage in academic discourse but is often left to figure it out on their own (Zwiers & Crawford, 2011).

Michaels et al. (2007) point out that students can find the norms of academic discourse in conflict with the communication norms in their homes and communities. This distance can cause some students to disassociate from Western academic discourse as it is seen as assimilating into

norms of white Western culture. Mainstream, or white middle class students, need only make slight changes to their language use to fit into the classroom space and can dominate the conversation while others are left silent (Hammond, 2015). In my context as a White Western educator in a classroom of mostly South Korean students, my role was to elevate each voice with the goal of creating a 'problem-posing' and equitable classroom space while also equipping them with the discourse skills they need for international academic spaces.

In addition to the benefits of acquiring academic conversational skills, Zwiers and Crawford (2011) point to interpersonal benefits as well. Rich academic conversations facilitated in a trusting environment can help students to build skills in co-constructing knowledge with peers. Learning alongside peers and teachers can help shift a student's experience from the accumulation of as many 'deposits' of facts as possible towards seeing themselves as members of a learning community. Engaging in academic discourse with peers also helps students to develop a more robust inner dialogue, which Vygotsky (1987) pointed to as crucial for integrating new knowledge and building a new understanding of the world. Co-constructing knowledge with teachers and peers through equitable exchanges of ideas enables students to expand their thinking to include the perspectives of others. Such conversations can help students develop empathy and more robust academic identities, and to value all voices.

Dialogue and Liberation

Freire's (1970) work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* posits dialogue as the foundation of learning and of humanity. He writes, "If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (Freire, 1970, p. 61). Dialogue, not just speaking, then becomes the foundational mechanism through which power is shared in education. Unfortunately, many classrooms

continue to be heavily weighted towards teacher talk over student talk, resulting in an absence of true dialogue (Lemke, 1990; Otten et al., 2015; Zwiers & Crawford, 2011). Triadic dialogue (Lemke, 1990) persists in many classrooms following a consistent pattern of teacher question—student answer—teacher evaluation. This pattern obstructs opportunities for students to engage in true dialogic discourse in which the student participates to "generate new learning with a community" (Otten et al., 2015, p. 1,285). Otten et al.'s (2015) study of math classrooms found that even when students were engaged in student-to-student exchanges, they often remained univocal in nature as their purpose was to "transmit or clarify ideas to the rest of the class" (p. 1297). The goal is not just student talk in class; it is meaningful dialogue through which students are communicating and constructing understanding (Freire, 1970; Lemke, 1990; Otten et al., 2015).

Weiler (1998) examined power in schools in her work on feminist teachers and radical pedagogy. She calls voice "a pedagogical category to examine the interaction of teachers and learners and the knowledge they both bring to the classroom as well as the knowledge they produce together" (Weiler, 1998, p. xii). She points to voice as a powerful mechanism through which language and pedagogy intersect to create learning spaces "rooted in the histories, experiences, and meanings of teachers and students" (Weiler, 1998, p. xiii). Dialogue is the tool by which teachers create opportunities for students to affirm or challenge power, authority, and institutional structures. Through the kinds of interactions teachers facilitate, they can either perpetuate hegemonic structures of gender, class, race, and identity or build counter-hegemonic realities for students. Through the lens of voice, teaching and learning spaces are reimagined as stretching beyond spaces where students acquire content to acknowledge the powerful role schools play in supporting students in telling their stories and growing as individuals. I worked to

create such a space alongside the student participants for the PAR project. Teachers and students come to know our identities and develop our voices amidst the social expectations, pressures, cultural realities, systems, and institutions we are embedded within. As schools are another system within which people develop their identity, we must bring awareness to the kind of space we are creating for students to do this work. As Weiler (1998) says, "Recognition of students and teachers as historically situated subjects with conflicting gender, race, and class interests is vital to understanding the possibilities and limits of the classroom" (p. 125).

Freire's (1970) liberation pedagogy of a problem-posing system of education in which students and teachers engage in meaning-making together aligns with Vygotsky's (1987) work on the social construction of knowledge. Vygotsky (1987) outlined knowledge construction as a social process. Engaging in dialogue is how people build new knowledge, analyze what they already believe to be true, and create new joint understandings. He outlined the dual role of language as both a tool to transmit what is known and a mechanism through which to generate new understanding. His work on intersubjectivity further aligns with Freire's (1970) problem-posing education model. Intersubjectivity describes a way of learning that dissolves the power differential between teacher and student. When engaged in intersubjective learning knowledge is co-constructed with all persons acting as teacher and learner simultaneously (Driscoll, 1994). These skills of not just listening to but meaningfully engaging with information empower students as learners and empower them to engage as active citizens (Wells, 2007).

In the PAR project I supported students as they reflected on factors shaping their gender identity. The students and I co-constructed a space within which student voice was viewed as equal to mine to illuminate aspects of themselves and of their surroundings that may have

otherwise remained hidden from them. Voice, my own and theirs, were the tool by which we explored these questions as we engaged in reflection and dialogue together.

Chapter Summary

Literature presented here, as summarized in Figure 3, anchors the PAR project amidst a landscape of research on identity, culture, dialogue, and learning. By considering perspectives on Western gender theory, gender in CHC, how students are navigating emerging identities in learning spaces, and the deep value of dialogue in learning, we placed student voice at the center of the PAR study. I present literature outlining the positionality of voice and academic conversations from Eastern and Western perspectives to illuminate the role culture plays in better understanding how gender and voice intersect in school experiences. Furthermore, Freire and Weiler's work on radical pedagogies outline methodological approaches designed to create dialogue-driven learning. In essence, the literature review contextualizes the space I created through the PAR project for students to reflect on factors shaping their gender identity at an American international school in South Korea.

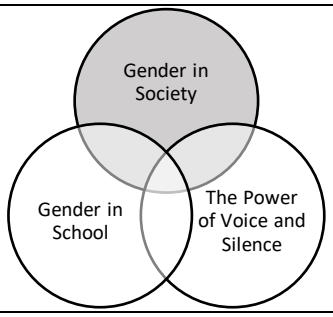
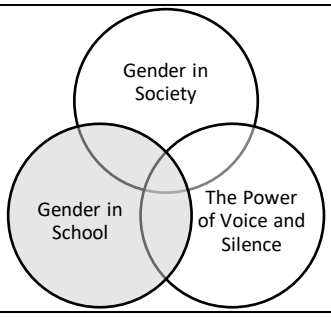
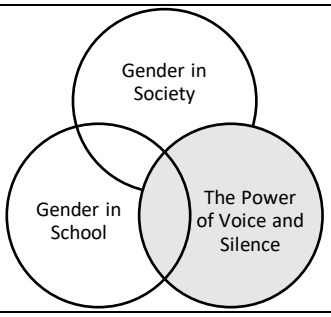
		
Gender in Society	**Gender in School**	**The Power of Voice and Silence**
Hierarchy and Gender: Western Theory	Navigating Emerging Identities	Problematizing Voice: East Versus West
Hierarchy and Gender: Confucian Heritage Culture	Gender, Voice, and Identity	Learning Through Dialogue
Women, Power, and Voice	Change the System, Not the Students	Dialogue and Liberation
Kye Chong Pyke & Johnson Pateman Thompson Gilligan	Bahng & Baker Barton Carlone et al. Archer et al. Sadker & Sadker Kim et al.	Li Kim Freire Lemke Zwiers & Crawford Weiler Driscoll

Figure 3. Literature review summary.

CHAPTER 3: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN

I used participatory action research (PAR) methodology in my qualitative research study to explore how students responded to opportunities for deep reflection on factors shaping their gender identity in an international middle school. The study was conducted at an American international school in South Korea. Students came from affluent families; over 90% were Korean with the other 10% mainly children of international faculty at the school. A few Chinese families also moved to Korea to enroll their children at the school, but many of these families left in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Parents enrolled their children at the school to provide a western education and enable them to gain acceptance to foreign universities.

I taught middle school science at the school for 3 years before beginning the PAR study. Through my observations and discussions with colleagues, I perceived a need for deeper exploration into the factors students felt were shaping their identity, in particular gender identity, and experiences at school. In particular, I noticed divisions between students along gendered lines with friend groups being predominantly single gender and patterns of boys speaking up more in class than girls. My observations led me to develop a set of research questions and to invite a team of students to explore them with me. Study participants and I collaborated to address the overarching research question: How can understanding the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school?

In addition, the study explored the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent and how does student agency manifest in response to opportunities to reflect on their experiences of gender identity at school?

2. To what extent does the intersection of students' gender, racial, linguistic, and cultural identities play a role in students' academic and social experiences at school?
3. To what extent can gaining insights into factors shaping student experiences of gender identity inform international school teaching practices, policy, and research?
4. How does my practice as a teacher leader change in response to working with students to explore factors shaping gender identity at school?

The research questions guided iterative cycles of data collection, reflection, and data analysis.

The following Theory of Action (ToA) further grounded the study: If we engage students as co-researchers in explorations of identity at school, then students will demonstrate increased belonging and agency. The goal of the study was to investigate factors shaping students experiences of gender identity at school with the goal of helping educators create spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school. In addition, I explored how engaging in PAR alongside students transformed my teaching and leadership practices.

This chapter provides an overview of how Participatory Action Research (PAR), coupled with improvement sciences and Community Learning Exchanges (CLE), provided a methodological approach for the study. Figure 4 provides an overview of the research design. I also introduce the participants of the study which included a modified co-practitioner researcher team, referred to as the *adult feedback group,* and the student participant researchers. I provide an overview of each research cycle including descriptions of how iterative cycles of data collection, analysis, reflection, and triangulation drove the research process. Finally, I address considerations regarding validity and confidentiality in the study.

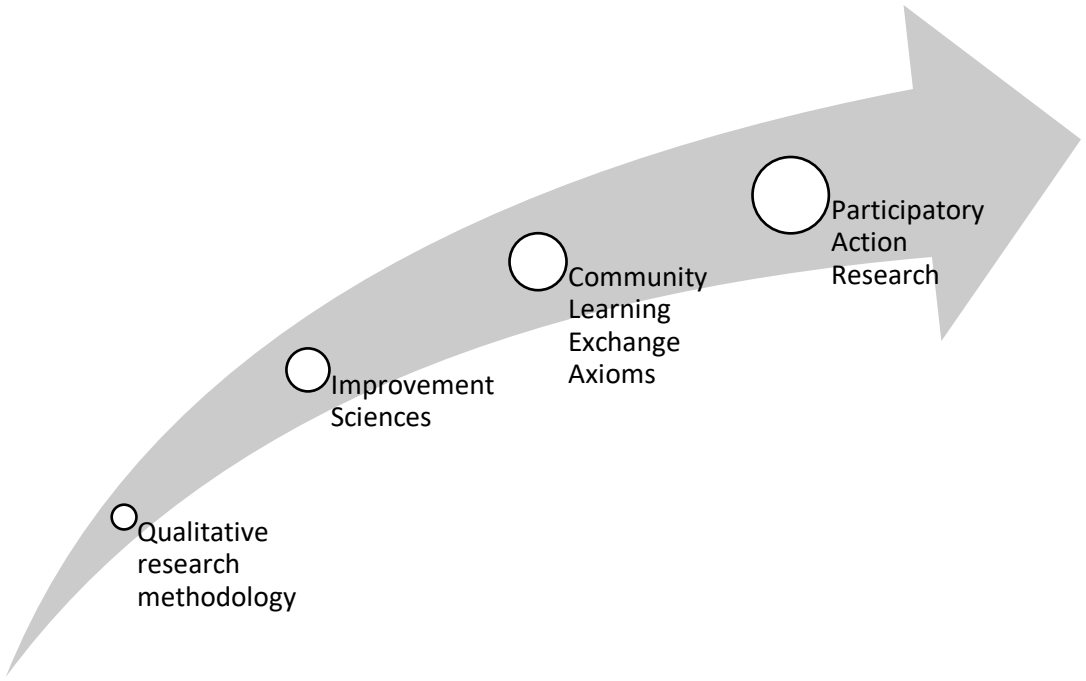


Figure 4. Research design overview.

Qualitative Research Methodology

I designed the study using qualitative research methodologies, in particular PAR, improvement science, and Community Learning Exchanges (CLE). The combination of methodologies work together to elevate participant voices, a driving goal of my study. Qualitative research methods are a favored tool in the humanities, particularly sociology and anthropology, which utilize observations and open-ended questions to generate data for coding, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research can take many forms, including ethnographies and case studies. For this study, I chose PAR (Hale, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013) as it best fit the study goals and provided guidance for me as a teacher researcher. Herr and Anderson (2014) say that action research is, "inquiry that is done *by* or *with* insiders to an organization or community, but never *to* or *on* them" (p. 3). Their framing resonated with the driving goal of the study to center student voice and their reflections on identity and learning experiences in an international middle school. The next sections outline how I combined PAR methodologies with improvement science principles (Bryk et al., 2015; Langley et al., 2009; Lewis, 2015; Militello et al., 2009) and community learning exchange axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016) for data collection.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is deeply connected to context and driven by cycles of reflection, planning, acting, and observing (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013). Traditional research often relies on extractive methods to generate a one-way flow of information in which academics pull knowledge from the community to capitalize on. Leveraging qualitative research methodologies, including in-depth interviews, and analysis tools like open coding allows for authentic engagement with the individuals involved in the work.

PAR is “a more dynamic, open, recursive, chaotic and unpredictable process” (Hunter et al., 2013, p. 8) than traditional approaches because it often leads to discoveries rooted in personal experiences. Such discoveries can meaningfully inform understandings of the question at hand. Herr and Anderson (2014) argue that an action research dissertation can “transcend mere knowledge generation to include personal and professional growth, and organizational and community empowerment” (p. 1).

In the PAR project, I partnered with students to explore factors shaping their experiences of gender identity at school. Through collaboration with students and colleagues, I aimed to support changes to the “setting or within the participants and researchers themselves” (Herr & Anderson, 2014, p. 4). I also drew on activist methodologies in the study design with the hopes of exploring how PAR can address issues of social justice, oppression, and community change (Hale, 2008). For example, the work of Kemmis et al. (2014) on critical participatory action research helped to further inform my study design as it “expresses a commitment to bring together broad social analysis, the self-reflective data collection, self-study of practice, and transformational action to improve things” (p. 12). Throughout the work, I embraced the words of Hunter et al. (2013): “The act of research is not just to understand the world but also to work within it in order to change it, that is, to change social structures, institutions and cultures” (p. 2).

Improvement Science

I combined PAR methodological approaches with improvement science (IS) because it provided an approach to problem-solving grounded in system thinking and connection to context. Two improvement science principles were particularly relevant in the research study: engagement in Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) (see Figure 5) cycles of inquiry (Lewis, 2015) and the use of networked improvement communities (NICs) (Bryk et al., 2015).

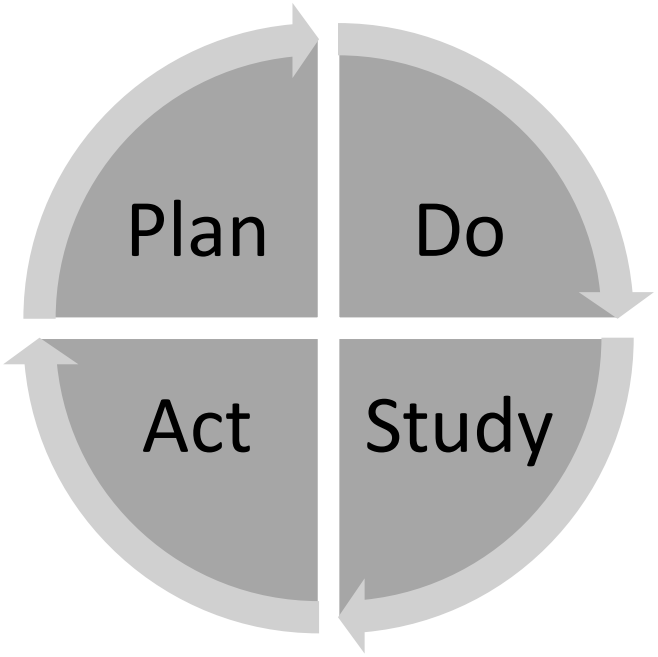


Figure 5. PDSA cycles.

A networked improvement community (NIC) is a highly intentional collaborative group of professionals working together to address systems change (Russell et al., 2017). NICs have the power to unlock deeper engagement and learning than research done by solo actors (Bryk et al., 2015). Traditionally, NICs bring together teams from different communities, which was not appropriate for the site-specific nature of this PAR project. Instead of a typical networked improvement community, which extends between sites, I planned to use a co-practitioner research (CPR) team. The CPR team did not work out as initially intended due to a number of circumstances explored in more depth in the participant section.

Throughout the action research dissertation, participants and I engaged in inquiry-action research cycles grounded in iterative and collaborative planning to continually reflect on and adjust the work (Militello et al., 2009). I built PDSA cycles into the study design to ensure ongoing reflection and intentionality in the data collection and analysis. I included study participants in the PDSA cycles to ensure participant voices were guiding each step of the process as much as possible. I also conducted member checks to validate the evidence as it emerged (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Community Learning Exchanges

Embedded within each research cycle, I facilitated Community Learning Exchanges (CLE). The CLEs served two purposes: (1) to provide a framework for data collection and (2) to provide a set of protocols and approaches to use when designing data collection events. Five axioms guide CLEs as methodology and served to inform the use of CLEs for the PAR project (see Figure 6).

As a methodology, CLEs provide opportunities for learning and reflection by participants and for data collection to address the research questions (Guajardo et al., 2016). Protocols used

- Learning and leading are dynamic social processes.
- Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes.
- The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.
- Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational processes.
- Hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities.

Note. (Guajardo et al., 2016).

Figure 6. Community Learning Exchange Axioms.

in the CLEs created space for participants to engage in conversations and activities to explore factors shaping their experiences of identity at school. Further, artifacts from the CLEs generated a rich data set I used to answer the research questions. I designed data collection to center student participant voices given that they, as the people closest to the research questions, were best positioned to inform understandings of students' experiences of identity at school. Through subsequent rounds of data collections student participants were able to take on a leadership role in the CLE space, transitioning from participants to co-researchers.

Participants

Unlike more traditional research approaches which extract data from individuals or communities, PAR is designed so investigators engage in an inclusive and iterative process with those closest to the issues to find solutions (Guajardo et al., 2016; Herr & Anderson, 2014). The findings generated by a PAR study are therefore more meaningful to the participants and have the power to generate lasting change. When using PAR methodology, researchers try to include a range of voices in the research process. Typically, a CPR team is formed to allow for deep engagement with the research question from a variety of perspectives. I intended to use a CPR team composed of colleagues at the study site, but several factors made this impossible, including the extra demands COVID-19 put on teachers and the unpredictability it created in the school year.

Nonetheless, a number of collaborative teams emerged that supported meaningful data triangulation and reflection (Merriman, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Colleagues with different roles in the school supported me in designing data collection events and reflecting on data. Additionally, while the student group began as participants, their deep involvement in the PAR process resulted in their development into co-researchers as they generated and analyzed

data. Member checks with the participant groups supported me as the researcher in checking biases, staying focused on the main research questions, and ensuring the data analysis accurately reflected the voice of the community (Foulger, 2010; Gerdes & Conn, 2001). I collected appropriate consent or assent and parent consent forms from all participants (see Appendices C, E, and F).

Sampling

I used cycles of naturalistic inquiry to drive the work and allowed for purposeful sampling to unfold as participants emerged through conversations and in response to invitations (Gerdes & Conn, 2001; Patton, 2015). Purposeful sampling of the adult and student participants was used taking into account the subjects' accessibility, proximity to the research questions, and willingness to be involved (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used purposeful sampling to invite students from the middle school advisory program, the school's pastoral care program to join the student research team (Patton, 2015).

The advisory program served the entire middle school. Each advisory group was made of approximately ten students, all in the same grade. The advisory groups met during an advisory period 4 days a week for 20 minutes. All teachers in the school acted as advisors, with one adult advisor for each advisory group. The advisory program did not have a standardized curriculum. The advisory period supported the logistics of the research as it provided scheduled time in the school week to meet with student participants. Inviting students by advisory group also allowed for a random subset of the Grade 6 cohort (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Community learning exchanges, one-on-one interviews, and reflection activities occurred with the student participants during the scheduled advisory period throughout the research project.

Adult Feedback Group

I formed the adult feedback group in response to challenges in forming a true CPR team. The adult feedback group was composed of a mix of voices, including international school teachers, school leaders, and university professors. Three teachers in my school, who were originally meant to form the CPR team, supported the logistics of the research on site. One member in particular, Lindsey, was crucial to supporting the research process as she took the students who chose not to join the research team during our meetings. Colleagues in the graduate program supported me by pressing me to think more critically and in pushing my thinking, to reflect more on the data as well as workshopping my designs for the CLEs. A weekly study group composed of international educators provided ongoing feedback on my study and helped to widen my perspectives. One member of the group, who was also in a CHC school, influenced my thinking with regards to cultural influences and norms in the region. A number of colleagues were also focused on gender-related studies and could direct me to relevant authors. As I was in ongoing and consistent communication with this set of academic peers, they were well informed about my study as it progressed and were able to provide research-based insights into my data and process. My dissertation coach was also instrumental in supporting my study. She provided feedback on my data collection strategies and collaborated with me to ensure I was facilitating high quality data collection events. Her insights into methodology and her reflections on my data ensured the participants stayed at the center of the work.

Student Participant Research Team

As a PAR researcher, my goal was to put the student participants at the center of the research. Because the focus of my research questions was factors shaping student identity and experiences at school, I placed a high priority on student voices and artifacts to generate the

knowledge and outcomes of the study (Hale, 2008). I explicitly worked *with* them as the experts of their identity and experiences. I invited any interested students from my advisory group and the advisory group led by Lindsey, a member of my adult feedback group. Three of the 10 students from my advisory group chose to join the research team. Five of the 11 students in Lindsey's advisory chose to join the research team. All told, eight out of the 21 students invited chose to participate. The students who chose not to participate joined Lindsey's group during the advisory periods when we met.

The eight Grade 6 students who volunteered to participate in the research provided a window into factors shaping student experiences of gender identity at school. Each student researcher listened to the assent script (see Appendix E) to accompany the consent form signed by their parents (see Appendix C) with a translated version available for Korean speaking families (see Appendix D). Student researchers understood their engagement was voluntary and that they could cease their involvement at any time. As we met during an ungraded period in the school day, it was clear to the student participants that their involvement in the research did not impact their grades or standing in any of their classes. In addition, if students chose to stop participating in the research group, it was easy for them to simply join another advisory group during this time. Each of the eight student researchers who volunteered remained engaged with the research throughout the process. The students began as participants who looked to me for guidance and direction and evolved into participant researchers as they took ownership of the research space and guided our exploration of identity at school. Their role as participant researchers culminated in Cycle Two when they analyzed their data and designed an advisory lesson to lead with their peers.

Student Participant Researcher Introductions

In this section I present brief introductions to each of the eight student participant researchers. As student voice is at the center of this PAR project, I wrote each brief biography as I believe students would introduce themselves using information they shared. I wrote each introduction using a combination of data gathered during the Pre-Cycle and knowledge I gained about each of the students as their science teacher. Three artifacts from the Pre-Cycle inform the following short biographies: (a) the identity chart, (b) the peer interviews, and (c) the digital question. Table 1 provides an overview of the student research team. In-depth presentations of each student researcher can be found in Chapter 4.

Lexa. Lexa was 11 years old, from the USA, and in her second year in Korea. She previously studied at an international school in Colombia. She pointed to family and travel as important aspects of her development and thought people noticed she is optimistic and American when they met her. However, she reported she felt left out and bullied when she was in school in Colombia (Lexa, peer interview, October 19, 2021). Lexa brought up her optimism in our early identity exploration. She said, “The most important thing about my identity is that I am always optimistic. I said that because I think if you don’t have any happiness in your life, it's hard to have a good life” (Lexa, identity chart, October 12, 2021). Lexa chose to join the research group because “I like the idea of being able to share our thoughts about how we feel at school. By learning about identity, we can discover more about ourselves. I hope to be able to discover more about each other and our surroundings on campus” (Lexa, digital question response, October 27, 2021).

Sophie. Sophie is Colombian, 12 years old at the time of the study, and in her first year at SJA. It was her first time attending an international school outside Colombia. She reported

Table 1

Student Participant Researchers

Name	Gender	Nationality	First Language	Notes
Lexa	F	USA	English	Second year at the school, previously attended international school in Colombia
Sophie	F	Colombian	Spanish	First year at the school
Marc	M	South Korean	English	First year at the school. Spent 9 years in Myanmar before leaving due to political unrest.
Max	M	USA	English	Fourth year at the school. Previously attended school in the US.
Marja	M	Canadian	English	Fifth year at the school. Previously attended school in Canada.
Tad	M	Korean/Canadian	English	First year at the school. Previously attended international schools in China and Myanmar.
JiWoo	M	Korean	Korean	First year at the school. Previously attended an international school in the Philippines and public school in Korea.
Jason	M	Korean	Korean	First year at the school. Previously attended public school in Korea.

people first notice she is a girl when they meet her and that she is quiet, but they realize she isn't quiet when she gets to know them (Sophie, peer interview, October 19, 2021). She thought the most important part of her identity was being Colombian because "it describes me and my culture. I also tell my likes and dislikes and I am proud to be Colombian" (Sophie, identity chart, October 12, 2021). Sophie listed several attributes on her identity chart: Colombian, dark hair, girl, wears glasses, tall; interests: Disney, reading, music and drawing; and traits: kind, happy (Sophie, identity chart, October 12, 2021). Sophie said she chose to be part of the research group because "I think we can learn more about ourselves and who we are. I think this is important for us to know because it could help us to decide things that are better for ourselves" (Sophie, digital question response, November 1, 2021).

Marc. Marc is a Korean national, 11 years old at the time of the study, and in his first year at SJA. While both of his parents are Korean, Marc had spent his life in China and Myanmar where his father had been employed. It was his first year in school in South Korea. He thought people first noticed that he was short (Marc, peer interview, October 19, 2021). On his identity chart he wrote, "The most important thing about me is being described as short because there is nothing else special about me, and being short makes me feel like me" (Marc, identity chart, October 12, 2021). He also pointed out that "most Koreans aren't dark [skinned], but I'm pretty dark" (Marc, peer interview, October 19, 2021). On his identity chart, Marc described himself based on relationships—for example, middle sibling, son—and attributes, such as, male, brown, short, Korean, and with only one interest, reading (Marc, identity chart, October 12, 2021). Marc said he chose to join the research group because he is "interested in science" (Marc, digital question response, October 31, 2021).

Max. Max was 11 years old at the time of the study, from the U.S., and a huge Dodgers fan. He had attended school in South Korea for 3 years prior to participating in the student research group. SJA was his first international school. Max described himself by using three categories: (1) things he loves: talking, board games, cucumbers, and animals; (2) things he has: two sisters, four cats; and (3) things he is: a boy, active, fast, kind, and a student at SJA (Max, identity chart, October 14, 2021). Max thought the first thing people noticed about him was that he is kind and thoughtful (Max, peer interview, October 19, 2021). He also said he sometimes feels left out in Korea because he is "one of the few people who aren't Korean, and I don't feel included in everything" (Max, peer interview, October 19, 2021). Max said he chose to join the research group because, "it looked like fun … I thought the beginning activity was interesting and fun (Max, digital question response, November 1, 2021).

Marja. Marja was 11 years old at the time of the study, a Canadian citizen, and had been at SJA since the school started 5 years prior to the research. In his identity chart, Marja described himself through things he liked, food, dogs and cats, and gaming, as well as through his personal history, from Winnipeg, relationships, has a family, a house, and a dog. Marja also described himself as dumb and bad at math (Marja, identity chart, October 14, 2021). When asked in the peer interview if he ever felt different from other people, Marja said, "In Korea I feel that people don't invite me to stuff . . . it is mainly Korean" (Marja, peer interview, October 19, 2021). Marja said he chose to join the research group because he is "interested to learn about other people, including what others like and don't like, and how people's lives are similar" (Marja, digital question response, November 2, 2021).

Tad. At the time of the study Tad was 11 years old and in his first year at SJA. He has dual citizenship from South Korea and Canada. His mother is Korean, and his father is Canadian.

Tad spent his early years of schooling in South Korea and the 3 years prior to joining SJA at an international school in Myanmar. His family moved back to South Korea in response to the political upheaval in Myanmar. In his identity chart, Tad described himself based on interests, sci-fi, reading, and writing, and attributes, Canadian, Korea, male. He pointed to his identity as a reader and writer as the most important things about himself (Tad, identity chart, October 14, 2021). He thought people first notice that he is a hard worker and mentioned being out of shape or needing to be in shape (Tad, peer interview, October 19, 2021). Tad chose to join the research group because "I thought it would be interesting to learn about identity. Identity makes us who we are, and it changes the ways we interact with others" (Tad, digital question response, October 27, 2021).

JiWoo. JiWoo is a South Korean citizen and at the time of the study he was 12 years old, in his first year at SJA, and living in the school dormitory. In his peer interview he pointed to feeling different as one of only a few South Korean students when he lived and attended school in the Philippines (JiWoo, peer interview, October 19, 2021). He thought people first notice that he is a boy when they see him (JiWoo, peer interview, October 19, 2021). On his identity chart, JiWoo listed interests such as soccer, gaming, and playing with friends. He identified attributes like being Korean, human, a student, a boy, and 13 years old (Korean age) (JiWoo, identity chart, October 14, 2021). I note here that age is calculated differently in South Korea. You are 1 year old when you are born and turn 2 on the next New Year's Day. He chose to join the research group because it "seemed like fun" and because he hoped we "do research about us!!" (JiWoo, digital question response, November 1, 2021).

Jason. A South Korean citizen Jason was 12 years old at the time of the study and had been at SJA for 2 years after living in Seoul for most of his life. He thought people first noticed

he was a boy and pointed to not wearing glasses as an important thing about his identity because so many other students, and people in South Korea generally, do wear glasses (Jason, peer interview, October 19, 2021). On his identity chart, Jason listed attributes: boy, Korean, 6th grade student, human, SJA student, no glasses, birth date (Jason, identity chart, October 14, 2021). He also identified specific friendships with other students in Grade 6 and his interest in the video game Roblox. He chose to join the research group because he "wants to learn" (Jason, digital question response, November 1, 2021).

These eight students made up the student research team. Six of the eight could be described as Third Culture Kids (TCKs) or children raised in a different cultural context than that of their parents or the culture of their country of nationality (Tanu, 2017). In this case, the term encompasses students from the US, Canada, and Colombia who are living and learning in South Korea. It also includes students who hold Korean passports but who have spent most of their life living outside of South Korea. The remaining two are South Korean citizens who have spent their lives living and learning in South Korea.

Action Research Cycles

The PAR project consisted of iterative cycles of data collection spanning from Fall 2021 to Spring 2022. The first cycle was considered a Pre-Cycle as it centered on building my skills as the lead researcher and on developing relational trust with participants. The subsequent cycles of data collection are referred to as Cycle One and Cycle Two. Each cycle was designed as an iterative approach to data gathering in which participants generated artifacts, and I maintained field notes, wrote reflective memos, and referenced literature. Each round of data collection included a variety of data sources including interviews, reflection activities, community learning exchange artifacts, and school-based sightings (McDonald, 1996). I continuously brought data

back to the participants to seek clarification, probe for missing pieces, and discover opportunities to dig in more deeply. I also brought protocols and plans for data collection to the adult feedback team to gain their insights on my process. Ongoing input from the student participants and colleagues illuminated my biases and blind spots in the analysis and approach. Data cycle details are summarized in Table 2 and explored in the following sections.

PAR Pre-Cycle

The Pre-Cycle for the PAR project took place after IRB approval in October 2021 (see Appendix A). During the Pre-Cycle I invited potential participants, secured appropriate consent and assent documentation, built my skills as the lead researcher, and developed trust with and amongst participants. A goal in the Pre-Cycle was what Kemmis et al. (2014) call "opening a communicative space" or "establishing a public sphere" (p. 90) by establishing norms to guide our meeting times.

My goal at this stage was to establish an adult CPR team and a student participant team. CPR team members were invited to participate during the Pre-Cycle, however, while interested colleagues did emerge the unpredictability of COVID-19 and the additional work load that came with it made it impossible for them to commit to forming a CPR team. We were not able to meet consistently and they were not able to give sustained attention to the research. Instead, three interested colleagues became members of the *adult feedback group* that I used to check my data analysis and findings. Activities in the Pre-Cycle were first designed as invitations to interested participants and later as opportunities to build trust within the groups that emerged. Table 3 presents an overview of Pre-Cycle data collection activities, which are then each described in more detail.

Table 2

Action Research Cycles

Research Cycle	Who	Aims and Components
PAR Pre-Cycle: October 1-November 29, 2021	Student Participants	Aim: Skill building as the lead researcher. Develop relational trust with and amongst participants.
	Adult Feedback Team	Components: - Participant invitation - Participant meetings - CLEs
PAR Cycle One: December 2, 2021-April 1, 2022	Student Participants	Aim: Gather individual student data on factors shaping gender identity
	Adult Feedback Team	Components: - Participant meetings - CLEs - Interviews - Student data analysis
PAR Cycle Two: May 1, 2022-June 17, 2022	Student Researchers	Aim: Gather data on student agency and student community presentation
	Adult Feedback Team	Components: - Culminating CLE - Student led advisory session

Table 3

PAR Pre-Cycle Activities and Timeline

Activity	Date	Attendance	Notes
Invitational Activity: Identity Charts	Oct 12, 2021 Oct 14, 2021	Lappé Advisory (Lindsey) Advisory	Students created identity charts and shared what they considered as the most important aspects of their identity. The research goals and paperwork were also presented.
CPR Identity Charts	Oct 15, 2021	Adult Team	Each member created an identity chart. We reviewed the research questions, and members shared ideas about future CLEs and potential collaborative projects.
Peer Interviews	Oct 19, 2021	Student Participants	Students paired up to complete peer interviews. Appendix YYY shows the peer interview protocol.
Digital Question	Oct 26, 2021	Student Participants	Students responded to the question, "Why did you decide to join the research group?" in Google Classroom.
Inside/Outside the Box	Nov 4, 2021	Student Participants	Students shared perspectives on the cultural meanings regarding what it means to fit "in the box" of either "Act Like a Lady" or "Be a Man."
Pre-Cycle Data Review	Nov 29, 2021	Adult Team	The CPR team gathered to review the data gathered to date and plan next steps.

Invitational Activity: Identity Charts

I began to invite participants after IRB approval in October 2021. I explained the research process and goals to my Grade 6 advisory group during an advisory period. I read the student assent script (Appendix E) and asked the students to indicate anonymously how interested they were in participating by closing their eyes and giving a thumbs up or a thumbs down. Three of the 10 students gave a thumbs up, four gave thumbs down, and three were undecided with a sideways thumb. The three interested students each had spent most or all of their lives outside South Korea. One was American, one Colombian, and one Korean but had spent his life overseas. I gave all members of my advisory group consent forms so they could discuss the research with their families as well. Families who spoke Korean at home were given consent forms in both English (see Appendix C) and Korean (see Appendix D) while English-speaking families were given only consent forms in English. I hoped that more of the students, especially Korean students, would change their minds and decide to participate.

Given the lower-than-expected engagement rate and the skew towards non-Korean participants, I reflected on how to expand my invitation to more students. I decided to do an initial activity related to the research question with all students in my advisory group whether or not they had already expressed interest in joining the research group as a student participant. this activity, each student created an identity chart. Examples are shown in Figure 7. Each student drew a simple representation of themselves in the middle and surrounded it with identity descriptors. Students then shared their identity charts with a partner to identify similarities differences. We wrapped up by sharing the one component of their identity students felt was most important to them. I let students know that we would continue to explore themes from the identity chart with students who chose to become a student participant in the research group.

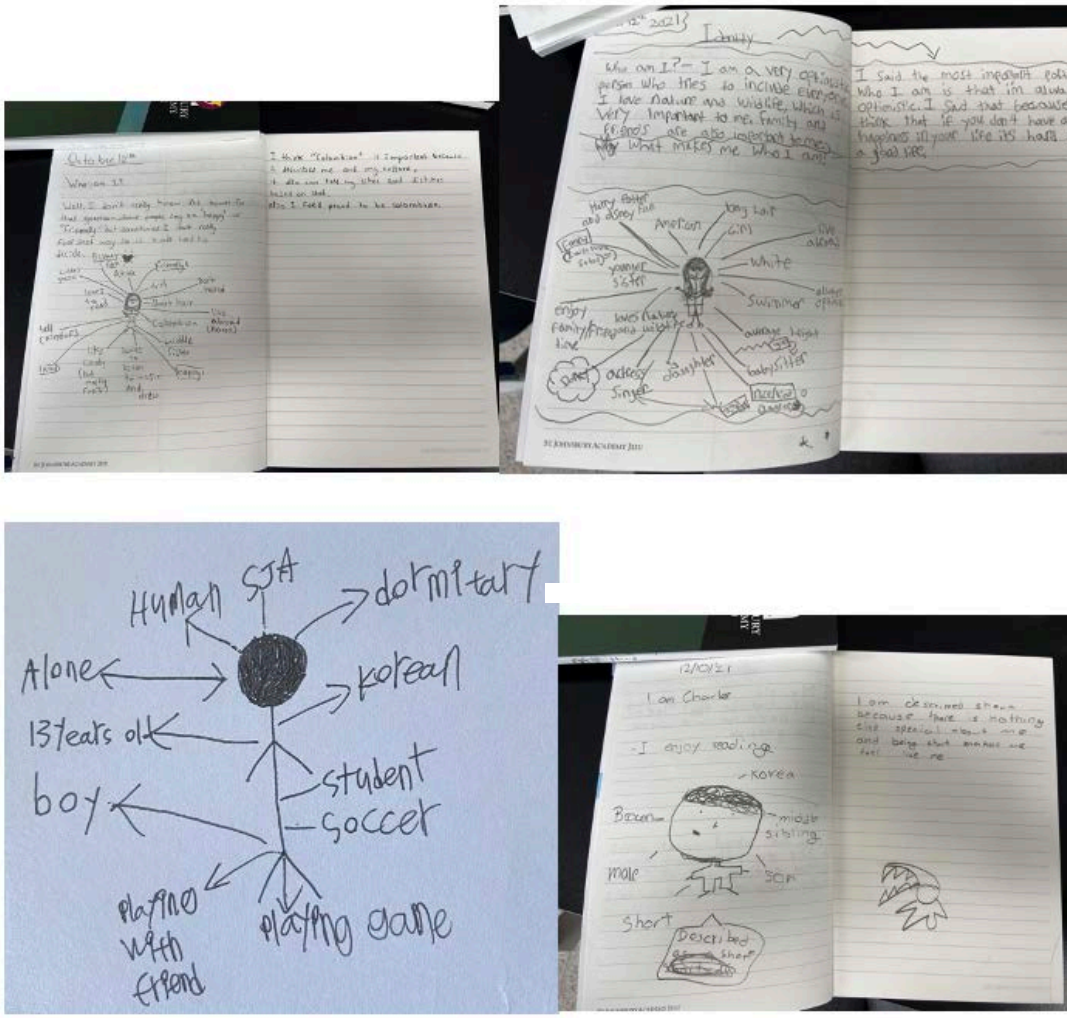


Figure 7. Student identity chart examples

To expand my invitation to more students, Lindsey, a member of the adult feedback group, and I switched advisory groups for a day. This way I could introduce the research process to her advisory group and invite them to join as well. I led the same identity chart activity with them to explain the research process. Of the 11 students in her advisory, the six boys all gave a thumbs up when asked if they wanted to participate. The five girls all said no. Three of the boys were Korean, one American, one Canadian, and one was half-Korean and half-Canadian who had spent his life living overseas. Consent forms were sent home with each student just as was done with my advisory group. I then coded the identity charts from the student participants in each advisory group. The coding process and insights into the identity charts are explored in more detail later in this chapter.

The identity charts provided an initial look at how students currently understood what identity meant. Categories such as physical traits, relationships, nationality, and interests emerged from the identity charts. Students included relationships to their family, friends, and school; interests like Harry Potter, reading, and sci-fi; and physical descriptors like glasses, hair, height, and age. Nearly all students also included their nationality on their identity charts.

Establishing Research Routines: Peer Interviews

Following the identity chart activity, Lindsey and I established our routine for separating those students participating in the research from those who were not. On days when I met with the student participant research team, I met with them in my classroom during the advisory period. On these days, those students who chose not to participate in the research would meet with Lindsey in her classroom. This is how we structured research days for the remainder of the study.

For the first meeting of the student participants—three from my advisory and five from Lindsey's advisory—they paired up and conducted peer interviews using a set of questions I prepared in advance (see Appendix I) and posted to the research group Google Classroom page. I designed the questions to gather basic information, to further explore themes of identity, and to give the student researchers a chance to build trust in small groups. Following the peer interviews, I posted a digital question to the Google Classroom for students to share why they want to be involved in the research. The identity charts, peer interview responses, and digital question reflections provided an introductory data set for each student participant.

The student participants opened a window into their current sense of self through the identity chart activity and through the interviews with peers. The peer interview data was framed by questions I provided while the identity charts were more open-ended. In the peer interviews students struggled to answer the question, "What is your race?" Nearly all of them asked for clarification or wrote their nationality in that space. This affirmed for me that the descriptors typically included in identity work— race, gender, ethnicity, language, or cultural heritage — may not all be meaningful to this particular group of students. Their sense of self was based on their lived experiences, communities, and culture. Their ways of thinking about identity in the Pre-Cycle provided a starting point for my ongoing exploration and a reference point for future data collection.

Gathering Meaningful Data: Inside/Outside the Box

I used an activity called Inside/Outside the Box for the next meeting with the student participant team. In this activity students created collaborative posters in which they responded to the prompt, "What does it mean to act like a lady or be a man?" Figure 8 shows examples of the posters the student participants created. I organized the student participants into gender

Figure 8. Inside/outside the box artifacts.

affinity groups for the activity. Each group was given a poster with one of the messages written at the top, either “Act Like a Lady” or “Be a Man.” Under the message was a large box. I directed the groups to write ideas about what the prompt meant to them inside the boxes on the poster. The two girl student participants were at the “Act Like a Lady” poster for the first part of the activity while the boys were split into two groups, each working on a “Be a Man” poster. I directed them to write any ideas, expectations, or terms they feel are commonly used to describe the phrase on their poster.

The girls understood the task quickly and started writing expectations of girls or women. They wrote inside-the-box statements such as: we can’t do what men do; only talk when you’re asked; and, you only cook and clean. The affinity groups changed posters after a few minutes, and the boys added similar ideas to the poster, writing: girls aren’t allowed to do special jobs like gamer and sports director; pink is for girls; and, do housework. Much of what was written on this poster positioned women as subservient, quiet, and destined for housework.

The boys needed additional clarification to understand the activity at first. They then started to identify the societal expectations of boys or men. The boys’ initial interpretations included only concrete descriptors of gender differences, such as “uses a boy's toilet” and “beard” and physical descriptors of what may make men and women different. With support, the boys began to reveal their knowledge of gender stereotypes. Phrases placed in the inside the box portion of the “Be a Man” posters suggested boys feel pressure to be impressive, have an important job, earn money, and be strong.

This activity showed the students had an understanding of what society expects of people based on gender. Some of the student reflections after the activity included statements such as, “This activity made me feel disappointed in society”, “This activity made me feel sad because it's

like we can't be ourselves", "I notice there are more 'benefits' of being a man than a woman" (inside/outside the box reflections, November 4, 2021).

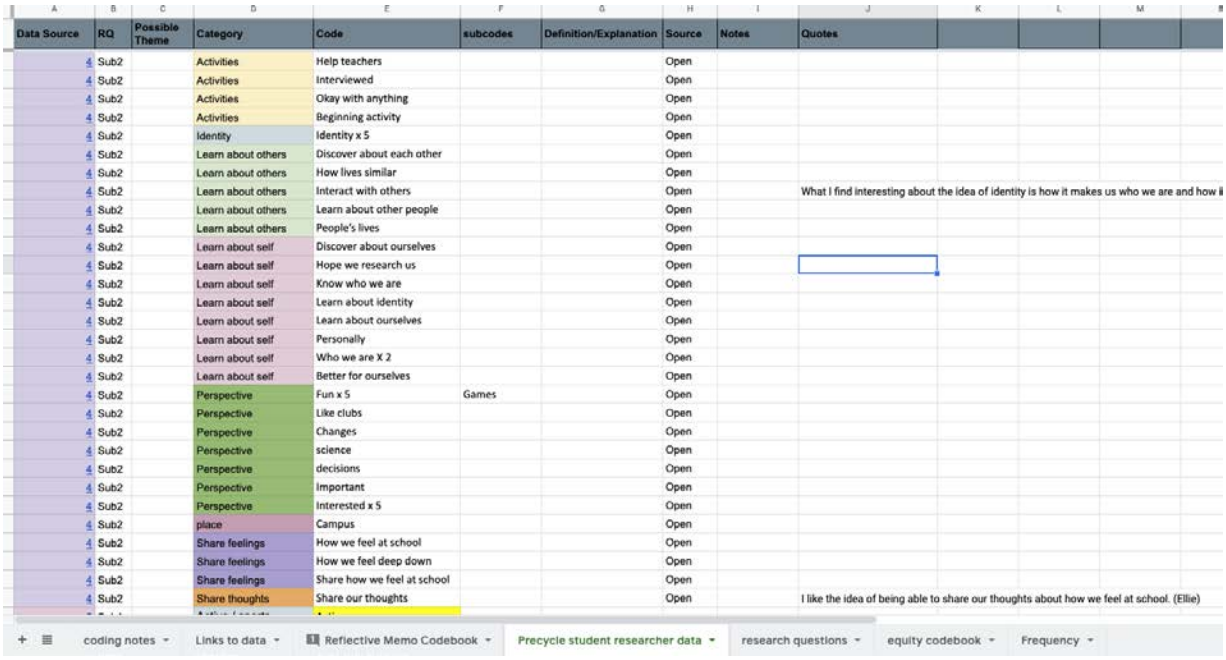
Pre-Cycle Coding

The Pre-Cycle provided the first set of data for me to use to learn how to code and analyze data for the PAR study. A code is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 4). I used open coding methods for the initial coding of artifacts from the Pre-Cycle. In my initial coding process, I established routines for organizing the data and on staying open to a range of interpretations. I used this step in the process to "to reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of [the] data and to begin taking ownership of them" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 115). I utilized a mix of descriptive and in vivo coding where direct words are phrases from the data are used to capture salient meanings from my own and participant artifacts (Saldaña, 2016). I coded the identity charts, peer interviews, digital question responses, the collective inside/outside the box posters, and the individual reflections from the activity. I also coded my reflective memos and field notes. I organized and housed data on Google Drive and OneNote. After organizing data and reflections into a research notebook in OneNote, I coded data twice. First codes and second codes captured meanings in the document or on the artifact itself before being transferred to the codebook. An example template for artifact coding is shown in Figure 9.

I included a space for categories in early coding templates to house potential categories as they emerged. This space was later removed to avoid jumping to categories too early. After initial rounds of coding, I moved the codes to the codebook as shown in Figure 10 and in more detail in Appendix H. Each tab in the codebook was dedicated to a different artifact: reflective

Lappé Reflective memo Owning My Space – FoP in a complicated context	Code round 1	Code round 2	category
Experience In a one-on-one meeting with Jim last night I felt myself articulate a new way of thinking about my position	• 1:1 Mtg • Jim	• Night • Context	

Figure 9. Example artifact coding.



Data Source	RQ	Possible Theme	Category	Code	subcodes	Definition/Explanation	Source	Notes	Quotes
4	Sub2		Activities	Help teachers			Open		
4	Sub2		Activities	Interviewed			Open		
4	Sub2		Activities	Okay with anything			Open		
4	Sub2		Activities	Beginning activity			Open		
4	Sub2		Identity	Identity x 5			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	Discover about each other			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	How lives similar			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	Interact with others			Open		What I find interesting about the idea of identity is how it makes us who we are and how i
4	Sub2		Learn about others	Learn about other people			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	People's lives			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Discover about ourselves			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Hope we research us			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Know who we are			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Learn about identity			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Learn about ourselves			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Personally			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Who we are X 2			Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Better for ourselves			Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Fun x 5	Games		Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Like clubs			Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Changes			Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	science			Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	decisions			Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Important			Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Interested x 5			Open		
4	Sub2		place	Campus			Open		
4	Sub2		Share feelings	How we feel at school			Open		
4	Sub2		Share feelings	How we feel deep down			Open		
4	Sub2		Share feelings	Share how we feel at school			Open		
4	Sub2		Share thoughts	Share our thoughts			Open		I like the idea of being able to share our thoughts about how we feel at school. (Ellie)

coding notes | Links to data | Reflective Memo Codebook | Precycle student researcher data | research questions | equity codebook | Frequency

Figure 10. Section of codebook.

memos, student participants, adult participants, etc. As Saldaña (2016) elaborates, “Coding is a cyclical act. Rarely is the first cycle of coding data perfectly attempted. The second cycle (and probably the third and fourth, etc.) of recoding further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the salient features of the data" (p.154). Tabs on the codebook linked to data sources, research questions, potential closed codes for future use, and spaces for code frequencies for future rounds of data analysis. As the codes expanded, they were grouped into potential categories with the intention of generating themes in later rounds of data collection and analysis as supported by Saldaña’s approaches to coding shown in Figure 11.

Pre-Cycle Summary

The Pre-Cycle allowed me to gain confidence as the lead researcher for the PAR project. The student participant research group and the adult feedback group were established and moving forward smoothly. Participants were gaining familiarity with research approaches and protocols and building trust within the group. I built my confidence as a lead researcher and developed approaches to data collection, organization, and analysis. Data from the Pre-Cycle was used to help me practice pre-coding, coding, organizing data into a code book, and organizing codes into categories and a set of initial emergent themes. Pre-Cycle data was also used to build the student vignettes found in Chapter 4. At the conclusion of the Pre-Cycle, student participants were demonstrating readiness to dig more deeply into reflections on factors shaping their gender identity and experiences at school.

PAR Cycle One

PAR Cycle One took place from December 2021 to April 2022. Insights gained through the Pre-Cycle informed the design of PAR Cycle One data collection events and protocols. While gender served as the primary entry point into discussions of identity, we also explored

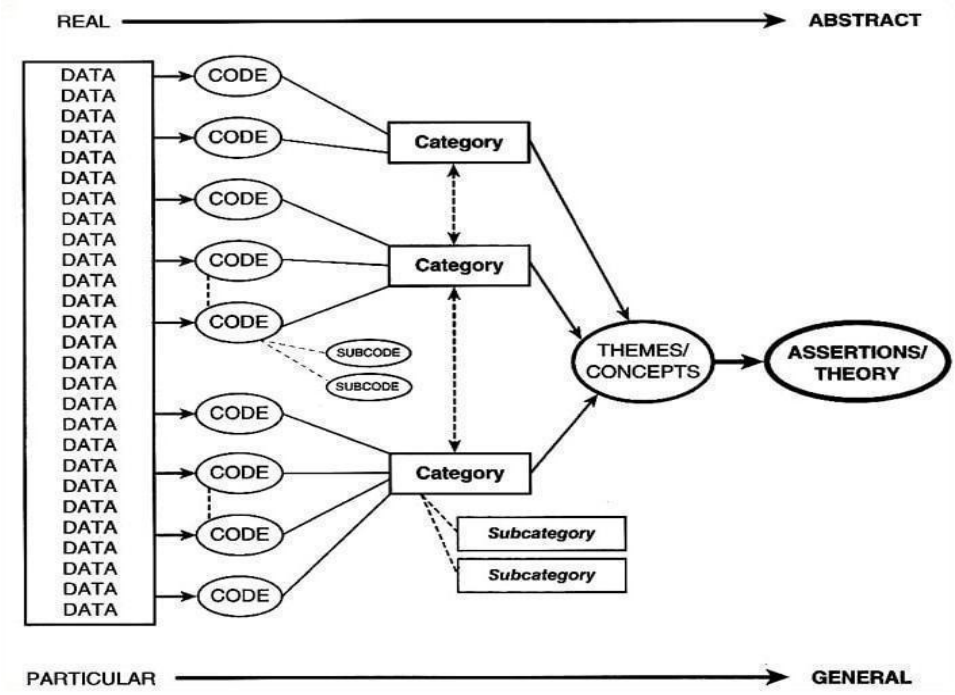


Figure 11. Saldaña's Codes-to Theory Model.

students' intersecting identities of gender, race, culture, and language. Cycle One data collection events generated a large data set including interview transcripts, student artifacts, and researcher reflective memos. The adult feedback team offered their thoughts through meetings and informal conversation.

The roles of the student group and adult group shifted during Cycle One. In the initial plan, I envisioned the adult group as the co-practitioner research (CPR) team, but over the course of the research process, it became clear such an adult CPR team would not work due to demands on their time imposed by the pressures of COVID-19. I continued to meet with the adult feedback group throughout the process, and their input helped me refine data collection plans and my interpretations of data. While the adult feedback group's participation did not meet the demands of close sustained engagement with the research question that defines a typical CPR team, their positionality as educators and graduate students conducting similar research did mean they could provide meaningful advice and support throughout the process

The student participants began to take a lead role in determining the direction the research process would take. As the students participated in data collection events, they grew from participants into co-researchers. They were motivated, focused, and eager to build on each set of data as it was collected. While I, as lead researcher, continued to plan events, my role shifted from leader to facilitator as students took the lead in conversations and reflection. Students' role as co-researchers crystalized with their creation of posters highlighting key findings based on an analysis of their own data at the conclusion of Cycle One. This evolution affirmed the methodological approaches of the participant-centered action research project.

Students engaged in written and verbal reflection activities designed to help them articulate their thoughts on factors shaping their identity and how it played a role in their

Table 4

PAR Cycle One Data Collection

Activity	Date	Attendance	Notes
Gender Switch Reflection	December 2, 2021	Student Participants	Students responded to prompts about how their life would change if they were the opposite gender.
One-on-One interviews	January 2022	Student Participants	An interview with each student researcher focused on identity, gender, life experiences, and school.
This or That	February 14-17, 2022	Student Participants	Students reflected on their experiences at school based on the story *Neither* (Anderson, 2018)
This or That	March 2, 2022	Adult Participants	Adults reflected on their experiences at school and reviewed student data and helped to plan upcoming data collection.
Gender Collage & Artist Statement	March 3, 2022	Student Participants	Students created digital collages in response to the prompt: *What is gender?* They also wrote an artist statement.
Gender Collage discussion	March 8, 2022	Student Participants	Students shared their collages with the team.

experiences at school, at home, and in society. Table 4 summarizes Cycle One data collection events, which are further explored in the following sections. Cycle One data was analyzed in an iterative process that resulted in the creation of a set of student vignettes, which are presented in Chapter 4.

Focusing on Gender Identity: Gender Switch Reflection

In this activity, students responded to prompts asking them to consider what life would be like at home, at school, and elsewhere if they were the opposite gender. The gender switch reflection was designed based on an activity from Sadker and Sadker (1994) exploring gender bias in school. Sadker and Sadker found this exercise generated more insights into students' gender perspectives and experiences than a direct question. Data from this exercise prompted further discussions of how gender intersects with experiences in different parts of our lives. Prompts were posted to the student participant Google Classroom page as shown in Appendix J.

Digging Into Individual Identity: One-on-One Interviews

In addition to Cycle One CLEs, each student participated in a semi-structured 10- to 20-minute one-on-one interview with me. I invited each student to bring to the interview an item they felt represented something important about their identity. The interview began with students describing what they had brought and why. The semi-structured interviews included similar interview covered different topics as guided by the students' comments about their lives, questions on gender identity asked of each student (see Appendix K) while also providing opportunities to explore specifically relevant topics that emerged in each conversation. The interviews deepened my understanding of each student's perspective on gender, identity, and learning and provided insights into their previous experiences, their sense of belonging, and their

interests and passions. The interviews also strengthened trust and connection between myself and each student, which facilitated deeper reflections in future data collection events.

From Participant to Student Researcher: This or That CLE

Data collection and analysis happened concurrently during Cycle One. Initial analysis of data from the first two activities pointed to an emergent idea of gender as divisive. To explore this more deeply, I designed a three-stage CLE centered around the children's book *Neither* by Airlie Anderson (2018). The *This or That CLE* built on students' initial reflections on gender identity and encouraged students to think about how gender influences student experience within the particular learning environment. It included opportunities for students to see if their ideas about groups being divided along gendered lines were observable during an advisory period across different middle school grades. We watched a video read-aloud of the book to serve as a common narrative for the CLE. *Neither* (Anderson, 2018) tells the story of a character who does not fit into the Land of This or That and goes in search of a place where they do fit in. They end up in the Land for All, a sort of land of misfits. The language of "This or That" and "Land for All" guided student reflections and observations for the CLE.

On the first day we watched the video and students reflected on the "this or that" groups at school. Groups that came up were boys and girls, Korean and foreigner, and good grades and bad grades. When I then asked student groups to consider how we make it more like the "Land for All," they saw that place as somewhere that everyone is the same. For example, a place where everyone is either academically successful or unsuccessful, or where everyone wears glasses or no one wears glasses. The students identified that being part of a group means unity, which to them meant sameness: you are either in that group, or you are in a different group. The groups don't mix.

On day two of the CLE, students went out in pairs around the school during an advisory period to see if they could observe the "this or that" groups they identified on day one. I coached them to do their best to just record what they saw and not any feelings or assumptions about it. Students were excited to get out in the school with clipboards to observe and act as researchers. I let other advisors know in advance that students would be doing this and that they would do their best to be unobtrusive as they observed. Students returned with observational notes capturing what they had seen. These notes included evidence that students in many advisories were gathered in gender affinity groups as well as observations connecting language and student behavior.

In the third and final session of the CLE, students responded to a set of reflection questions (see Appendix L) about their experiences and observations, in particular regarding gendered groups at school. In the reflection questions, I asked what might be good about students being divided by gender and what might be bad about it as well as what students thought we should do next as a research group. Students indicated they would like to see a more united community at school. They felt pressure to stay in separate groups and were eager to find ways to help students feel more comfortable making friends across gender groups. Connections to other identity factors at play, namely nationality and language, also emerged in their reflections.

Over the course of the three-session CLE, students began to move from student participants to student participant researchers. They were identifying trends in the community, gathering data to validate those trends, and analyzing the data they observed. Their reflections led them to a deeper awareness of the dynamics at play in their peer community and to consider where change was possible. Their personal connection to the research questions was clear, and

they were demonstrating true commitment to the PAR process. I felt my hope of creating a space where students saw their voices as equal to mine was becoming a reality.

Synthesizing: Gender Collage and Artist Statement

Informed by their reflections on gender, the group discussions from the This or That CLE and their school-based observations of gender, students created gender identity collages with accompanying artist statements. The collage was based on the prompt: What is gender, and where do you see yourself fitting into the idea of gender? The college and artist statement activity was designed to help students articulate their own gender identity and to explore factors shaping their gender identity at school. I curated an image bank for students to use for their collages if they wished, and they were invited to source their own images online or from magazines. Most of the students who created the collages—not all finished this activity—used the image bank. Students then wrote artist statements to accompany their collages. I asked students to complete the collages independently over about 1 week. We were able to use one session together for students to work on their collages as well. The collage work session provided some less structured space for students to ask questions about the collage and the research process. Students' collages were varied in style and content.

Students who chose to complete a collage presented them to the other student participants for discussion. The discussion allowed students to further articulate their perspectives on gender and factors shaping their gender identity and experiences at school. Students discussed themes of division between genders, different expectations placed on boys versus girls in school and in society, and other factors they felt defined who they were. Some students felt simply making a collage about themselves and their interests provided a window into their gender identity while others created collages more explicitly focused on gender identity.

Student Data Self Analysis: Culminating CLE Part I

The final CLE was designed to give students structured time to analyze their own data, to collaborate to find commonalities in their experiences, and to generate a final *"so what"* statement to summarize their research message. Data from the individual student data analysis component of the final CLE was used for Cycle One while the collaborative components were used for Cycle Two. In the first part of the CLE, students worked individually to construct a data analysis poster based on categories and themes they saw emerging from their personal data set.

Prior to the final CLE, I did a comprehensive analysis of each student's data set. I organized each student's data into a single document and reviewed it, looking for patterns to establish an initial set of categories for each student. I listed each code as it emerged, then looked for how best to group the codes into categories. These categories were meant to help students to initially organize their data, but they were invited to change or modify the categories as they saw fit. I wrote each category on a post-it and placed them on a large piece of flip-chart paper for each student. The structure of the final CLE allowed participants to verify if my analysis of their data matched theirs. As the research was designed as a PAR project, it was important that I not become too attached to my analysis and instead allow participants to guide the final understanding of their data and the meaning behind it.

Once the task was clear, students were eager to engage with their data. Each approached the task slightly differently: some wrote on the posters; others cut out sections of their data; and others incorporated drawing and icons on their posters as well. I spoke individually with each student as they worked to explain where the categories I provided for them had emerged from. I lifted quotes from our interviews or statements they had made in group reflections. By engaging in their self-analysis, the students solidified their position as student participant researchers in a

truly participatory research process. While I had done initial analyses of their data sets, the posters they created were a critical component of the data analysis process. They were able to articulate the categories they felt best reflected their data, identity, and experiences.

Cycle One Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred alongside data collection throughout Cycle One. I organized and reviewed each data set for salient categories. I brought my findings and questions to the student and adult participants for their insights. I produced ongoing reflective memos to capture data collection approaches as well as my personal experiences as the lead researcher. Academic colleagues and my dissertation coach helped me to reflect on the data I gathered and supported me in designing meaningful data collection events. I maintained ongoing reflections after each data collection using a consistent set of prompts: what happened, what went well or needs adjusting, an initial analysis with connections to research questions, and a brief memo about how I was feeling as lead researcher. The reflections were accompanied by raw data from each event. This base of informal data reflections supported cycles of deeper analysis throughout Cycle One.

Data Analysis: Writing the Vignettes

I used Pre-Cycle data, combined with data from Cycle One, to write a set of eight individual student vignettes. The process of writing and rewriting these vignettes allowed for deep analysis of each student's data. The categories I provided to each student for their data self-analysis posters supplied the initial framing of each vignette. The categories students created, combined with the deep analysis required to write each vignette, allowed for adjustment of these categories to better capture core ideas from each student's data. I triangulated each round of analysis with feedback from members of the adult feedback team and by cross-checking against students' self-analysis. The final categories for each student are shown in a Venn diagram that

introduces each vignette. These Venn diagrams changed in form in each round of re-writing the vignettes as I worked to best represent both the student categories and the meaning behind the interplay of categories. As identity and the factors influencing identity are deeply interwoven, it was important to find a way to capture the interplay of factors driving student gender identity and experience.

Note Regarding COVID-19 During Cycle One

COVID-19 was a factor throughout the PAR project, but around the time of the gender collage, March 2021, it began spreading within the sixth-grade class more aggressively. Case counts rose sharply in South Korea as the Omicron variant became dominant. As of early 2022, South Korea had only approved vaccines for those age 12 and older. This meant the majority of the Grade 6 class was unvaccinated. We began to have more than 10 students out at a time getting tested or in quarantine. Government guidelines shifted rapidly; because public Korean schools were on holiday at this time, the international schools were left to serve as trial spaces for various approaches to the pandemic in schools.

This impacted the research because the full student participant team was rarely at school at the same time. Two of the student participants' families decided to pull them out of school to keep them safe for a couple of weeks. Another student researcher's family got COVID-19 one by one, which meant the family quarantined for nearly 4 weeks. It was challenging to keep up with who was in or out, both with regards to students and faculty. From the beginning of the process, I have done my best to be present with the participants, gather insights into their experiences, value their contributions, and move forward with gratitude. This time of COVID-19 put the research process to the test.

PAR Cycle One Summary

Cycle One built on the work done during the Pre-Cycle. Each event was meant to build on what had come before with the goal of digging deeply into factors shaping student experiences of gender identity at an international school. Student reflections on gender identity, one-on-one interviews, student data collection, and individual gender collages were used to inform initial analysis and the creation of a set of categories for each student researcher. The initial categories were changed or validated by each student researcher when they created individual data analysis posters. The complete data set from the Pre-Cycle and Cycle One was used to write a set of eight individual student vignettes (see Chapter 4). The process of writing each vignette generated deep and iterative data analysis, and the vignettes present as full a picture of student data as possible.

At the conclusion of Cycle One, student participants had grown into student participant researchers. Cycle Two included collaborative data events where students interrogate how their experiences align with those of other student researchers. Students also chose to share their learning with their peer community during Cycle Two. These became the goals for the final round of data collection.

PAR Cycle Two

PAR Cycle Two took place from May to June 2022 and was specifically aimed at positioning students as the leaders of their own data analysis and communication of findings. Students engaged in group discussions about experiences of identity. PAR Cycle Two included the group processing aspects of the final CLE and the student-led advisory lesson. Table 5 summarizes PAR Cycle Two data collection events. While the CLE was meant to be our last event as a research team, the students expressed a desire to share their experiences with their

Table 5

PAR Cycle Two Data Collection

Activity	Date	Attendance	Notes
Data Review CLE	May 9, 2022	Student Participant Researchers	Students reviewed their data in a progressively larger group culminating in a final statement capturing their experiences with gender identity at school.
Student Led Advisory Session	June 10, 2022	Student Participant Researchers	A subset of student participant researchers designed and led an advisory session focused on gender identity and experiences at school.

peers. They decided they wanted to design and lead an advisory lesson based on their experiences with gender identity and friendship at school. Their motivation to share their learning led to an expansion of Cycle Two data collection to include their advisory lesson.

Data from the Pre-Cycle and Cycle One had revealed a set of patterns in student experiences of identity. PAR Cycle Two was designed to substantiate those patterns and to build on the analysis work done in the generation of the student vignettes. As this cycle took place at the end of the academic year, it became challenging to engage students in feedback cycles on my analysis. Adult feedback team members continued to support the work logistically and to provide feedback on plans and analysis.

Culminating CLE: Collective Processing of Common Experiences

Students used their individual data analysis posters to support conversations in pairs, groups of four, and in a whole-group discussion of factors shaping gender identity and their experiences at school. In the final stage, the group of eight student participant researchers shared their observations, reflections, and experiences and collaborated to generate a "so what" summary statement directed to their Grade 6 peers that communicated a key idea from their research experience with the school community. Appendix M shows the agenda for the final CLE.

In the first round of the final CLE, students used their data analysis posters in a partner discussion identifying similarities and differences in their experiences of identity. I designed the pairings for students with different perspectives to discuss similarities in their experiences. For example, boys and girls or Korean and non-Korean students discussed their experiences with friendship from their different gendered or cultural perspectives. I assigned one pair, Marc and Tad, with the hope they would identify similarities in their experiences, namely, their experience

as Korean National students with more limited Korean language skills. Each pair of students successfully identified overlaps in their experiences of identity.

After their partner discussions two pairs joined to create groups of four. The groups of four were similarly tasked with discussing experiences of identity. I encouraged them to pay special attention to what made their experiences similar, even if their identities were different from one another. For example, while Max and Jason occupied different cultural and linguistic identities, they both pointed to sports as a space where they made many of their friends. Similarly, while JiWoo and Sophie experience different identities of gender, culture, and language, they identified a common experience of feeling pressure to fit into a set of expectations based on their gender.

For the final stage of the CLE, all eight student researchers sat around one table to discuss their experiences and to craft a summary statement. I left it open for the students to decide *who* the summary statement would be directed towards and *what* they wanted to communicate. As a facilitator, I sought to be as hands-off as possible to ensure the outcomes were driven by the students, not me. Students took turns going around the table sharing their thoughts on factors shaping identity and their experiences at school. The ideas students shared echoed key ideas from their data, for example, that they felt pressure to be friends with their only own gender. After everyone shared, they discussed and drafted their summary statement: *"We want to encourage students to be friends with more different kinds of people and not let things about identity like gender or language create separate groups."* I asked if they wanted to list more or different parts of identity, but all eight agreed language and gender were most important. They were eager to turn their ideas and experiences in the research group into action. I suggested an advisory lesson as an extension activity students could lead with their peers to share their

experiences in the research team. All eight students expressed a desire to design and lead an advisory lesson.

Sharing With the Community: Student-Led Advisory Lesson

At the conclusion of the final community learning exchange (CLE), a number of student researchers were eager to share their experiences with their peer community at SJA Jeju. They decided an advisory lesson would be the best platform. As the CLE was intended as the final event for the research, I left it open to each student to decide if they wanted to participate in designing and leading the advisory lesson. Five of the eight student researchers, Max, Lexa, Sophie, Tad, and Marja, decided they wanted to design and lead the advisory lesson. They met to design the lesson during two advisory sessions with me. I provided them with some activity templates of interactive advisory lessons to choose from. They elected to use the four corners activity template. An example slide for this activity is shown in Figure 12. For each slide projected on the board, advisory students would move to the corner of the room that matched their opinion about the statement in the center. Groups would then discuss why they chose that particular corner of the room.

The students wrote eight statements connected to gender and friendship for the activity. For each slide the statement is in the center, and students move to one of four corners of the room, each corner representing an opinion about the statement. After designing the slides, the students decided they would split up and lead the lesson with their advisory groups because we were getting close to the end of the school year. This allowed them to meet their goal of leading the lesson with two advisory groups before school ended. My advisory and Lindsey's advisory also knew the research group was meeting because it was composed of students from those two advisory groups. I recorded a short reflection with at least one student from each group in the

Figure 12. Example student advisory slide

afternoon after they led the lesson. Details regarding the advisory sessions and student reflections can be found in the findings chapter.

PAR Cycle 2 Summary

Cycle 2 of the PAR project culminated data collection. It was designed to give student participants the opportunity to analyze their data set and reflect on their experiences. Each student generated a data analysis poster, and the group crafted a summary statement directed to their peers about their experience. A subset of student participant researchers designed and led an advisory session with two Grade 6 advisory groups. The student-led session was focused on gender identity and friendship at school. Data analysis from PAR Cycle One was used in crafting the final data events in Cycle Two. A set of patterns emerged based on data from the Pre-Cycle and Cycle One. PAR Cycle Two data allowed me to substantiate the patterns and revealed a set of findings in the form of themes. These findings are deeply influenced by the student researchers' own analysis of their data sets, which is in keeping with PAR methodologies as it approaches research as a collaborative endeavor.

Study Considerations

While the study aimed to hear authentic narratives and experiences from students to illuminate the intersection of identity and experience in a particular school, I entered the study with a set of biases, ideas, and interests that guide the work. As the primary researcher, my positionality, expertise, background knowledge, interests, and biases played a central role in the design and implementation of the work. As a teacher in the school where the research took place, I was tasked with attending to the dual roles I played as educator and researcher. Colleagues in the adult feedback team helped me to reflect on my dual roles and ensure accountability.

Qualitative data collection tools including observations, narrative, interviews, and field notes each come with limitations, many of which are linked to the biases of the researchers reviewing the data (Quierós et al., 2017). Member checks and triangulation are tools to mitigate against researcher bias (Foulger, 2010; Gerdes & Conn, 2001). While I made every attempt to ensure I was being deeply reflective and open to a range of interpretations of the data as it emerged, impartiality is not and cannot be the goal of participatory action research (Kemmis et al., 2014). I worked to mitigate my role as a teacher in data collection events with students. I was mindful of my position and worked to elevate student leadership and voice. The student participant researchers and I used protocols designed to distribute power amongst the group and elevate equity. All members were assured that they could leave the research at any time and that their engagement in the work would not impact their standing in any classes.

Internal Validity

To mitigate my role in the proposed research project and pay attention to potential threats to the credibility of the data, adult feedback team members participated in the planning and in the examination of the data. Inviting more voices into the research process was designed to reduce my biases as a researcher and to access the knowledge of the community, including those closest to the issues being investigated (Guajardo et al., 2016). Member checks, triangulation, and other mechanisms were incorporated into the process consistently to ensure it was a collaborative endeavor targeted at gaining group understandings of experiences and events (Foulger, 2010; Gerdes & Conn, 2001).

External Validity

Existing assets and structures supported the research project. As I had been a member of the research study site for 3 years, I had a foundational understanding of the context and had

established relational trust with members of the community. In addition, prolonged engagement of the researchers and research was achieved through ongoing rounds of data collection throughout the 9 months of the academic year (Gerdes & Conn, 2001). Additional strategies for external validity outlined by Gerdes and Conn (2001) were leveraged in the research design and implementation including triangulation of multiple data sources, member checks, peer debriefing, and persistent observations.

Given the deep ties to context embedded in the qualitative research tools of participatory action research, the findings of this study are not directly transferable to other contexts. The processes and tools of the work are transferable if researchers seek to better understand factors shaping student gender identity in their learning contexts. Therefore, transferability comes with the process, not the products (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Leveraging the process of discovery may help others generate results that are relevant to their local settings and illuminate a research methodology best suited to the pursuit of better understandings of student gender identity, agency, and belonging in international middle schools and other learning spaces (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Confidentiality and Ethics

The participants in the study were a combination of colleagues and students who demonstrated readiness to reflect on student agency and experience of identity and voice in a particular international middle school. Consent forms for all adults involved in the research as well as assent forms from all students further ensured protected and informed engagement by all members (see Appendices C, E, F). By seeking out students I taught and connecting with colleagues with whom I had a positive professional relationship, the research study was grounded in relational trust and mutual support. Such a grounding facilitated honesty and

ongoing feedback. All members of the adult and student participants groups knew their engagement was voluntary, could stop at any time with no impact on students' standing in classes, and that all data remained confidential. Parents of student members signed consent forms and were informed about the research process. Open parent communication also gave students another outlet for communication if they chose to cease involvement in the project.

Collegial members of the adult feedback group signed consent forms approved by East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (ECU IRB) (see Appendix F). All students volunteered to participate after hearing the assent scrip approved by ECU IRB (see Appendix E). Adult members were also part of data analysis to verify student data protections.

Data security and confidentiality were maintained through measures including password protected data files, locking away hard copy data, and providing copies to participants for transparency and reflection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Any identifiable data including documentation of individuals will be destroyed at the conclusion of the research.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outline the research design and methodology used to answer the overarching research question: How can understanding the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school? Participatory action research methodology combined with community learning exchanges, informed by improvement science inquiry cycles, provided the basis of the research methodology (Bryk et al., 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013). Through a Pre-Cycle and two subsequent cycles of data collection, I gathered a variety of data through community learning exchanges, reflective memos, field notes, and student interviews. Each round of data collection was informed by the previous

findings as data was coded, member checked, and reflected upon. Limitations of the study design along with questions of internal and external validity are examined in this chapter along with steps designed to ensure confidentiality. Seeking out perspectives closest to the research questions, namely students, is purposeful as it allowed for the most informed interpretation of the research topic. Positioning students as participant researchers provided an in-depth look at factors shaping student experiences of gender identity and belonging at an international middle school.

CHAPTER 4: STUDENT DATA VIGNETTES

In the PAR project I investigated factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity to support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school. Data from the Pre-Cycle, collected in the fall of 2021, and from Cycle One, collected from January to April 2022, are presented here in the form of student vignettes. Details regarding data collection can be found in Chapter 3. Each vignette highlights an individual student participant researcher and presents categories which emerged from each student's data set, including their self-analysis. The eight student participant researchers were introduced in the Chapter 3 and summarized in Table 6.

The students' insights into their own experience and identity provide the most important data relevant to the research questions. Student data is presented in the form of individual student vignettes. Each of the eight vignettes focuses on a single student researcher and is based on data from the Pre-Cycle, Cycle One, and each student's own self-analysis. I organized each vignette around a set of categories I identified from student data. Student's own data analysis guided the final categories in each vignette. The iterative process of writing each vignette also aided my analysis as I dug deeper into each student's data in search of categories, patterns, and connections, enabling me to uncover a set of themes that are subsequently outlined in the findings chapter.

Student Vignettes

The categories for each student vignette were initially based on my coding of each students' data prior to the final CLE. The final categories as presented are based on a combination of my own analysis and each student's analysis as found on the data analysis poster they created during the final CLE. Each vignette includes the student-researcher's self-analysis

Table 6

Student Participant Researchers Summaries

Name	Gender	Nationality	First Language
Max	M	American	English
Marja	M	Canadian	English
Lexa	F	American	English
Sophie	F	Colombian	Spanish
Tad	M	South Korean 7 Canadian	English
Marc	M	South Korean	English
Jason	M	South Korean	Korean
JiWoo	M	South Korean	Korean

and their data summary poster. A visualization of the overlapping nature of the data categories accompanies each vignette. The process that supported the development of the vignettes is outlined in the Chapter 3.

Max

Max is American and was born in California. He moved to South Korea in 2018 with his parents and two younger sisters. He was in third grade; his sisters were 2 and 5 years old. His parents' jobs as teachers at SJA Jeju brought the family abroad. English is the family's first language, and SJA Jeju is their first international school.

Based on my initial review of Max's data, I provided him with the categories of *friendship, family, gender,* and *sports* for this data analysis. (A photo of Max's data analysis chart paper is shown in Figure 13.) Max immediately used my suggested categories to divide his sheet of paper into four quadrants. He began his data analysis process by pulling key pieces from his data and placing them in the relevant quadrants. When he finished quickly, I encouraged him to add details and to find examples that may connect across quadrants. He looked back through his data and placed a few pieces of data on the lines between the quadrants showing how the data connected with more than one of the categories.

I refined the categories for Max's data based on what Max generated in his data analysis and my review of Max's complete data set. The new categories are shown in Figure 14 and are: *friendship and language, family, sports and his father,* and *gender.* The new categories emerged from the codes generated from Max's data analysis and all of the data he generated as a student researcher.

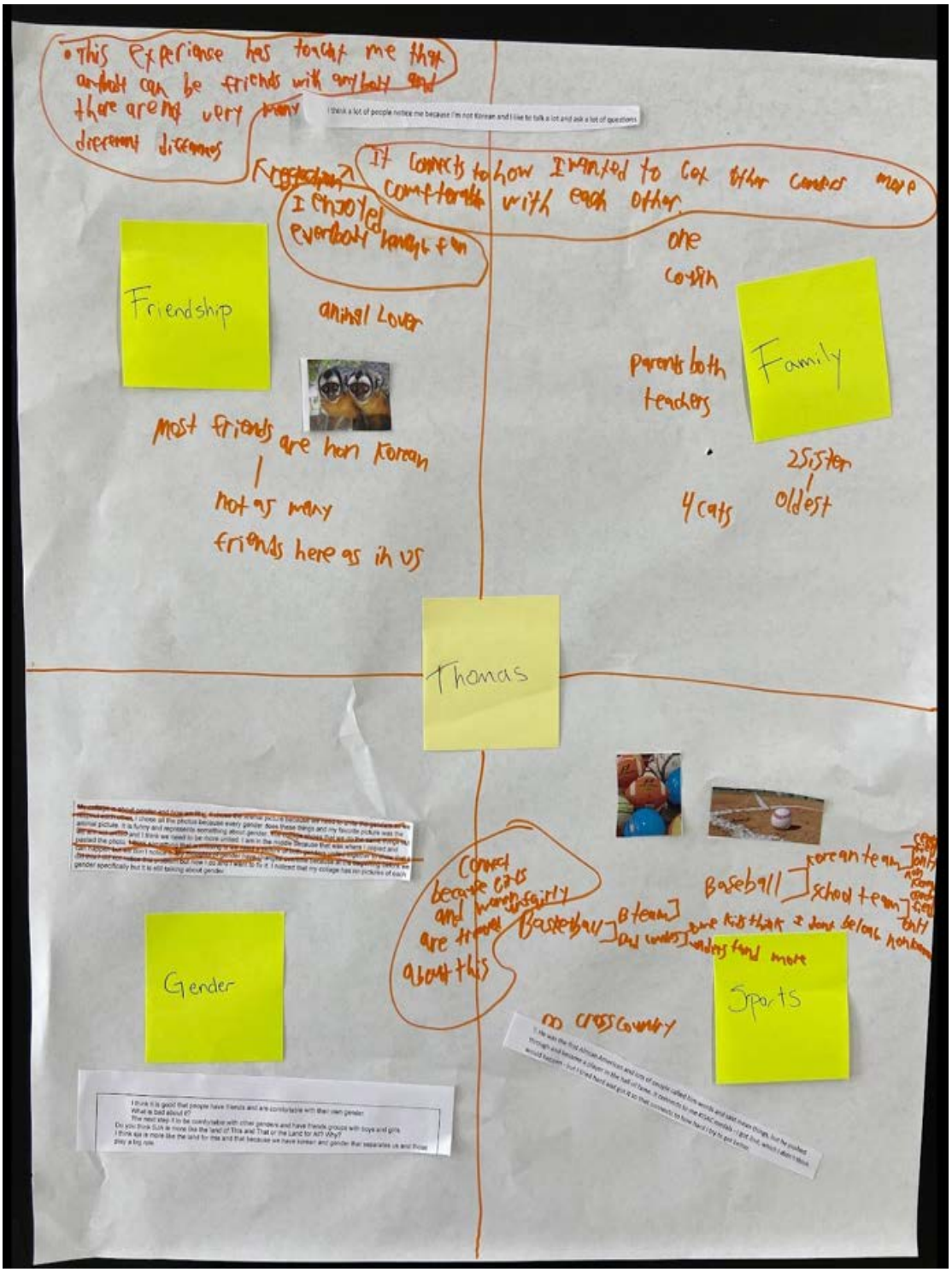


Figure 13. Max data analysis chart (May 9, 2022).

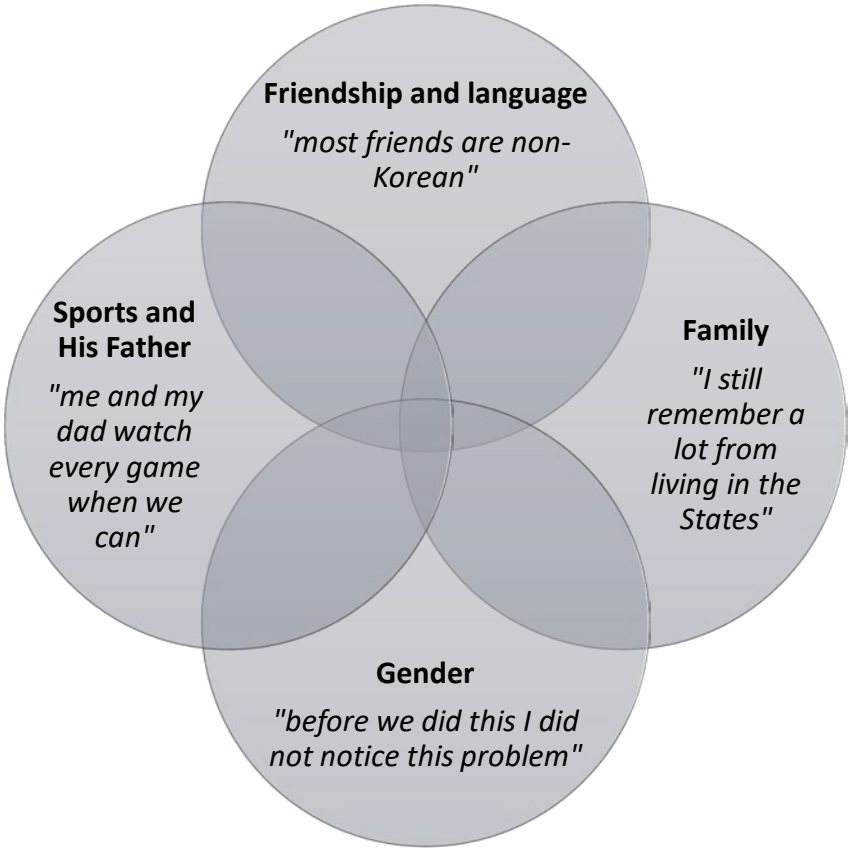


Figure 14. Max data categories.

Friendship and Language

Friendship and identity emerged as important for each member of the student research team. For Max, the interplay of friendship and the languages spoken by his peers came up repeatedly. The interplay between friendship and language prompted me to adjust the category from *friendship* to *friendship and language.*

In the friendship quadrant, Max wrote, “not as many friends here as in the US,” “most friends are non-Korean,” and “animal lover” (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In his data, Max pointed to challenges to building friendships at school in South Korea and to the difference in closeness of his friendships between those in the States and those in Korea. Language differences emerged as a key challenge to friendship for Max, while sharing a common language and having lots of quality time together supported his close friendships.

Max said that being non-Korean presented challenges to building friendships with local students. In his peer interview, Max said, “In Korea I'm one of the few people who isn’t Korean, and I don't feel included in everything” (Max, peer interview, October 19, 2021). Being an English speaker is part of Max’ identity. This sometimes left him feeling vulnerable when students spoke English as a joke. In our interview he spoke about his response to different ways students use language:

> Sometimes it is very annoying because people say things in English just to be funny with their friends, and I find that annoying. It is annoying because they are making fun of English because they know I speak that, and they can just speak Korean, and I can't speak that. (Max, interview, January 20, 2022)

While students in this example may not have been directing the jokes at Max, he felt vulnerable

as an English speaker who did not also understand Korean. This sense of vulnerability presented an additional challenge to developing friendships with local students.

Despite the language barriers, Max felt he had developed stronger friendships in Korea than he had in the States. In our interview he said, “I have better friends here because I can play with them every day and see them more” (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). However, as Max pointed out in his data analysis, the friends he did have in Korea were primarily non-Korean (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Max’s majority non-Korean friend group may have been driven by how his peer community used language in social settings. The pervasive use of Korean in unstructured settings at school was a component of how students experienced personal identity and interpersonal relationships. This dynamic shows the relevance of *friendship and language* in how Max experiences his identity.

Family

Family was also important to Max’s identity and sense of self. In the family section of the data analysis chart, Max wrote: “one cousin, parents both teachers, 4 cats, 2 sisters – oldest” (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In his identity chart, shown in Figure 15, Max identifies his sisters and cousin as key parts of who he was.

Max’s data revealed family heritage as key to his identity. On his identity chart, Max highlighted missing his cousin, who lives in the US (Max, identity chart, October 14, 2021). In our interview Max talked about his eagerness to reconnect with family in the States. Max said, “I’m excited for sports, family, food, back in the States. I still remember a lot from living in the States, so that felt like where I am from” (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). As the oldest

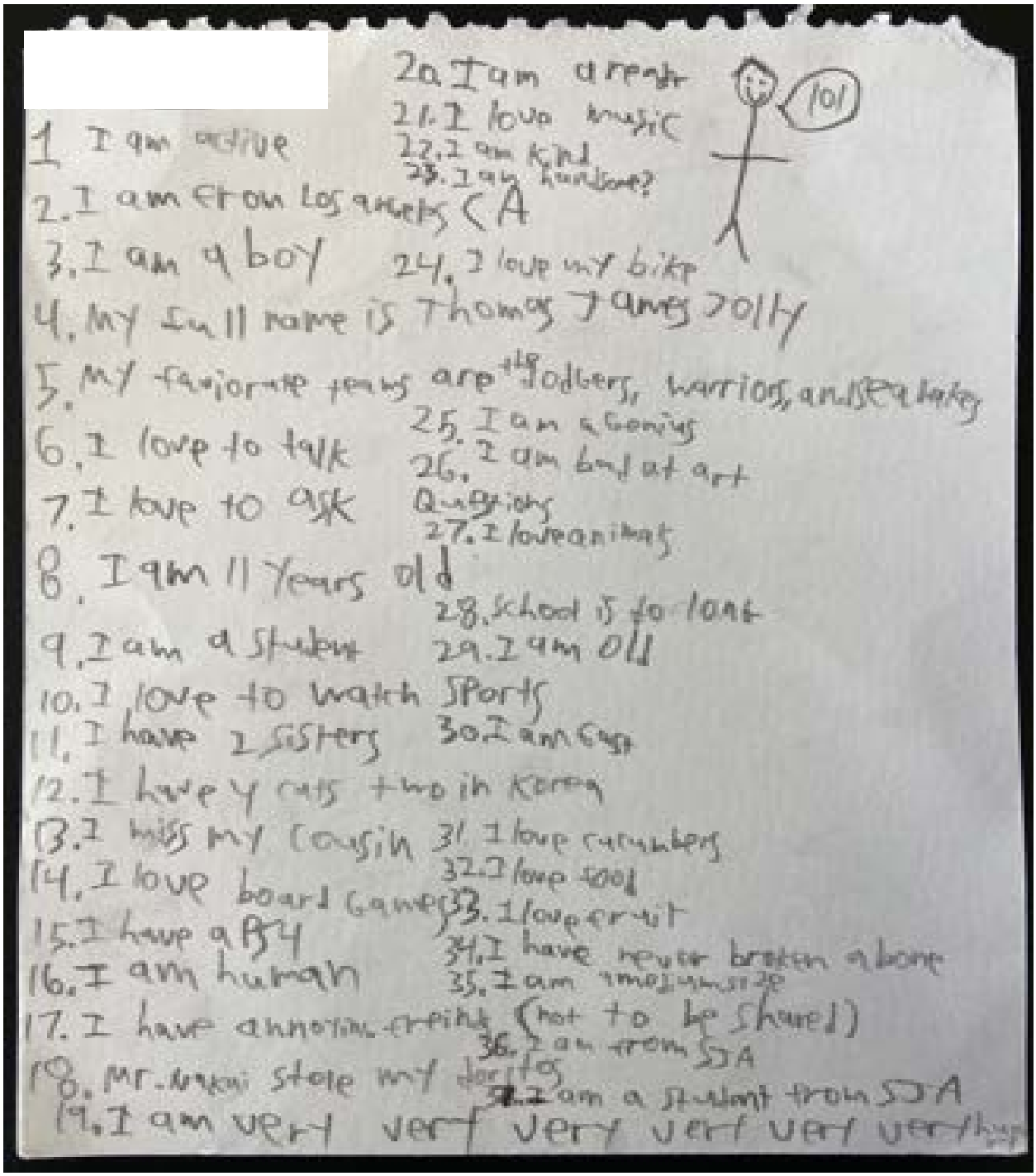


Figure 15. Max identity chart (October 14, 2021).

sibling, Max held early memories on behalf of all of them. He said, “I still remember my house and everything, but my sisters don’t remember very much” (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). Max associated America with family history, and it is a key component of his sense of self.

Max connected the family and friend quadrants of his data analysis chart, writing, “It connects to how I wanted to get other genders more comfortable with each other” (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). While he struggled with a sense of difference as one of a few students from outside Korea, he worked hard to belong, stating, “A lot of people notice me because I’m not Korean, and I like to talk a lot and ask a lot of questions” (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). This effort to belong and make friends is supported by his family who also support a sense of community within the school.

Sports and His Father

Max’s data revealed sports to be central to his identity throughout his life. Sports and athletics play a large role in his friendships and family connections, in particular with his father. The frequent combination of sports and his father in Max’s data prompted me to change the category from *sport* to *sports and his father*.

Max drew charts in the sports quadrant of his data analysis paper (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). These charts are recreated in Figures 16 and 17 and show the sports he played, the positions he played, and details about his experiences within each sport. Figure 16 shows the chart Max created about his basketball experiences. Attached to basketball it says “B Team,” which is the team he played on at SJA Jeju, and “Dad Coaches.” (Max’s father coached Max’s team at SJA.) Branching out from “Dad Coaches,” Max wrote, “Some kids think I don’t belong because I’m not Korean” and “understand more” (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

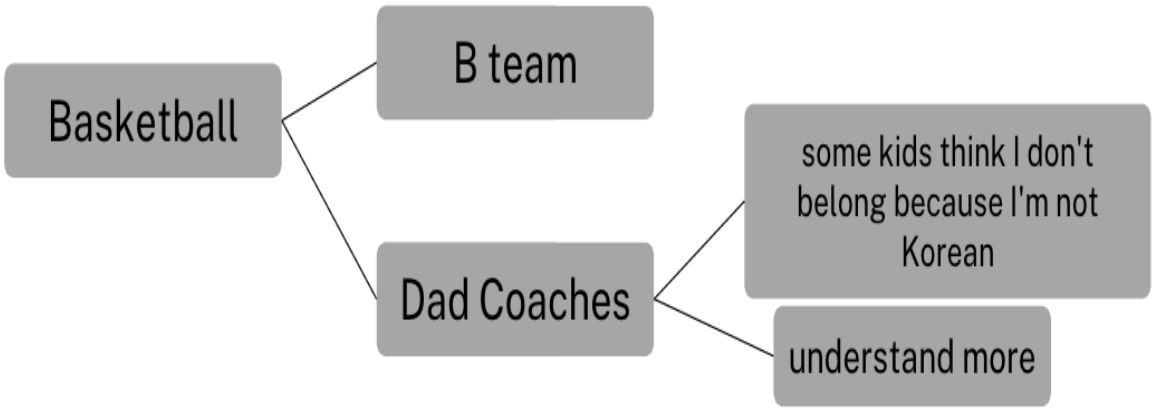


Figure 16. Basketball chart from the sports quadrant of data analysis chart.

Max's basketball chart provided a window into his experiences with sports. In particular, it showed his feelings of being excluded by Korean peers and the importance of his father to the experience.

In addition to the basketball chart, Max created a chart about his experiences with baseball in the sports quadrant of his data analysis. Figure 17 shows the baseball chart. Branching off from "baseball," Max wrote "Korean Team" and "School Team" to show the two different baseball programs he was involved with while at SJA Jeju. Branching out from "Korean Team" are two boxes, "center fielder," his position, and "non-Korean." Connected to the "school team" box is "center fielder", his position, and "non-Korean" (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Max was a center fielder on both teams, and his identity as the rare non-Korean was consistent as well. Max identified with being an athlete, but in Korea this part of his identity also intersected with his identity as different from those around him.

Max and his father shared a common love for sports, which they share through playing and watching sports together. Max said,

> Me and my dad watch every game when we can, and sometimes my sisters watch too … I think it is fun and interesting. I like to play, so I like to learn and get better by watching. Dad likes to watch it with me, and he played too, so he likes to watch good players. (Max, interview, January 20, 2022)

Sharing an ongoing love for sports with his father created a consistent throughline in Max's life as he moved to different countries. On his identity chart, Figure 15, Max listed his favorite sports teams, "The Dodgers, The Warriors, and Seahawks," three teams from the west coast of the United States (Max, identity chart, October 14, 2021). Sports represented a set of experiences in the States, in Korea, and with his father that were central to how Max thought about his identity.

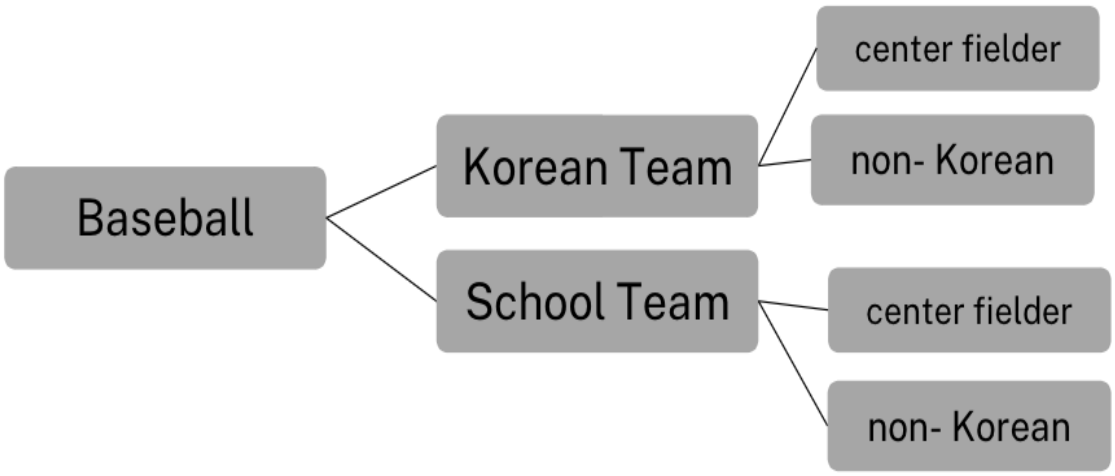


Figure 17. Baseball chart from sports quadrant of data analysis.

Max found role models in sports as well. He brought in a signed Dodgers World Series baseball to our interview and talked about Jackie Robinson, the first African American player in the majors. Jackie Robinson's persistence resonated with Max as an athlete: "I tried hard [in my cross-country race] and got [second place], so that connects to how hard I try to get better" (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). The values found in athletics of effort, hard work, and persistence resonated with Max as meaningful to his own lived experiences. Jackie Robinson seemed to capture the power of persisting through struggle despite difference.

Sports were central to Max's passions, his sense of self, and his sense of connection to the community in Korea. The mutual love of sports he shared with his father created consistency across the places he lived. This supported a cohesive identity as a sports lover and athlete for Max. At school in Korea, sports were an important part of Max' social experience, but were also a space in which he noticed his position as a non-Korean member of the community.

Gender

I provided the category of *gender* to all student researchers as it was my initial entry point into discussions of identity. Intersections emerged in Max's data between gender and other categories, in particular the categories of friendship and sports. Friend groups were largely drawn along gendered lines, and sports further reinforced gendered groups. Discussions of gender revealed Max's awareness of gendered patterns and his eagerness to support connections across different genders to create more inclusive groups.

Friendships defined gendered identity; that is, boys befriended boys because they tended to have similar interests. To Max, gender identity was expressed through friendships "because most people's friends are of the same gender" (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). With regards to gender at school, Max said, "There are more boys at school, and they get in trouble more. I

think they feel like they are in charge and can do whatever they want whenever they want" (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). Without gender, Max thought friend groups would be more inclusive. In a school with no genders, Max thought that "groups of friends would be bigger, and everybody would treat each other equally" (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). To Max, friendship connections were built on a shared set of values based on gender identity.

Sports tended to define and reinforce the point that boys seek the company of others similar to them. Max discussed the connection between gender and sports in our interview. He used the female volleyball coach as an example:

> In volleyball most of the kids [boys] were unsure about [the female] coach at first…I think kids would have messed around more if she was a man because they would have felt they could express their feelings more because they would be the same gender. They would feel like they wouldn't get in trouble as much because they know them more because they are the same gender. (Max, interview, January 20, 2022)

Here Max expressed the role gender can play in defining relationships. Boy players would have had more ease in interaction with a male coach because they would have a shared identity based on gender.

Max also pointed to gender inequity in sports. Between the gender and sports quadrants of his data analysis chart, Max wrote, "It connects because girls and women are treated unfairly" (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In his reflection on what life would be like if he changed genders, Max wrote, "People would tell me to like art and not play sports" (Max, gender swap reflection, December 2, 2021). Sports, as a gendered space, reinforced gender inequity.

While boys and girls sought the company of their same gender, Max felt there was a need for boys and girls to be more united. He highlighted his desire for unity in his gender collage,

shown in Figure 18, and his artist statement, which he included in the gender quadrant of his data analysis. He underlined parts of the artist statement as shown below:

> My collage is about gender and how we fit in. I chose the animal picture because we need to unite the genders so we respect each other. I chose all the photos because every gender does these things, and my favorite picture was the animal picture. It is funny and represents something about gender. The collage shows that we do the same things, but we are not united, and I think we need to be more united. I am in the middle because that was where I copied and pasted the photo. I think something that is missing is we need a picture of both genders united together to show that it can happen, but we don't notice it. My thoughts of gender have changed overtime because at the beginning before we did this, I did not notice this problem, but now I do, and I want to fix it. I noticed that my collage has no pictures of each gender specifically, but it is still talking about gender. (Max, gender collage artist statement, March 3, 2022)

Max saw people as connected but not united. He wanted to bring people together and felt he had a clear sense of the issues dividing genders after being part of the research group. He wanted to "fix it" once he saw it.

Max experienced the unity he sought in the research group. In his reflection on being part of the research group, Max wrote, "This experience has taught me that anyone can be friends with anybody, and there aren't very many different differences" and "I enjoyed everybody having fun" (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Figure 18. Max gender collage (March 3, 2022).

Marja

Marja was born in Canada. In 2017, he moved to South Korea with his older brother and parents to attend SJA Jeju. English was the primary language spoken at home although Marja's father's first language is Spanish.

Based on my analysis of Marja's data, I provided the categories: *gender, interests,* and *friendship* for Marja's data analysis. Marja split his data analysis paper, shown in Figure 19, into four quadrants using the three categories I provided. He seemed to add a fourth quadrant as well, but this area does not have a title. On the day when students engaged in self-reflection and data analysis, Marja modeled his data analysis chart similarly to that of his close friend, Max. Marja reviewed his data packet and wrote key ideas on his data analysis chart but did not include specific quotes or items from the data itself. The images he cut and added to the data analysis chart were from his gender collage.

Marja's complete data set illustrated his discomfort, fears, and insecurities connected to not fitting in with peers in the school community alongside the joy he found in the relationships he cherished. Reviewing Marja's data, including his self-analysis, prompted me to adjust the *interest* category for Marja's data to *interests & insecurities.* The interplay of these categories is shown in Figure 20.

Interests and Insecurity

Marja's interests provided a window into his lived experiences. His interests, including gaming, sports, and animals, appeared throughout his data and provided an entry point into conversations about community and connection as well as his feelings of isolation and insecurity.

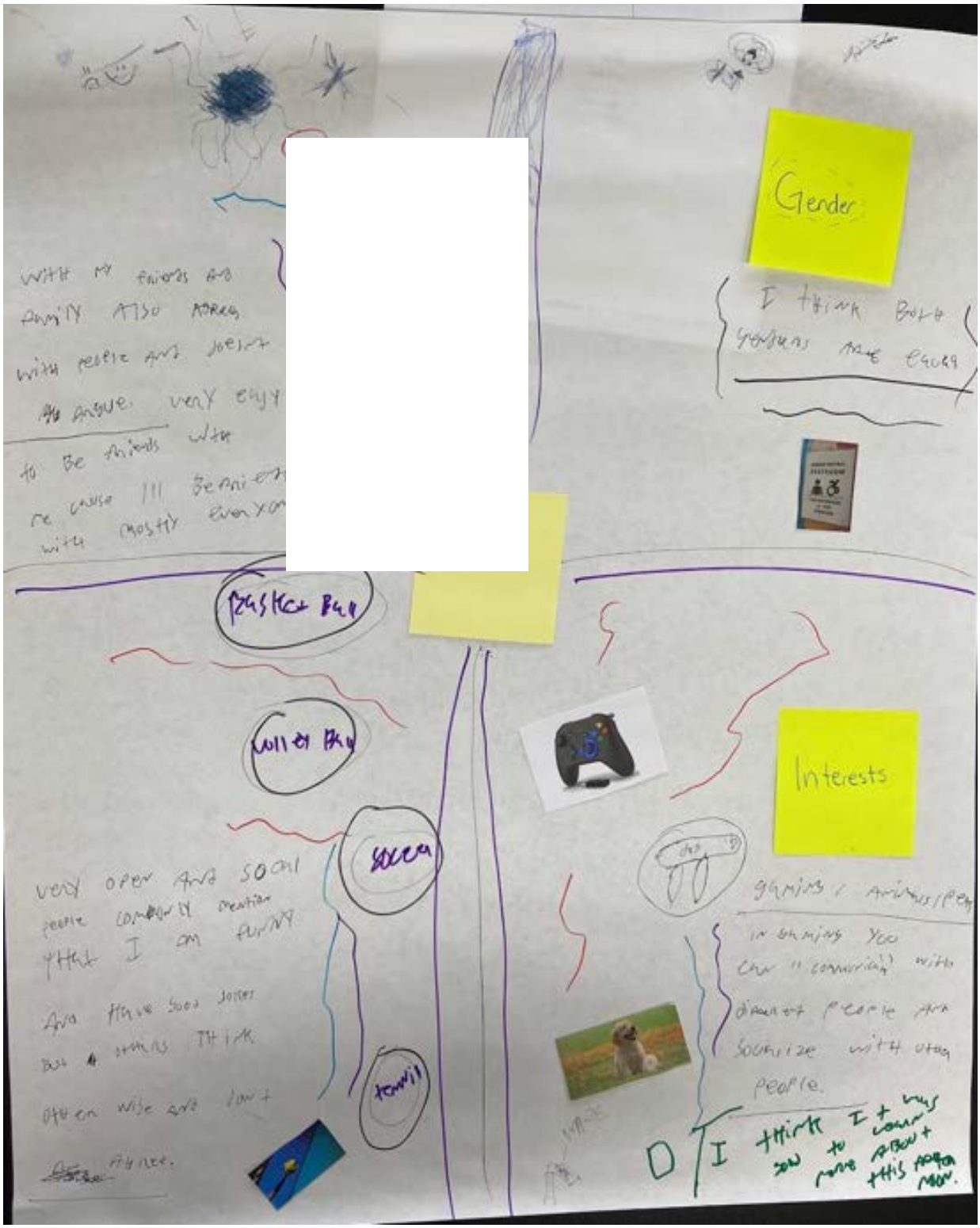


Figure 19. Marja data analysis poster (May 9, 2022).

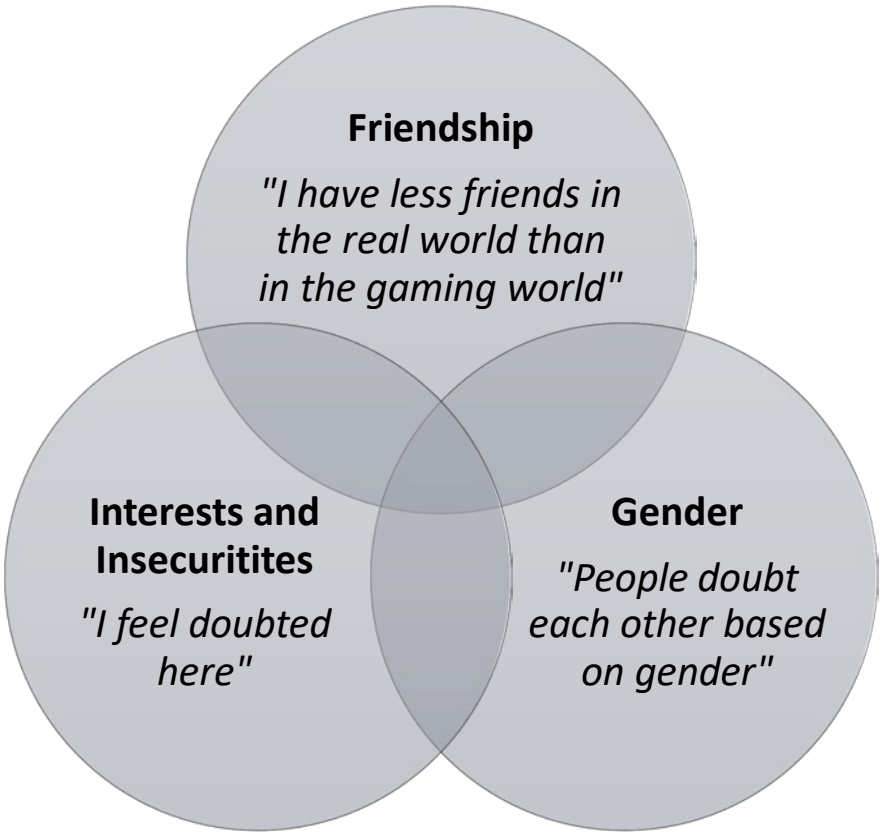


Figure 20. Marja data categories.

Gaming was a meaningful part of Marja's life. He glued an image of a game controller in the *interest* quadrant of his data analysis chart and wrote, "In gaming you can communicate with different people and socialize with other people" (Marja, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). He brought a similar controller to our interview as an item to represent his identity: "I brought my controller because my passion is gaming. My controller is one of my most valuable things to me" (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022). Marja found community and friendship in the gaming world, stating, "I have less friends in the real world than in the gaming world where I have more friends. I like the gaming world more than the real world" (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022).

Marja divided his world into two, the gaming world and the real world. In the real world he struggled with feelings of self-doubt and isolation. He felt the real-world community valued skills that he didn't have. Marja's expressed his feeling of not fitting in at school saying,

> People are recognized at school based on their skills, like being good at sports or good at art or music or math. I am in the middle. More people talk to those people or give them more attention than other people. So, the best student in 6th grade gets the most recognition. I think some people think I'm good at stuff, but some people don't. (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022)

Marja pointed to the influence academic success has on social position, which is an important social construct in South Korea. As a teacher, I saw a strong desire from students to excel in earning the highest grades or having a particular area of expertise like art or music. These students were well liked and often central members of friend groups. Marja felt diminished within this value system, not seeing himself as successful by this definition.

Friendship

While Marja struggled to feel valued, he had friendships he cherished at school. He

highlighted successful relationships in the *friendship* quadrant of his data analysis chart. In this quadrant he wrote, “Very easy to be friends with me because I’ll be friends with mostly everyone” (Marja, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). He also wrote two names, MAX and LEXA, in large print in this quadrant (Marja, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Marja saw himself as a good friend and could point to meaningful friendships.

Marja had friends but struggled with feelings of isolation in Korea. Marja told his peer interview partner Max, “In Korea I feel that people don’t invite me to stuff, and it is mainly Korean” (Marja, peer interview notes, October 19, 2021). In my interview with Marja, I asked him if he felt friendships would be as challenging if he were in Canada. He replied,

> I would have a lot more friends because here most people speak Korean all the time. In Canada they speak English, so I would be able to communicate better. The common language would make it easier to make friends. It felt unfair when everyone around me is speaking Korean because I don't know what they are saying. (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022)

Korean was the dominant language during unstructured time at school, which often left non-Korean speakers feeling isolated from their peers. In an English-speaking context, Marja imagines he would be more included and have more friends.

Marja’s close friends were non-Korean speakers who also are all in a Korean as a Foreign Language (KFL) class. Friendship, language, and academics all played a role in the KFL classroom. For Marja, KFL made him feel vulnerable with his friends. In our interview he said, “I feel doubted in KFL because I’m not that good at Korean. Other students have been here for less time, but they are better at it than me” (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022). Marja was the only student in the KFL class who has been at SJA Jeju since the first year. His weaker Korean

as compared to his peers made him feel insecure and put pressure on his friendships with other students in the class.

One's confidence and sense of belonging in a community can fluctuate based on many factors. Pieces of Marja's data pointed to feelings of isolation and insecurity while other data highlighted his confidence and strong relationships. This variety speaks to authenticity in the data, and my presentation of his data aims to paint as accurate a picture as possible. In an unlabeled quadrant of his data analysis, Marja wrote, "very open and social. People commonly mention that I am funny and have good jokes, but others think otherwise and don't agree" (Marja, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Marja's data pointed to a desire for belonging which, while he didn't feel it all the time, did occur at times.

Gender

Gender was provided as a category for all student researchers as it was my initial entry point for discussions of identity. Intersections emerged in Marja's data between gender, trust, interests, and belonging in the community. Friend groups were largely single-gender with gendered groups sharing common interests and engaging in similar activities. Marja saw people making assumptions about one another based on gender, which caused division in the school community. He felt the division between genders was negative and could be reduced if people extended trusting invitations to one another.

People make assumptions about a person's skills based on their gender. Assumptions then drive groups further apart, both in the gaming world and in the real world. Gaming is a boy-dominated space in which Marja saw girls being pushed to the margins. Marja spoke about gender dynamics in gaming saying, "A lot more boys play than girls. I have some friends online who are girls. A lot of people think they are better at games than girls, but there are a lot of good

girl gamers" (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022). In his gender switch reflection, Marja identified similar dynamics in the real world. He wrote, "If I were a girl and people wanted one more person for a game, they wouldn't let me play because they would assume I'm bad at stuff" (Marja, gender switch, December 2, 2021).

Marja thought people would be more trusting, more connected, and more equal without such gender bias. In our interview, I asked Marja what he thought school would be like if there were no genders.

> I think everyone would be friends with everyone. No doubting or making other people feel bad based on skills. People doubt each other based on gender. Boys doubt girls' gaming abilities, and girls doubt boys' ability to make a speech or dance. (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022)

Removing gender would in turn remove a set of expectations and doubts people place on others. Marja expected a genderless community to be more trusting and inclusive.

Invitation and trust are two tools Marja felt would help to bridge the gap between single-gender groups. Marja highlighted the potential power of invitation in our interview:

> If boys invited girls to play, then maybe they would want to play, and if girls invited boys, then maybe they would want to join. I think people think if you invite the other group to join, then you will do worse. But there are different ways to think about it. If you doubt people, it isn't fair to not invite them. People don't invite each other into their groups because boys hang out with boys and girls hang out with girls. (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022)

Marja believed trusting one another would increase inclusion in the community.

Marja desired a community in which people were valued and treated equally regardless

of gender. In the *gender* quadrant of his data analysis chart, Marja glued an image of a gender-neutral bathroom sign from his gender collage (see Figure 21) and wrote, "I think both genders are equal" (Marja, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In his gender collage artist statement, Marja wrote,

> My collage is about gender and how everyone is different and similar. I chose the gaming controller picture because I want to connect gamers of all genders together. My goal for my college was trying to include as much of all genders as possible. I learned that both genders do the same thing, but genders don't really do what they like together if they get judged. (Marja, gender collage artist statement, March 3, 2022)

Marja wants to use his interest in gaming as a tool to connect different genders.

Lexa

Lexa was born in the United States. In 2019 she moved to South Korea with her older brother and parents to attend SJA Jeju. Her parents both worked for the school. The family moved from Colombia where her parents worked at an international school. Lexa said the U.S. did not feel like her home anymore. In our interview she said, "The only thing that makes [the US.] feel like home is because my family is there. Home felt like where I am with my family" (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022).

Based on my initial analysis of Lexa's data, I provided the categories *gender, friendship, expectations,* and *leadership* for her data analysis. During the final CLE, Lexa was proud of her data and excited by the opportunity to look back at it and organize it on the page. She started building a web on her data analysis chart. She cut quotes from her data, wrote key ideas on the paper, and used lines and colors to connect the different categories. Lexa's data analysis chart

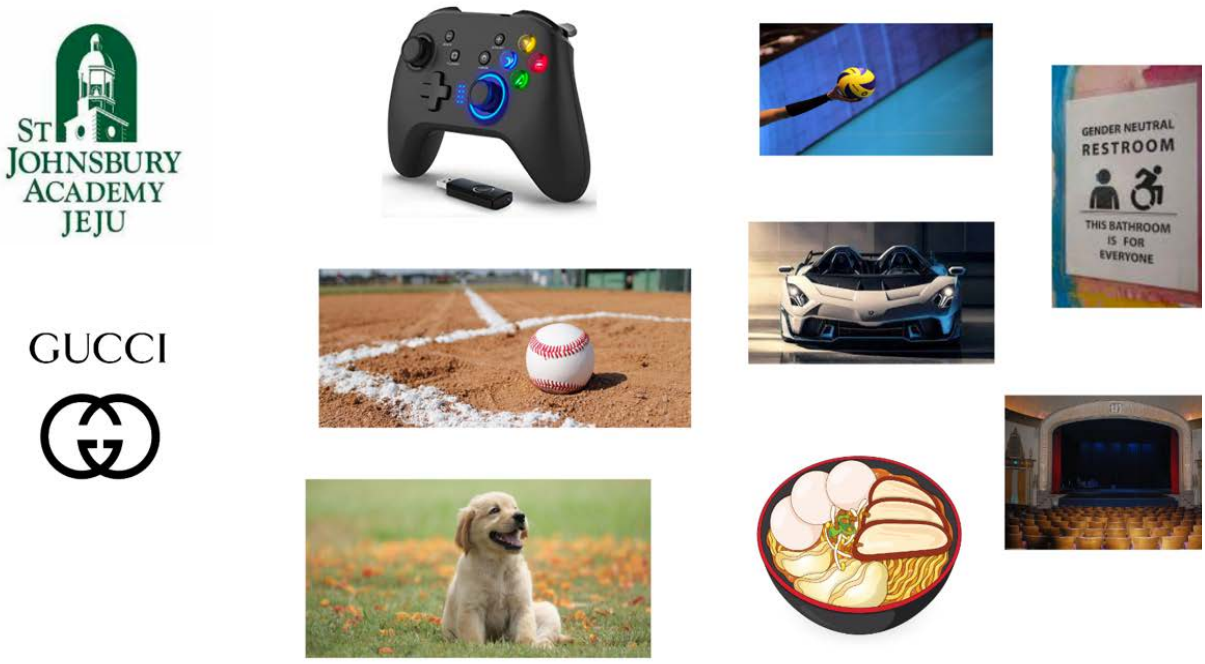


Figure 21. Marja gender collage (March 3, 2022).

(see Figure 22) shows how she visualized the interconnectivity of her categories. While working, she remarked she was proud of how eloquent she had been.

Based on further review of Lexa's complete data set, I combined the categories *expectations* and *leadership.* Figure 23 shows the overlapping nature of the three categories. Gender played a key role in how Lexa thought about identity, leadership, and friendship. Lexa was passionate about gender equity and eager to see more space for women leaders around the world. She was proud of her gender identity, her enthusiastic personality, and of how she participated in community, but at the same time she felt othered by her gender. She desired to be part of a more gender inclusive friend group but could not access one at SJA Jeju.

Leadership and Expectations

Lexa was frustrated by pervasive gender biases against women. To Lexa, women are not seen as leaders. She felt women would perform well in leadership positions and would even outperform their male counterparts. On a line connecting the *leadership* and *expectations* sections of her data analysis chart, Lexa wrote, "People don't expect women to lead" (Lexa, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). She also cut a quote from our interview to add to her data chart about her frustrations regarding the lack of women leaders, especially in the U.S. She said,

> I feel like no one saw women as leaders. I feel like it's not fair that women couldn't vote or do this or that. I feel like if the[re] had already been a woman president, for example in the U.S., then the world would probably be a lot different… I see the men who are leading feeling like they are in power so they can do whatever they want, but the women actually understand why they are leading and that they need to do something good while they are leading. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa saw historic and ongoing oppression against women sidelining people who would lead with

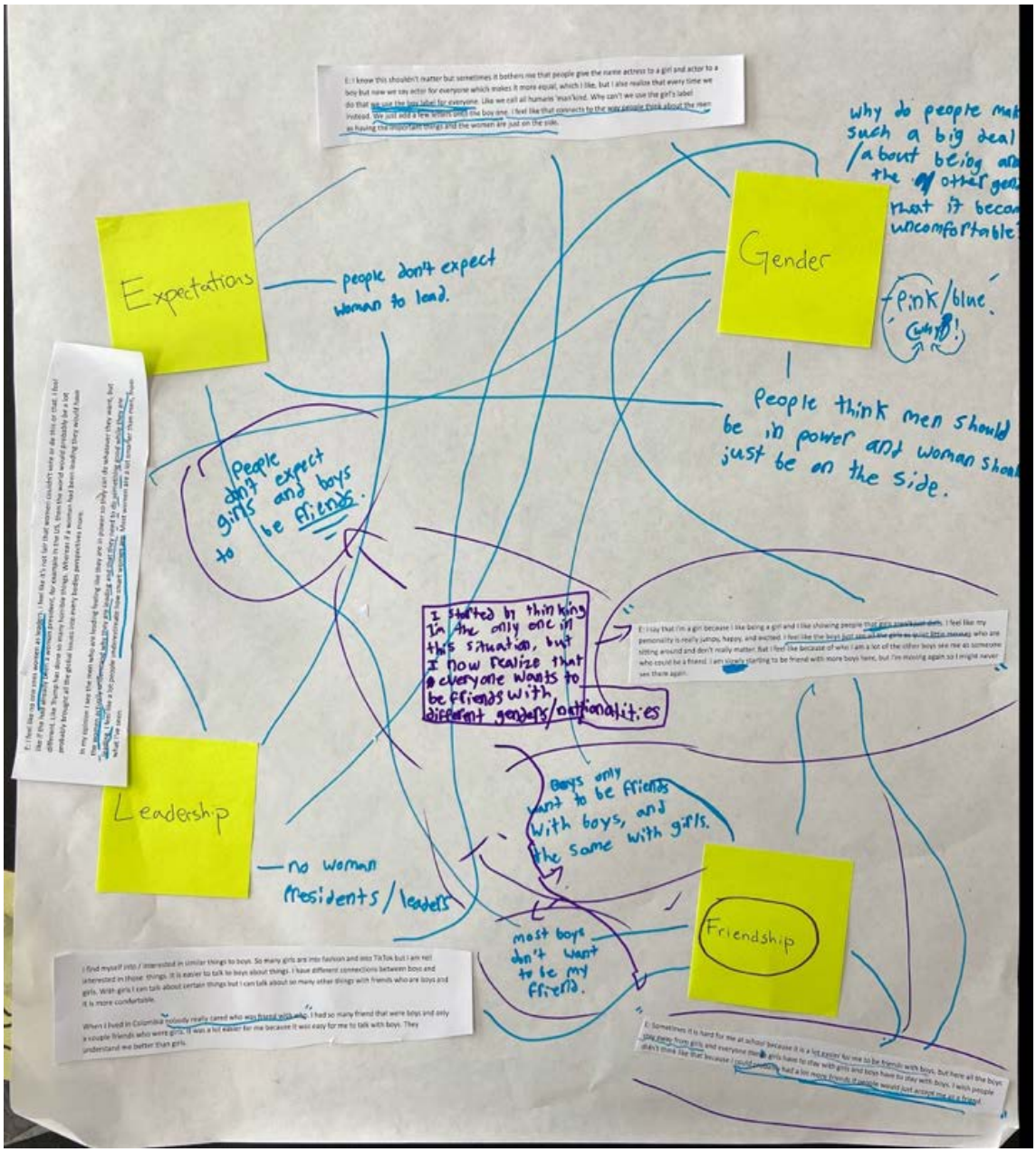


Figure 22. Lexa data analysis chart (May 9, 2022).

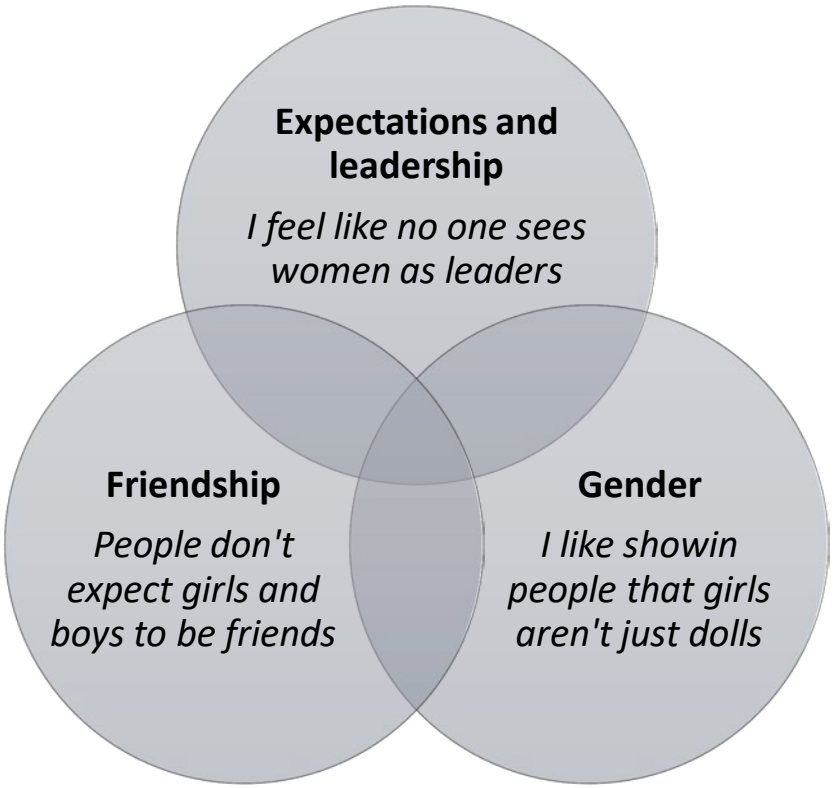


Figure 23. Lexa data categories.

compassion. She saw many male leaders as entitled and power-hungry while she anticipated women would stay focused on their responsibilities as leaders. In our interview she identified her female role models saying,

> There are women who are so smart like Malala or Frida, but people think that because you are a woman you just can't do that. A long time ago people would call smart women witches, but really they are just smart people. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa highlighted how historic and ongoing bias against women continues to push them to the margins and keep them out of leadership positions. Although Lexa came to the research group with clear opinions about justice and feminism, her ideas continued to evolve through her involvement. She wrote about her changing ideas on gender in her gender collage artist statement:

> My thoughts about gender have changed because when I was little, I didn't really realize that girls are mistreated. But when I got older and learned about gender equality, I realized that women aren't treated fairly and that I might never be accepted by men. (Lexa, gender collage artist statement, March 3, 2022)

Lexa's eyes were open to the historic and ongoing injustices against women, and she worried she might never be accepted by men. While Lexa was keenly aware of gender oppression, she was also proud of her gender identity as an enthusiastic and optimistic young woman.

Gender

Lexa generated data rich with perspectives and insights into the role gender played in her identity. She saw gender as culturally constructed and based on society's expectations attached to dress, history, and behavior. Lexa felt she has been closer with boys than with girls in the past but found it difficult to make friends with boys now. She was proud of her identity as an

enthusiastic, talkative, girl who showed a different way of being a girl than was the norm. Lexa wished friend groups were more inclusive of boys and girls together.

In the gender area of her data analysis chart, Lexa wrote, “People think men should be in power and women should just be on the side” and “Why do people make such a big deal about being around the other gender that it becomes uncomfortable?” She also wrote “pink/blue” with arrows pointing to “why?” (Lexa, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). To show connections, Lexa drew lines from *gender* to each of her categories: *friendship*, *leadership*, and *expectations*.

To Lexa, gender was culturally displayed through clothing and the colors society assigns to each gender.

> Genders don't matter, it's just gender…. [a woman] is a version of a person that is like every other person or creature. They just look different, or people identify them with so many things that aren't really true. Like, only women wear dresses, or pink is for girls, or women aren't smart enough to vote. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

In this quote Lexa pointed out that gender isn’t always defined by the individual but is instead imposed externally. She pointed to the school dress code as another way gender norms are pushed onto students. In our interview she talked about her frustration with having to wear a skirt to school every day:

> I hate wearing skirts every day, and I don't think it's fair that the boys can wear only pants and the girls wear only skirts, and if you don't do it, then you get detention. I think it is stupid because there are so many men all around the world who wear dresses or skirts, and there are so many women who hate skirts and prefer to just wear clothes like shorts. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Most, if not all, schools in South Korea use uniforms for students that include a skirt for girls and pants for boys. The gender binary uniform limited how students can express their gender identity. For Lexa, the uniform represented an unfair set of rules that did not reflect an inclusive approach to an individual's cultural and gendered identity.

Lexa thought the pressures put on boys and girls to fit into certain boxes forced them apart socially as well. Lexa's gender collage, shown in Figure 24, illustrated the impact a divided view of gender can have on students like her who want a more gender inclusive community. The collage shows a gradient of color from blue on the left to pink on the right. The blue side shows symbols associated with boys including pants, video game controllers, sports equipment, and a scale positioned with the boy as more important than the girl. On the pink side are symbols and images associated with girls including a skirt, the word "cute," Instagram, and a scale with a girl positioned as more important than a boy. In the middle are images of pants, a tree, nature, and a scale with the boy and girl balanced. Lexa said the collage represented how she saw boys and girls at school, each with their own interests and power. The middle area is where she saw herself trying to fit in. She described the collage and its meaning in her artist statement, excerpted here:

> I chose pictures like Instagram and skirts for girls because they always seem to be very petite and try to be cute. I chose pictures like sports and pants for the boys because they are the only ones that ever want to play sports at school, and they can only wear pants. For myself, I chose pictures like nature and things that mostly boys use or wear because I love nature, and I get along better with boys. In my collage I am in between the girls and boys because I am a girl, but I feel like I belong more with boys. My collage shows what gender means to me by showing girls and boys cut off from each other like they shouldn't

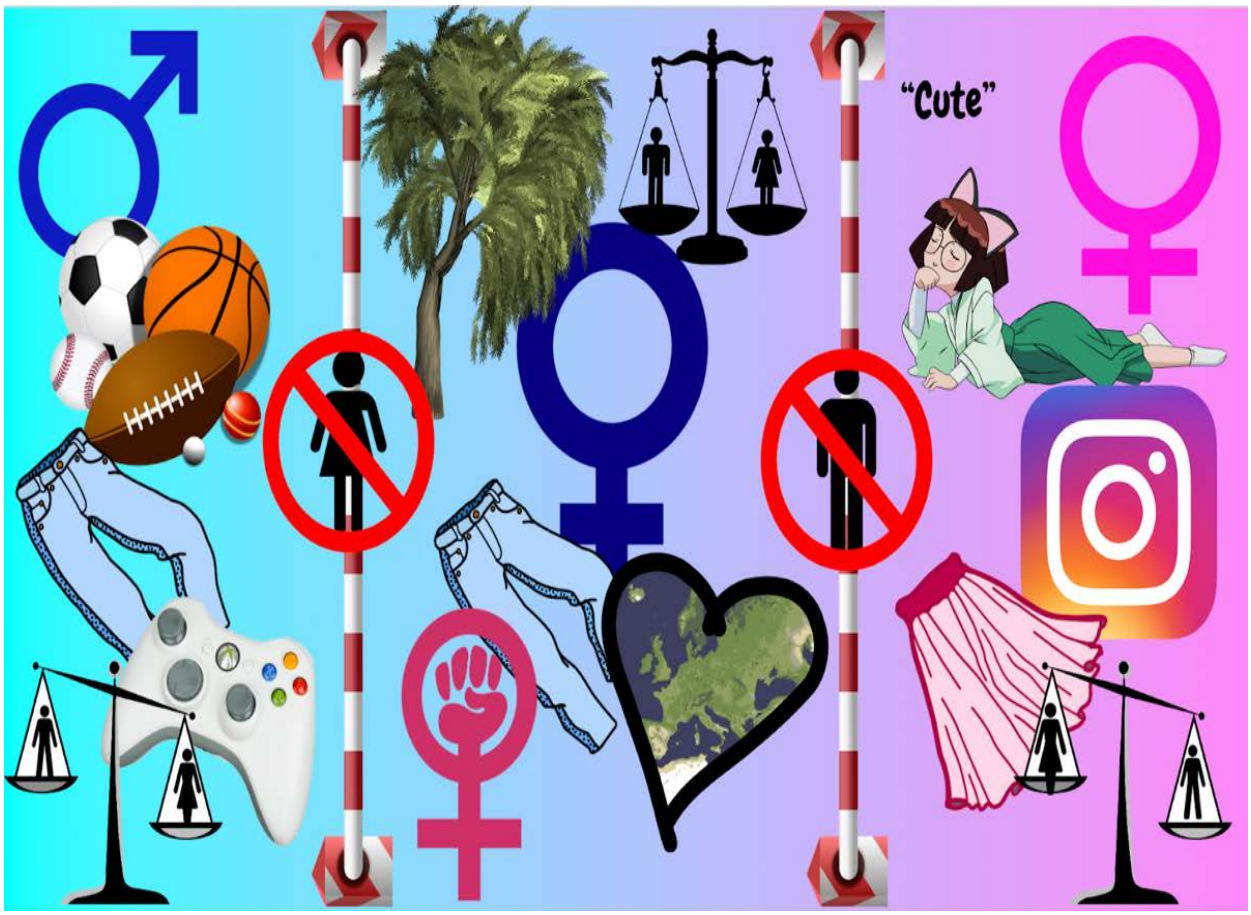


Figure 24. Lexa gender collage (March 3, 2022).

> be together when really they should be equal and have fair lives. I think I put those pictures and colors there because I grew up around people and cultures that use things like that to show/represent girls or boys. (Lexa, gender collage artist statement, March 3, 2022)

Lexa's collage and artist statement presented boys and girls as being separated at school. Each gender assigned interests, colors, and images based on stereotypical expectations. Lexa found herself stuck in between with interests spanning the spectrum of gendered expectations. She was eager to connect with people across gender groups but found it challenging.

While Lexa saw gender as a constricting set of societal expectations, she was proud of herself for representing a different interpretation of her gender. In our interview she spoke to her pride in her gender identity.

> I like being a girl, and I like showing people that girls aren't just dolls. I feel like my personality is really jumpy, happy, and excited. I feel like the boys just see all the girls as quiet little mouses who are sitting around and don't really matter. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa expanded on her role as a gender-bending member of the community with regards to who spoke up in classrooms.

> I feel good about being someone who talks. I like when people know that I am not a shy girl, and I like trying to make people laugh.…Girls don't tend to talk in class very much. I am usually the girl who talks the most in all my classes. The girls seemed too scared to talk in front of the boys because there are so many more boys than us. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa saw gendered expectations playing out in the school community with regards to who

speaks up and felt powerful in classroom spaces. She was proud of herself for being a girl who presented a different image of what it can look and sound like to be a girl in class and in school.

Friendship

While Lexa was proud of her identity as an outspoken girl, she struggled to make friends with boys. She found this challenging because she saw herself as typically getting along better with boys than with girls. Next to the *friendship* category on her data analysis chart, Lexa wrote, "Boys only want to be friends with boys and the same with girls"; "People don't expect girls and boys to be friends"; and "Most boys don't want to be my friend" (Lexa, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Lexa struggled with her desire to have a more gender-inclusive friend group in the face of social pressures and expectations to conform within a single gender friend group.

In our interview, Lexa spoke about how her struggle with friendship impacted her experiences at school.

> Sometimes it is hard for me at school because it is a lot easier for me to be friends with boys, but here all the boys stay away from girls, and everyone thinks girls have to stay with girls and boys have to stay with boys. I wish people didn't think like that because I could probably have a lot more friends if people would just accept me as a friend. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa felt she typically shared more common interests with boys than with girls. She saw girls as being into fashion and social media while she is not. In our interview she spoke to the gendered nature of interests at school and how she fits in.

> I find myself interested in similar things to boys. So many girls are into fashion and into TikTok, but I am not interested in those things. It is easier to talk to boys about things. I have different connections between boys and girls. With girls I can talk about certain

> things, but I can talk about so many other things with friends who are boys, and it is more comfortable. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa saw herself as a girl who got along easily with boys and historically had lots of friends who were boys. But such a friend group didn't feel possible at SJA, which left her feeling isolated and cut off from potentially meaningful connections.

Lexa's experience of isolation from boys was unique to her time living in South Korea. By contrast, in Colombia she had meaningful friendships with boys, something not available in South Korea. In our interview, she said,

> When I lived in Colombia, nobody really cared who was friends with who. I had so many friends that were boys and only a couple friends who were girls. It was a lot easier for me because it was easy for me to talk with boys. They understand me better than girls. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa was eager to feel such connections again and struggled against the rigid, gendered, lines drawn between friend groups in the context.

Lexa thought removing gender at school would open up opportunities for friendship and decrease her sense of vulnerability as a girl in the school community. In our interview she talked about what school would be like if there were no gender.

> It would be a lot easier to make friends. I am embarrassed around a lot of boys sometimes depending on the way I look or because I'm the only girl. In my swim classes I am almost always the only girl. It is kind of awkward for me. I'd be able to just be myself around anybody I wanted, and it wouldn't really matter. (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022)

Lexa imagined that removing gender and the accompanying discrimination would create a more inclusive place where people could have more friends and feel less vulnerable. Lexa thought she

would be able to be herself around more people and that there would be less judging of others at school.

Lexa gained access to the gender inclusive friend group she desired through her involvement in the research group. In her reflection on the experience, Lexa wrote, “I started by thinking I’m the only one in this situation, but I now realize that everyone wants to be friends with different genders/nationalities” (Lexa, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Sophie

Sophie was born in Colombia. In 2021 she moved to South Korea with her mother, younger brother, and step-father for her American step-father’s job at the school. Prior to moving to South Korea, Sophie attended public school and international school in Colombia where she became fluent in English. Her mother is Colombian and speaks Spanish as a first language as does Sophie although she speaks both Spanish and English at home.

Based on initial analysis of Sophie’s data, I provided the categories *culture/heritage, friendship, power/leadership,* and *gender* for her data analysis. Sophie was unsure how to begin her data analysis and curious to hear why I gave her these categories. I pointed to examples of topics we had discussed in our interview and comments she made during other events. Sophie took her time going through her data packet, closely reading the interview transcripts and digging into the data she had created as a student researcher. Although Sophie wanted more time to study her data and build her data analysis chart (see Figure 25), she was able to get a few ideas onto her chart before we began the next step of the activity.

Based on a comprehensive review of Sophie’s data and her analysis, I adjusted the initial categories I had given her from *culture/heritage, friendship, power/leadership,* and *gender* to

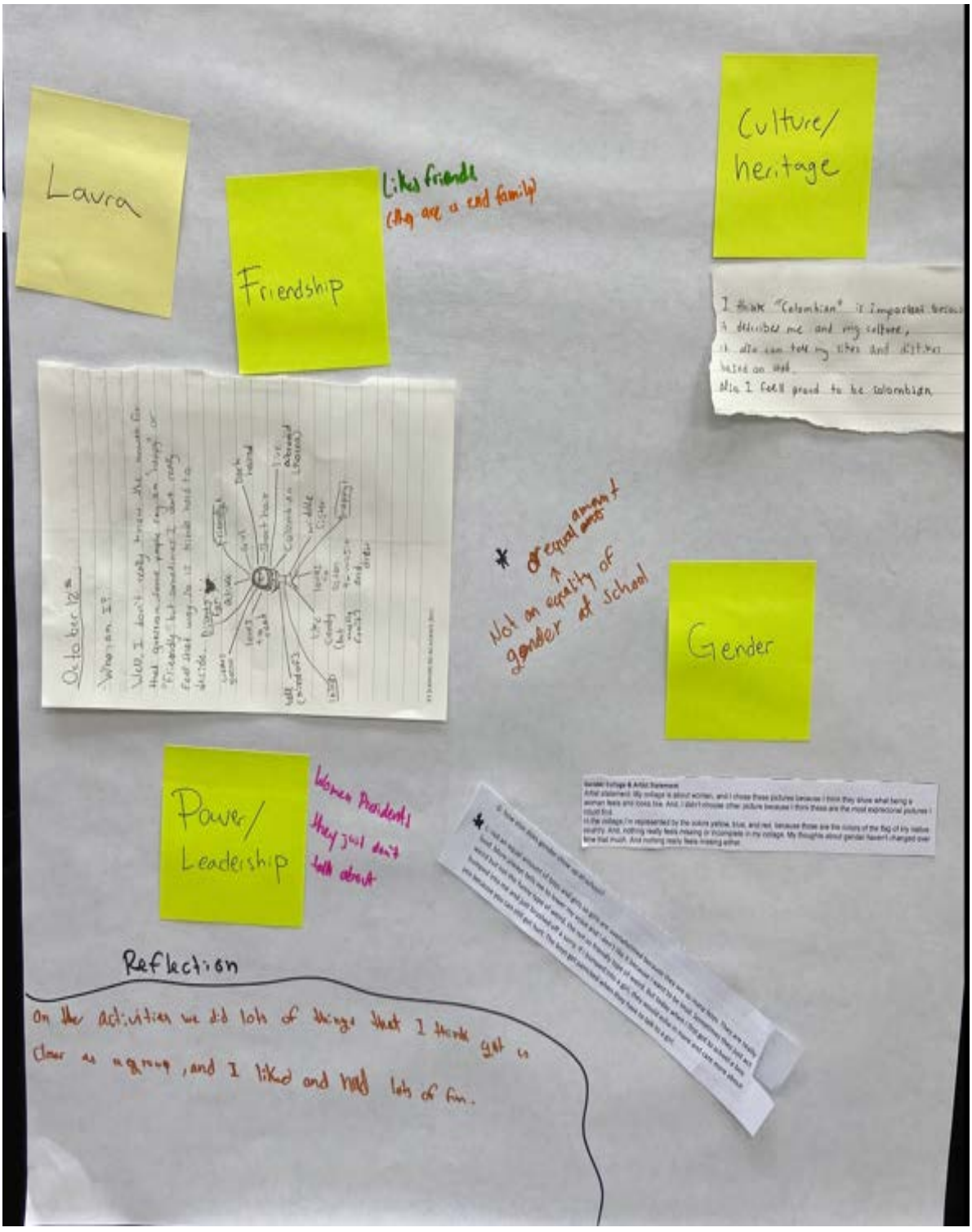


Figure 25. Sophie data analysis chart (May 9, 2022).

Colombian heritage and language, gender and friendship, and *women leaders.* Figure 26 shows the overlapping data categories.

Sophie was an outgoing charismatic student, eager to connect with people and build relationships at school. She found some of the cultural dynamics in South Korea challenging to navigate given her own cultural and linguistic background. Sophie's cultural heritage and identity as a Spanish speaker give her a unique set of perspectives and experiences. While she enjoyed the opportunity to live abroad, she sometimes struggled to feel at ease with English as the dominant language. Cultural dynamics related to gender presented complications for Sophie in her navigations of friendships. Sophie was passionate about gender equity and disheartened by the lack of female representation in leadership positions around the world.

Colombian Heritage and Language

Sophie pointed to her Colombian heritage as central to her identity. In commenting on her identity chart (see Figure 27), she identified being Colombian as the most important part of who she is, writing, "I think 'Colombian' is important because it describes me and my culture. It also can tell my likes and dislikes. Also, I feel proud to be Colombian" (Sophie, identity chart, October 12, 2021). In her gender collage artist statement, she highlighted her deep connection to Colombia, saying, "In the collage, I'm represented by the colors yellow, blue, and red because those are the colors of the flag of my native country" (Sophie, gender collage artist statement, March 3, 2022).

While immensely proud of her Colombian heritage, Sophie sometimes struggled to feel at ease in an environment where she could not speak Spanish. She was the only Colombian student at SJA Jeju for the 2021-2022 school year and the only student who spoke Spanish as a first

Figure 26. Sophie data categories.

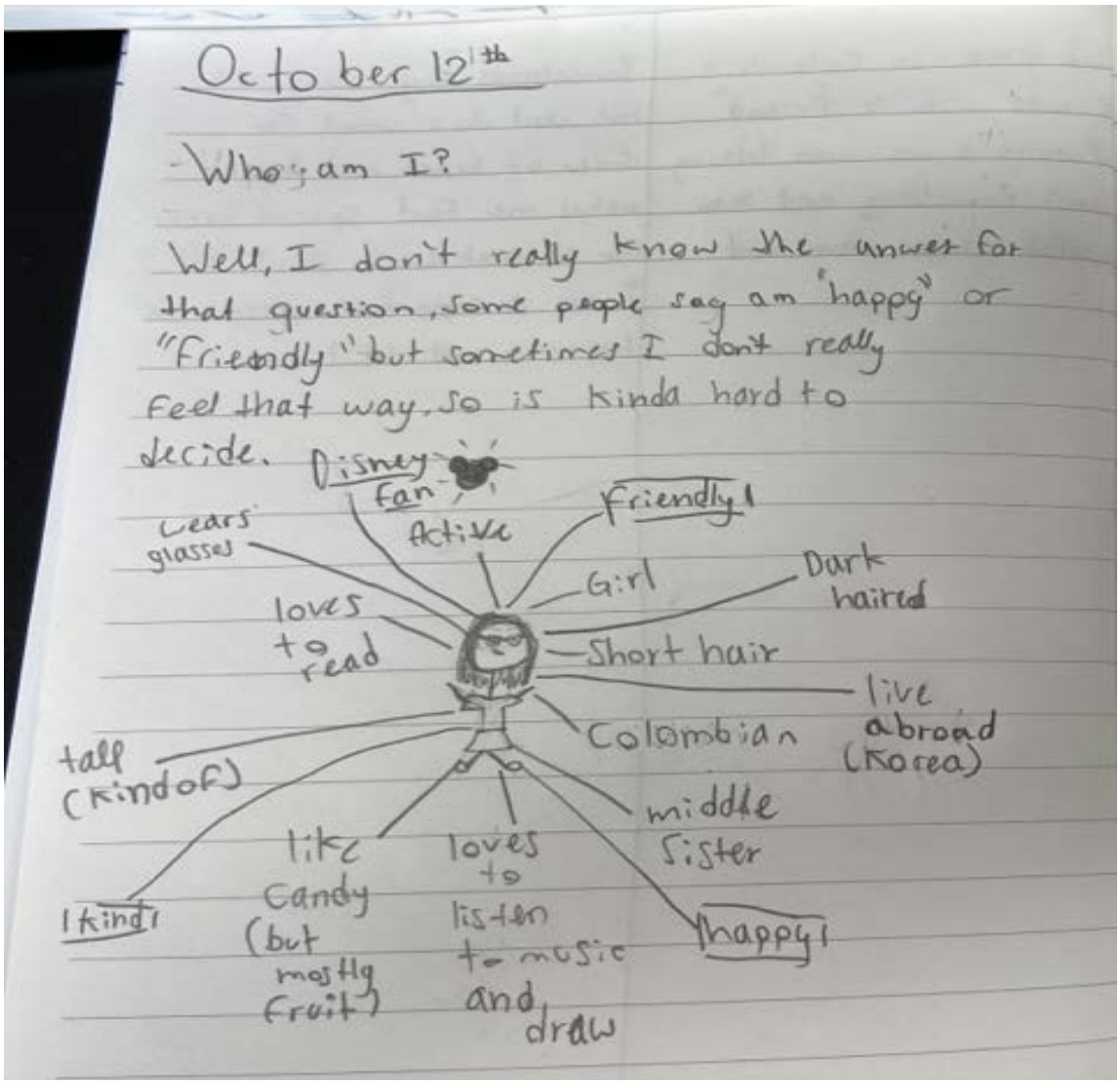


Figure 27. Sophie identity chart (October 14, 2022).

language. She spoke about the challenge to feel like her full self when not speaking Spanish in our interview:

> I don't want people to judge me. I think it is also not being able to speak my native language because I don't feel like myself anymore. … I know how to explain myself better in Spanish than in English, but here I have to do it in English because people don't understand Spanish. (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022)

While her English was strong, Sophie didn't feel that she could always express her true meaning in English. For Sophie it seemed, language was a key part of how she felt seen and known in the community. Language was central to her relationships as well. In our interview, Sophie highlighted the difference between friendships formed in English and those formed in Spanish, saying, "For me, speaking Spanish with my friends means we are having fun and are connected" (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022). She was not able to feel the same peer-to-peer connection in her first language with anyone at school.

In spite of Sophie's expressed sense of disconnection with her peers, as her teacher I observed Sophie as a charismatic, energetic, and involved member of the community. Korean-speaking students sought her out and switched to English around her. One day, in the hallway outside of class, Sophie taught a group of her peers, Korean and other foreign students, multiple Colombian games. There was lots of laughter, and Sophie was at the center of all of it (field notes, November 5, 2022). Sophie worked well with almost everyone and would hold her peers accountable to speaking English in her group to ensure she was always included. In the space created in the research group, Sophie was able to share her sense of vulnerability. But in her everyday school interactions, she did not show signs of feeling isolated from her peers or insecure about her English fluency.

Gender

I provided gender as a category for all student researchers as it was my entry point into discussions of identity. Sophie saw gender impacting relationships between students as demonstrated by students' interests, the friendships they form, and the ways students behave as community members.

Sophie saw gender as socially constructed and made known by things like how companies market different clothing to boys versus girls, hair length, individual interests, and friend groups. In our interview Sophie described what gender was:

> Companies just make stuff for boys and girls separately. Boys wear simpler clothing.…There are boys with long hair, but here there are almost no boys with long hair. Most girls have long hair.…Also, by the way they act. Like I said earlier about soccer, girls doing other things and boys would be excited to play. Not always true but mostly true from my experience. Like, you can do more interesting things than soccer, so girls choose the more interesting things. (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022)

Sophie saw a strong tie between interests and gender with boys choosing to do similar activities to other boys and girls choosing their own set of activities together.

Sophie assumed her interests would change if she were a boy In particular, she imagines the boy version of herself playing more soccer. "I like to play football (soccer), but it isn't my favorite thing. But I think if I were a boy, I would like it more" (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022). In her gender switch reflection, Sophie reflected on the impact of being a boy: "I would feel obligated to like the things that boys mostly like, and I don't think I would feel like myself anymore" (Sophie, gender switch reflection, December 2, 202). Changing gender would demand a change in activities, regardless of Sophie's authentic interests.

Friendships are often formed through shared interests and activities. There were more boys than girls at SJA Jeju, and Sophie saw the mismatch in numbers playing a role in how students interacted. In the gender section of her data analysis chart, Sophie wrote, “not an equality (or equal amount) of gender at school” (Sophie, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In our interview Sophie spoke to the disproportionate number of boys, saying, “Girls are overwhelmed because there are so many boys.… The boys get panicked when they have to talk to a girl” (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022). Sophie imagined she would have more friends if she were part of the dominant boy group. (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022).

While Sophie imagined her life would be different and include more friends if she were a boy, she was glad for the diversity of genders at school. Given her sense of isolation as a girl in a boy-dominated school, I asked her what she thought school would be like with no gender. She had mixed feelings about the idea but largely disliked it.

> On the friendship side it will be good because everybody could be friends with everybody. Boys could come over and play games. Could also be really lame. Even though they are annoying, it is good to have annoying people sometimes. I don't want everyone to be the same because then there would be no happiness because everyone likes the same thing and does the same thing because we are all the same. (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022)

Women and Leadership

Sophie’s gender data went beyond her experiences of gender and friendship at school to explore larger themes of gender and representation in leadership around the world. She saw gender bias in the way people thought about power and potential for men and women with men being placed above women in a patriarchal hierarchy. In the *power/leadership* section of her data

analysis sheet, Sophie wrote, “There are women presidents, they just don’t get talked about” (Sophie, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Sophie identified differences in the societal expectations set for boys and girls based on gender. She saw boys being expected to work and girls being expected to cook and clean. In the gender switch reflection, Sophie spoke to the increased pressure she thought she would feel if she were a boy.

> I think my thoughts about my future would be really overwhelming. Because I would literally HAVE to be someone completely different from who I am now. I think I would also feel that I would need to work harder because men/boys are usually ‘supposed' to make a big impact on society. (Sophie, gender switch reflection, December 2, 2021)

In our interview she also spoke to differences in the expectations set on men and women.

> Boys are the ones who are supposed to go to work, and women are the ones who stay home and cook, clean, and take care of the babies. But things are starting to change, and women have more powerful jobs. That is good progress, but I still think we could do better. (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022)

Sophie saw boys and men as being treated as more powerful than girls and women and imagines herself feeling more powerful if she were a boy. In our interview she said she would “feel more powerful because since the beginning boys have always been more than women. Even now, women can do more than in the past, but it is not enough” (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022). In our interview she spoke to the problematic lack of female representation in global leadership.

> I don't know if this is right, but in none of the countries that I know as a 12-year-old there has been no women presidents and why? And it isn't like we are stupid or something. (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022)

I let her know there have been, and are, women presidents, but her statement pointed to an ongoing lack of inclusion in how we talk about leadership, power, and gender.

Sophie's gender identity played a role in her interests, her friendships, and in how she imagined her life. She felt a sense of liberation from the societal expectations set on men and boys but also took issue with an ongoing lack of power and representation for women. In her reflection on the data analysis and research experience, Sophie wrote, "We did lots of things that I think got us closer as a group, and I liked that and had lots of fun" (Sophie, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Tad

Tad was born in Canada. In 2021 he moved with his younger brother and parents to South Korea to attend SJA Jeju. His father works for the school. The family moved from Myanmar where his father had worked at an international school. The move away from Myanmar was motivated by the combination of the COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 and the military coup in 2021. When Tad was younger, the family lived in Canada, Tad's father's home country, and South Korea, his mother's home country.

Based on initial analysis of Tad's data, I provided the categories *gender, friendship, places and home,* and *sports/being active* for his data analysis. Tad was quick to begin building his data analysis chart, shown in Figure 28. He did not spend as much time reviewing his data packet as other students did. He instead began by drawing icons and writing key words around each category. I asked him for clarification on images or terms I was not familiar with, and he

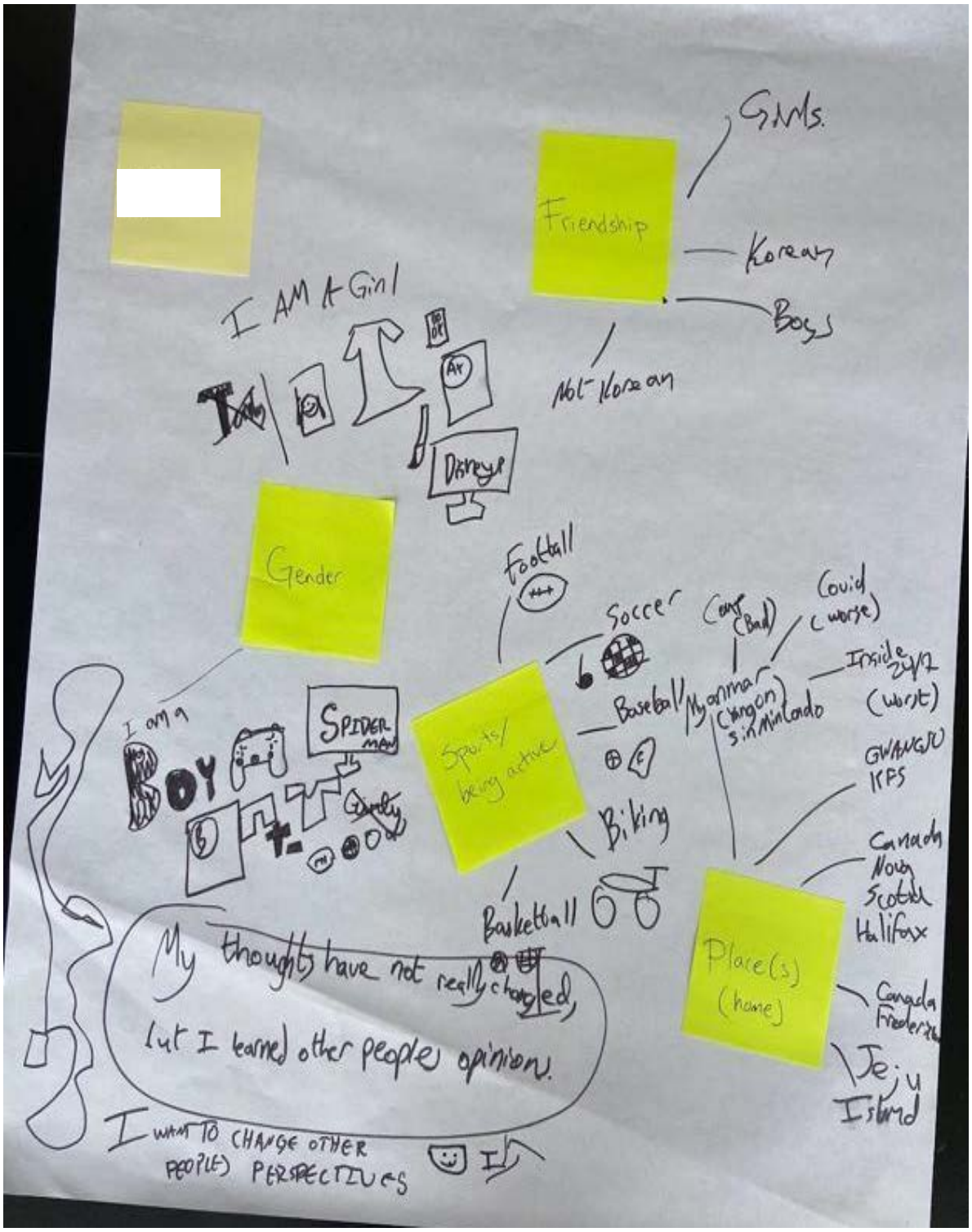


Figure 28. Tad data analysis chart (May 9, 2022).

was able to explain his reasons for each addition. I then encouraged him to add clarifying details to his sheet and to see if he found any connections among the ideas on the page.

Based on a review of Tad's full data set including his data analysis, I refined the categories for his data from *gender, friendship, places and home,* and *sports/being active* to *home and living through unrest, language and community*, and *gender.* The interconnectivity of these categories is shown in Figure 29.

Tad's lived experiences as a multinational, multilingual young person who has lived in three different countries gave him a particular set of perspectives on friendship, identity, and community. His data presented compelling insights into what it means to be *from a place* as he is torn between the different places where he has felt at home in his life. Tad's interests and insecurities were tied to his lived experiences and continued to inform his sense of self. Tad saw gender as being socially constructed, binary, and impacting the ways peers interact.

Home and Living Through Unrest

Before Tad's family returned to South Korea in 2021, they lived through a very challenging time in Myanmar. Tad wrote all the places he had lived in the *places/home* section of his data analysis chart. He wrote "Jeju Island, Canada (Frederickson), Canada (Nova Scotia, Halifax), Gwangju (ROK), and Myanmar" (Tad, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Next to Myanmar he wrote, "the coup (bad), COVID-19 (worse), spent inside 24/7 (worst)". These details referred to the military coup in Myanmar in 2021 and the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. The unrest in the nation resulted in lockdowns, and the family spent months isolated in their apartment. Tad and his brother attended school online for 2 years.

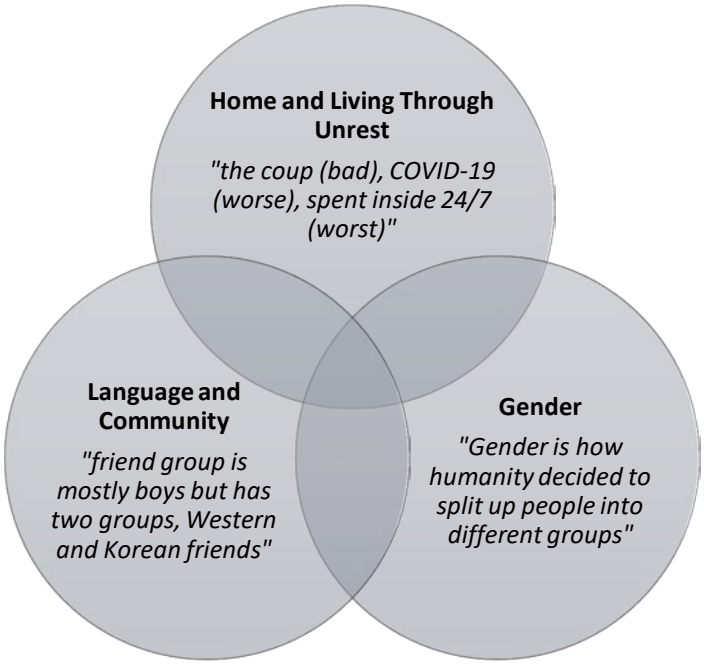


Figure 29. Tad data categories.

On his identity chart (see Figure 30) Tad circled his identity as a reader and a writer as being the most important parts of who he is. Tad's time in isolation with his family in Myanmar created a strong bond with his family unit, which in turn influenced Tad's interests in reading and writing. His father, in particular, arose as a meaningful figure in this time. Tad credits his father with his passion for reading and writing, interests he names as the most important parts of his identity (Tad, identity chart, October 14, 2022). In our interview he spoke about his identity as a reader and writer, saying it "felt like who I am. I would rather write than watch sports, play video games etc.…" (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022). Tad found refuge in books while isolated in Myanmar. Tad's father brought home books for Tad and his brother while the family could not leave their apartment. One of these books, *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2014), helped Tad to contextualize his experiences in Myanmar through the dystopian text. In our interview he said, "How the Peacekeepers were terrorizing everyone. It was like in Myanmar" (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022).

Language and Community

Tad spent time living in the countries where his parents are from, Canada and South Korea, and he spoke both English and Korean. Tad's national and linguistic identities positioned him at the intersection of different peer groups at school. Tad straddled spaces between other faculty children who spoke English as their primary language and local Korean-speaking students who made up the majority of his grade. In our interview Tad described his friend group at school saying,

> My friend group is mostly boys, but it has two groups: Western or foreign friends and Korean friends…. There is overlap but not really. Sometimes I sit with one group and sometimes the other, usually with the foreigners. I feel like the foreign group understands

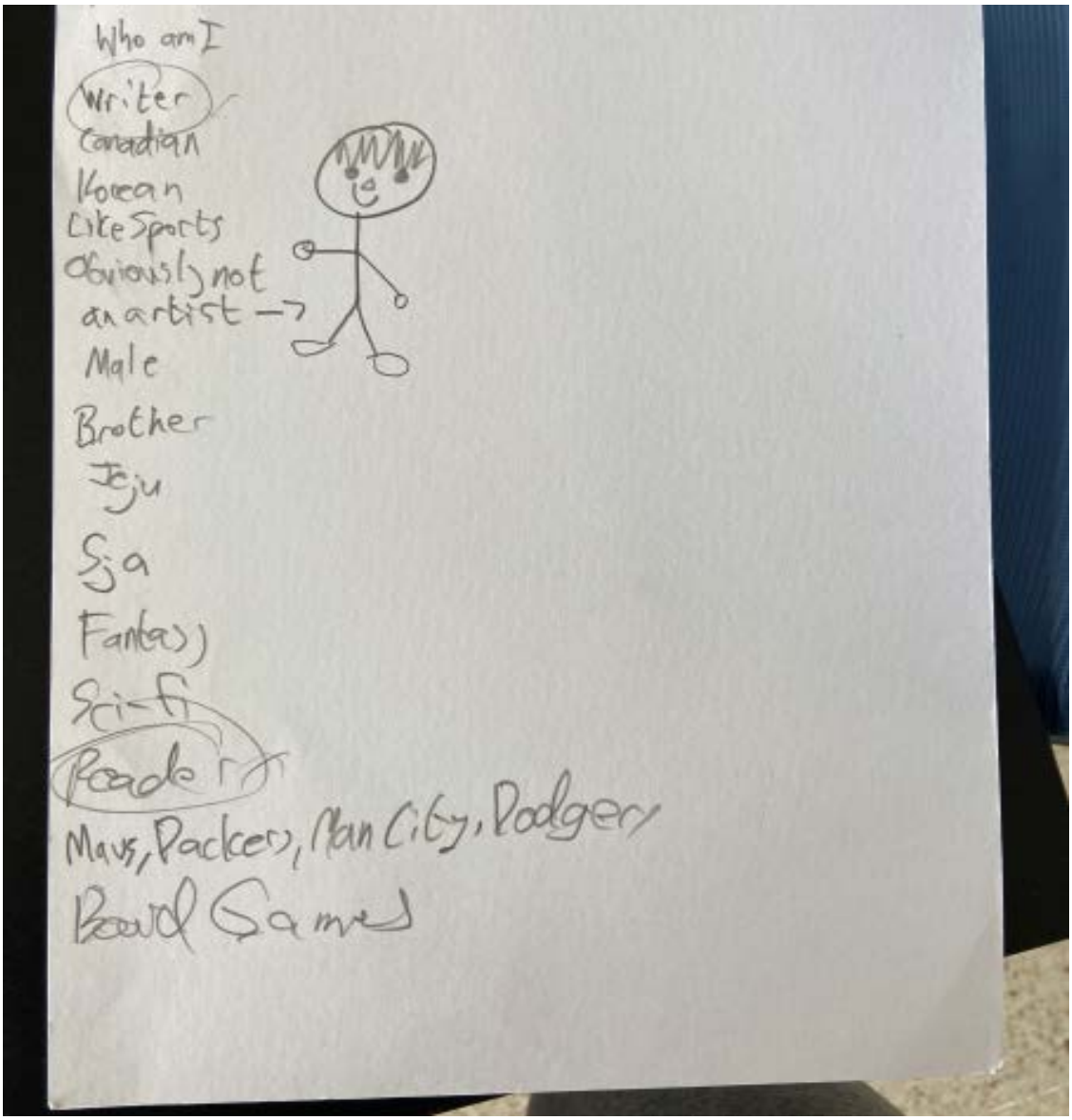


Figure 30. Tad identity chart (October 14, 2021).

> me more. I speak Korean really well, and everyone says so, but I don't speak Korean that well, so Westerners understand me more because they understand how I talk. (English) (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022)

Because he was bilingual, Tad could move between Korean and Western peer groups. He felt more fluent in English and so more comfortable with his Western friends. As his Korean fluency grows, it may impact his peer relationships at school.

Cultural and linguistic background influenced Tad's friendships and his sense of self. In our interview I asked Tad where he felt he was from. He started out saying Canada and seemed to end up saying South Korea. Language, family relationships, and sports each play a role in his sense of belonging to a particular place. He said,

> Canada. I lived in Canada but only when I was two because I talk in English more than I do in Korean, and there aren't really Korean sports. I associate myself more with Canada. Sometimes I think I'm Korean because I'm closer to my mom. When I was in quarantine, she was the only person I spoke Korean with. Maybe now I think I'm more Korean because I'm living in Korea and there are lots of people to speak Korean to. Most recent 3 years I've lived where no one else speaks Korean so. (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022)

Tad's reflections on where he felt he was from highlighted how language, family, interests, and community can interact to reinforce a sense of belonging in a particular place. Korea's lack of sports teams pulled Tad towards his Canadian identity while his growing Korean fluency pulled him towards his Korean identity. While his time in Myanmar was formative, it does not seem to be a place he felt he is from at all.

He thought the community at SJA would be stronger if the school changed its language policy. The school aimed to create an English immersive experience with students speaking

primarily English at all times. While the dominant language in unstructured times continued to be Korean, teachers were more diligent about asking students to speak English during class time. Tad saw this policy as divisive and undermining the community. In his “This or That" reflection about how to make the SJA community more united, Tad wrote, “Everybody could just speak Korean more often and if the teachers were less strict about the Korean rule” (Tad, this or that reflection, February 17, 2022).

Gender

Gender was provided as a category to all student researchers for the data analysis activity as it was my entry point to our discussions of identity. To Tad, gender was culturally constructed and played a role in Tad’s friendships and his identity as a writer. Tad described gender in our interview saying,

> Gender is how humanity decided to split up humanity into different groups. Men are stronger, and women are weak.…Boys are into biking or gaming or sports.… Usually, girls have long hair. Girls all together talking. Girls wear skirts. (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022)

Gender for Tad was defined through physical strength, interests, appearance, clothing, and friendship groups. Boys were active and played sports while girls were in groups talking to one another. Tad drew icons for boys and for girls in the gender section of his data analysis chart. For girls he drew a dress, an A+ on an assignment, a TV showing Disney, a paintbrush, and what appears to be a phone and a person with long hair. For boys he drew a TV showing Spiderman, a video game controller, an assignment with a B on it, a T-shirt, and the word girly with a line through it (Tad, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). As recorded in a memo following the data

analysis event, Tad noted that he didn't think people should have to fit into these gendered ideas but that these icons show what people say these genders are (reflective memo, May 9, 2022).

In his data analysis chart and explanation of gender, Tad aligned sports and fitness with boys. In our interview Tad spoke about his insecurities about his body and his desire to be more fit. Speaking about his time in isolation in Myanmar, he said it was "tough for me. I want to lose a lot of weight now. I ate a lot of food because I couldn't go outside. Dad said I was stress eating" (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022). In his inside the box reflection, Tad also said "staying fit" is another box he needs to fit into (Tad, inside/outside the box, November 4, 2021). While Tad disagreed with gendered expectations placed on people by society, he appeared to feel pressure to fit into an expectation of boys being fit and active.

Tad saw his identity as a young male reader and writer pushing against gendered norms. In our interview I asked him if he saw gender playing a role in his interests in reading and writing. He said,

> I like writing books. This represents gender because I feel like there are more female writers writing for young people in general. Dad says that teachers try to get boys into science and math, and the girls get pushed into English and art. But I like English more than other subjects. (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022)

Tad shared his father's ideas about gender and interests, and his father's perspective on gender and academic spaces appeared to play a role in how Tad saw his identity as a boy writing young adult fiction.

Tad's gender collage, shown in Figure 31, shows similar themes of athletics, arts, and school. The collage shows images of sporting equipment, an open book, military, health, and writing. Tad wrote an artist statement to accompany his collage in which he explained his image

Figure 31. Tad gender collage (March 3, 2022).

choices: “I think that most people think that genders fit into neat categories that are very general, so that was why I picked the images I picked” (Tad, artist statement, March 3, 2022). Tad included himself in the collage as the image of the person overlaid on top of the other images. He explained why in his artist statement: “I try to do lots of different things that don’t classify me as a gender specifically” (Tad, artist statement, March 3, 2022).

In his reflection on his involvement in the student research team, Tad wrote, “My thoughts have not really changed, but I learned other people’s opinions. I want to change other people’s perspectives” (Tad, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Tad is grounded in his ideas, but after involvement in the research he wanted to support others in updating their ideas to be more inclusive.

Marc

Marc was born in South Korea. In 2021 the family returned to South Korea after living abroad for most of Marc’ life. Marc’s father’s job took the family to China until Marc was 3 and then Myanmar where they lived until Marc was 12. Marc’ father lost his job in Myanmar due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Myanmar’s military coup in 2021. The family chose to move to Jeju Island so Marc and his siblings could continue to attend an international school. Marc spoke Korean with his parents and English with his siblings.

After my initial review of Marc’ data, I provided him with the categories *friendship, language, gender,* and *place(s)* for his data analysis. Marc began by reviewing his data packet. Then he wrote key ideas and quotes on his data analysis chart paper, shown in Figure 32. He was quiet and focused during the activity and did not need my support. Although I encouraged him to look for connections between data elements, he mostly wrote a salient key idea next to each category on his sheet.

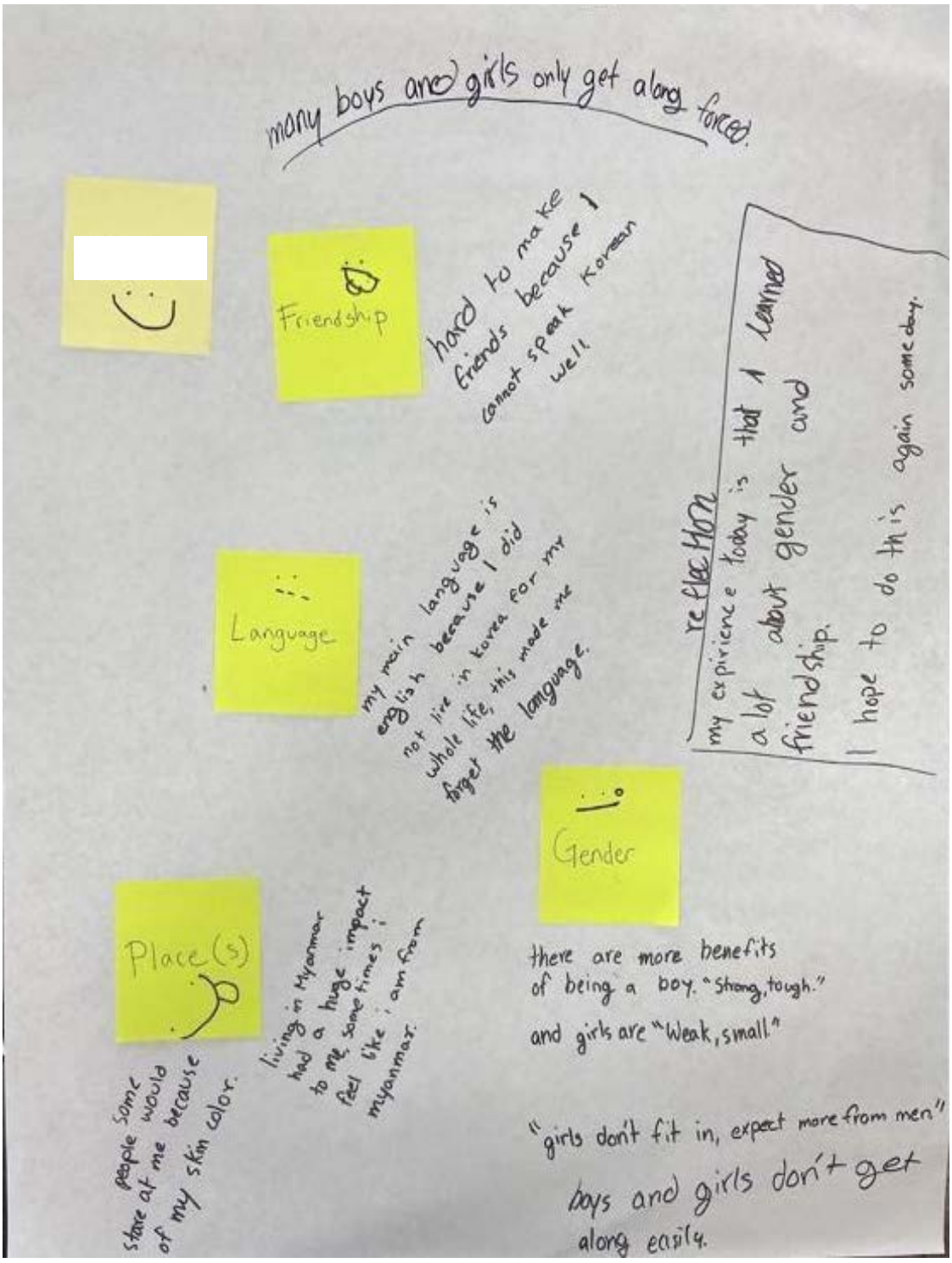


Figure 32. Marc data analysis chart (May 9, 2022).

Based on further review of Marc' complete data set and his own analysis, I deleted the *friendship* category and added *gender* and *physical features.* Figure 33 shows the interconnectivity of the categories. *Place,* in particular, emerged as playing a role in how Marc interacted with *language*, *physical features,* and *gender*. Marc was a Korean national, but his time spent living overseas impacted his Korean language skills and cultural understanding of South Korea. The 9 years he spent in Myanmar played an especially significant role in his sense of self. Upon his return to South Korea, Marc worked to build his Korean language and cultural skills to better fit in with his Korean peers. As expanded upon in the following sections, Marc pointed to his more limited Korean language skills as making it particularly challenging for him socially at SJA Jeju. He also felt different due to his darker skin tone. Gender also emerged as a factor in how he navigated culture and friendship.

Place and the Meaning of Home

In 2021 Marc and his family returned to South Korea after living abroad for 12 years. The return to Korea was not planned but was forced on the family by the political unrest and COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar. While Marc' extended family lived on mainland Korea, his parents chose to move to Jeju so Marc and his siblings could continue to attend an international school.

Living in Myanmar played a large role in Marc' identity and sense of self to the point where sometimes Marc felt he was from Myanmar. In the *place(s)* section of his data analysis Marc wrote, "Living in Myanmar had a huge impact on me, sometimes I feel like I am from Myanmar" (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Marc built a community of peers in Myanmar whom he cared deeply about. In our interview he said, "It was very fun to live because I got to spend a lot of time with my friends. I had a lot of friends" (Marc, interview, January 25,

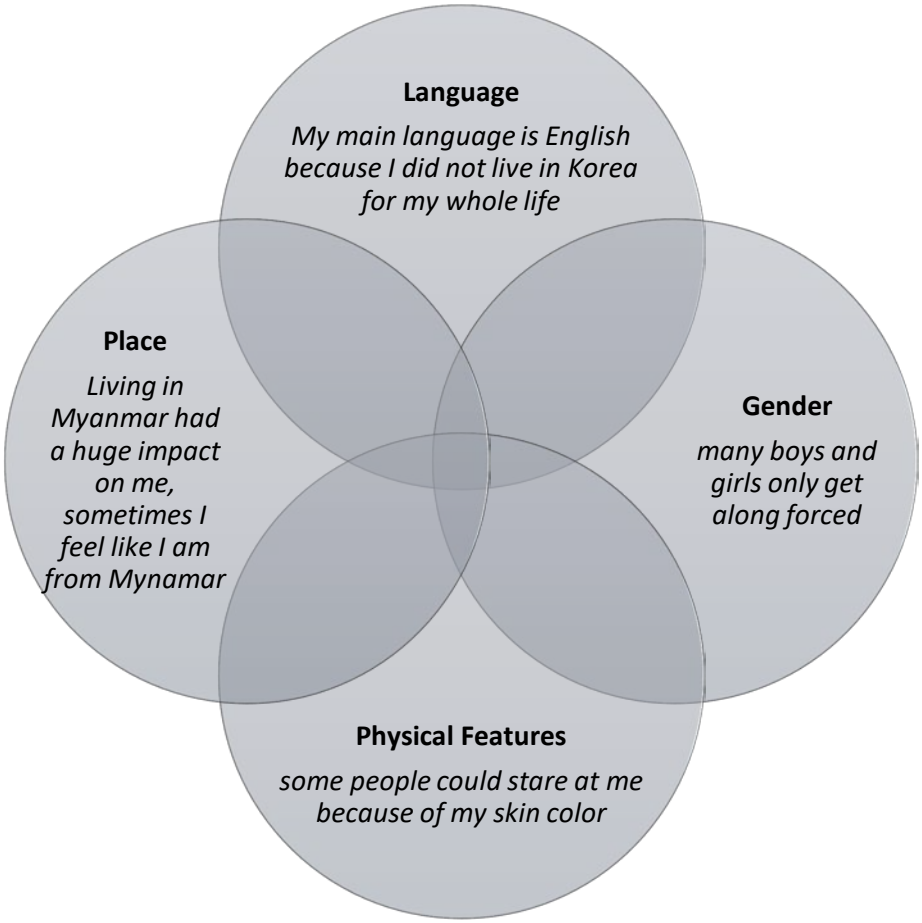


Figure 33. Marc data categories.

2022). For Marc, Myanmar was a place where he felt connected to community, supported by peers, and at home.

Marc experienced some culture shock when he returned to South Korea. In our interview he spoke to what it was like to come back to South Korea.

> I was shocked because Myanmar is a poor country, and they didn't have a lot of things there. In Korea there are a lot of different things. In Myanmar people would sleep on the streets, including outside my apartment. They would smoke a lot and burn a lot of wood. (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022)

His time in Myanmar had exposed him to a different way of life than the one he saw in South Korea. In Korea, he was confronted with a much more modern, developed, and affluent country.

Language

In addition, Marc spoke to the challenges of integrating into life in Korea due to his weakened Korean language skills as he was more fluent in English. Marc spoke Korean with his parents but English with his siblings and at school where English is the primary language of instruction at the international school he attended in Myanmar. In the *Language* section of his data analysis, Marc wrote, “My main language is English because I did not live in Korea for my whole life, this made me forget the language” (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Marc’ English schooling motivated his parents to enroll him at SJA Jeju as opposed to Korean public school where the academic Korean would be too challenging for Marc and his siblings. He said he was learning a lot in Korean class, and that is making him feel more comfortable (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022).

Marc said his limited Korean made it challenging to form friendships. Although English was the language of instruction, Korean was the dominant language during unstructured time at

school and for social interactions and friendships. In the friendship section of his data analysis, Marc wrote, “hard to make friends because I cannot speak Korean well” (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Marc recalled strong friendships in Myanmar. While he did not speak Burmese, the local language, he was able to connect with his peers more easily because English was the dominant language at school. In our interview he said, “I only know two words of Burmese; they spoke English at school” (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022).

Physical Traits

Physical characteristics, primarily height and skin tone, came up in Marc’s data as important to his sense of self. Marc’s height was a key part of his identity. Marc’ identity chart, shown in Figure 34, included descriptors “brown,” “short,” “male,” “son,” “middle sibling,” “Korean,” and the phrase “I enjoy reading” (Marc, identity chart, October 12, 2021). He highlighted being short as the most important part of his identity. He wrote, “being short because there is nothing else special about me, and being short makes me feel like me” (Marc, identity chart, October 12, 2021). Marc felt he had darker skin than many other people in South Korea, which made him feel vulnerable and separate from others. In the *place* section of his data analysis sheet, he wrote “some people stare at me because of my skin color” (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

In our interview Marc spoke about two books that had affected him: *Wonder* (Palacio, 2012) and *Genesis Begins Again* (Williams, 2020). Both texts are about young people struggling to find community at school due to physical differences. *Wonder* tells the story of a young boy’s struggle to fit in due to a facial abnormality. Marc identified with the way the main character in *Wonder* felt isolated at school. When he spoke about his connection to *Wonder*, he said, “When I came to this new school, no one would talk to me. But later, I made some new friends” (Marc,

Figure 34. Marc identity chart (October 12, 2021).

interview, January 25, 2022). *Genesis Beings Again* is about a dark-skinned African American girl's struggle against a community that values lighter skin. In our interview Marc connected with the main character's struggle to fit. He said, "I thought every other Korean would be a different skin color from me, and I would be excluded because I am darker" (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022).

Marc' skin tone did not make him feel different in Myanmar, but he attributed his darker skin to his time there. In our interview he said,

> Myanmar people had the same skin color as me. I would be like a normal Korean with lighter skin, but it is really hot in Myanmar. So I got sunburned a lot, so my skin is darker now. It felt weird to be brown or a different skin color than other people. My parents have light-colored Korean skin. (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022)

Marc seemed to blame himself for his darker skin. Marc identified his parents' light skin as normal Korean skin, which implies that he felt his own skin was abnormal.

Gender

Gender was provided as a category for all student researchers as it was my entry point into discussions of identity. Gender was a factor in how Marc navigated friendship and community at school. Marc saw gender identity as manifested through physical characteristics and through the dominance of single-gendered friend groups at school. Marc described gender in our interview:

> Gender is just something you're born with, either boy or girl. You can tell apart by people's faces and the group of friends they are with—lots of female friends together or male groups together. I don't know what girls do. (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022)

In the *gender* section of his data analysis sheet, Marc pulled text from the Act Like a Lady activity. He wrote, “There are more benefits of being a boy ‘strong, tough’ and girls are ‘weak, small,’” and “girls don’t fit in, expect more from men” (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Marc did not see his peers choosing to form friendships across gendered lines. At the top of his data analysis, separate from any category titles, Marc wrote, “many boys and girls only get along [when they are] forced” (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In the *gender* section of his data analysis, Marc wrote, “boys and girls don’t get along easily” (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Marc thought that without gender people would not be divided from one another. In our interview I asked him what he thought school would be like without gender.

> It would be more fun because if there is no gender, then there would be no pressure about boyfriends or girlfriends. We could just hang out with each other without other people thinking it's weird to spend time with another gender. If there was no gender, then people could just be friends with each other. (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022)

Cross-gender friendship implied romantic interest in this school setting. This caused young people to avoid reaching across gender to find friends.

Place, language, physical traits, and gender each played a role in Marc’ identity and impacted his efforts to find belonging in the school community. His time in Myanmar changed his primary language and his cultural framework. Marc was finding success in the community as his Korean skills grew and he found friendship. In his reflection on his involvement in the research group, Marc wrote, “I learned a lot about gender and friendship. I hope to do this again someday” (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Jason

Jason was born in South Korea. In 2019 he moved to Jeju Island with his mother and

younger brother to attend SJA Jeju. Previously, Jason had attended Korean public school in Seoul. Jason's father lives in Seoul and travels to the island for weekend visits periodically. Jason's school experiences mimic those of many other students at SJA Jeju but were unique in the research group as he was the only one who had exclusively lived and attended school in South Korea.

After my initial analysis of Jason's data, I gave him the categories *activities/interests, gender, family,* and *friendship* for his data analysis. Jason drew icons and key ideas around each category on his data analysis poster, shown in Figure 35. Jason was focused and eager to carry out the activity. He reviewed his data packet to inform the ideas he added to the page. In addition to the categories I provided, he added a post-it with the category *ME*. In the *ME* section of the data analysis chart, Jason glued his identity chart, shown in Figure 36. He also wrote, "Jason, 14 international age (12), boy, no glasses, 3 years in SJA" (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). To clarify Jason's note about age, in South Korea you are one year old when you are born. Then you add another year on the next New Year's Day. People born in Korea know both their Korean age and their international age, which Jason shows on his chart.

Based on a complete review of Jason's data, including his data analysis poster, I changed the categories for his data from *activities/interests, gender, family*, and *friendship* to *family and friends, interests,* and *gender.* The interconnectivity of the data categories is shown in Figure 37. Jason's family and friends were cornerstones of his community and key elements of his sense of self. Jason's interests included school, video games, and sports, and they played a role in how he connected with his family and community. Gender played a role in how Jason navigated friendship and identity at school.

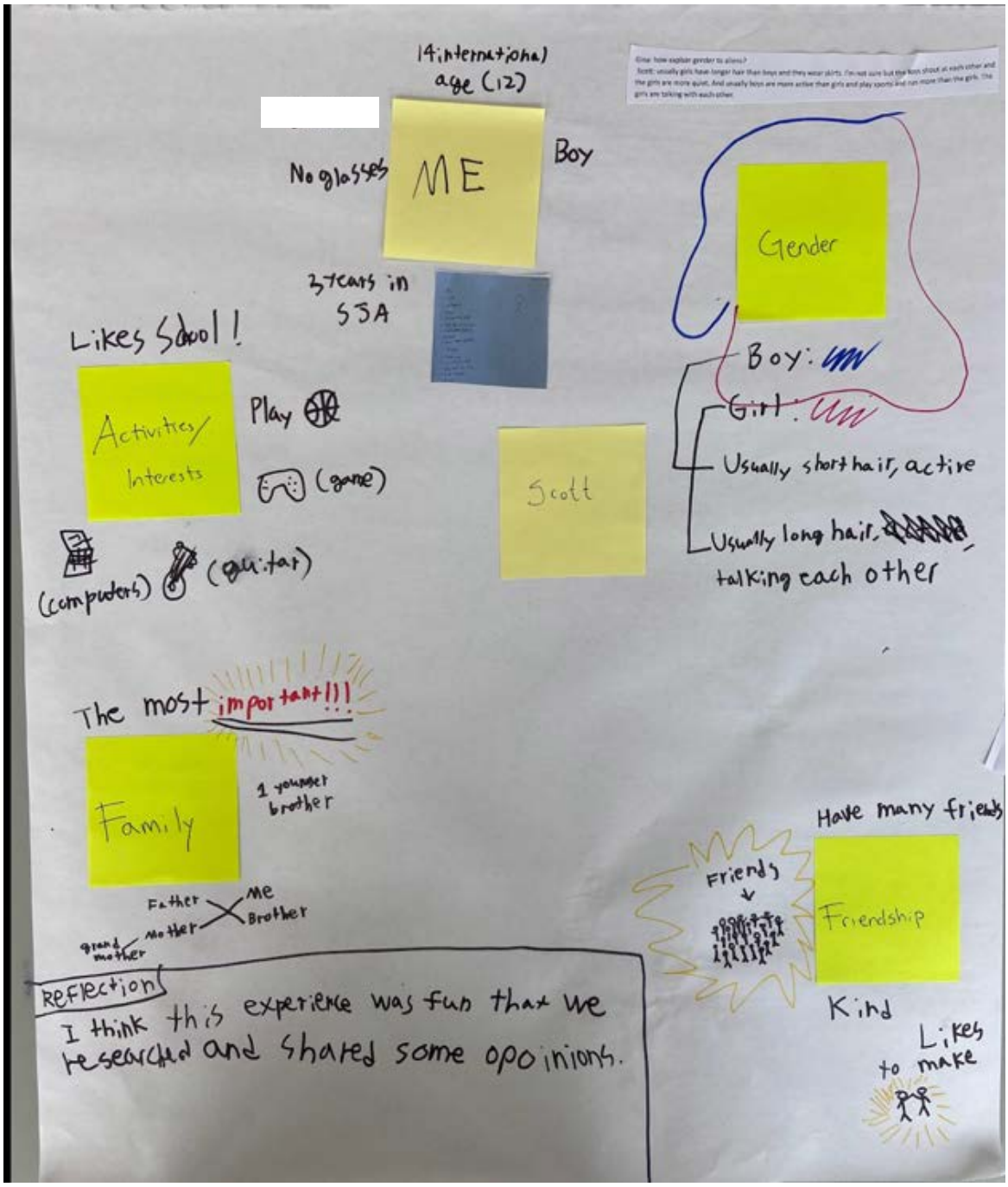


Figure 35. Jason data analysis poster (May 9, 2022).

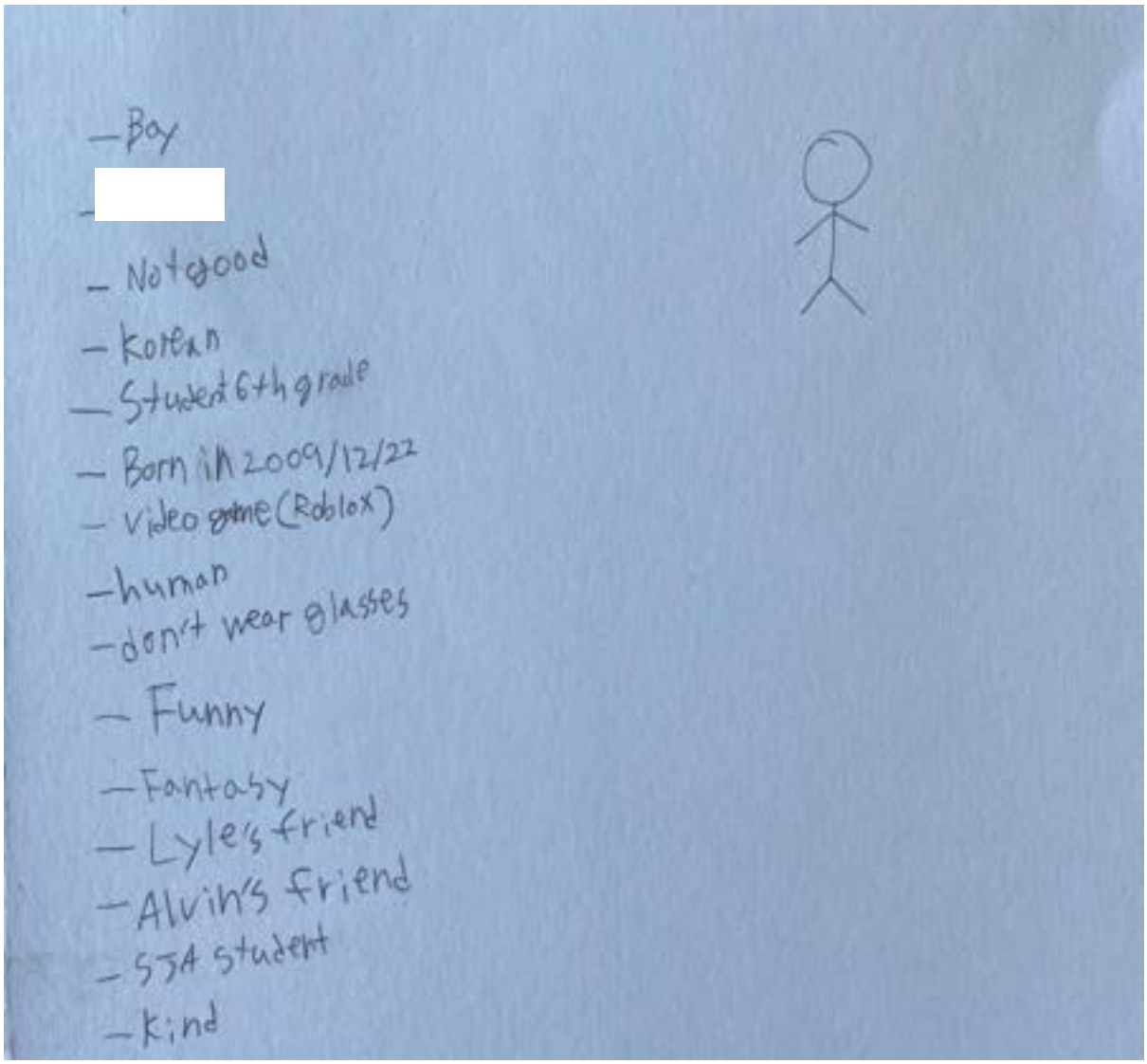


Figure 36. Jason identity chart (October 14, 2021).

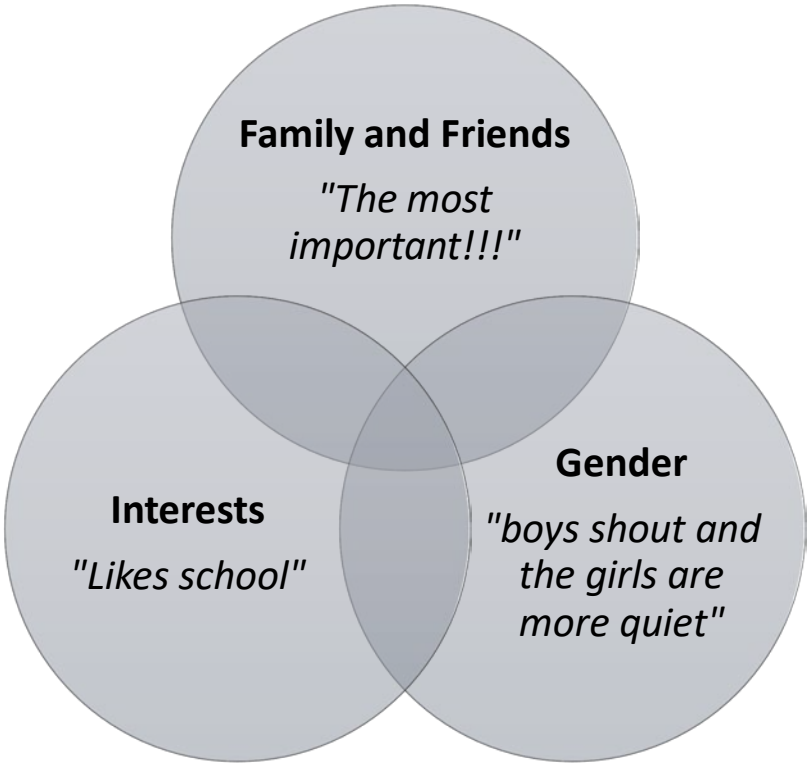


Figure 37. Jason data categories.

Family and Friends

Jason was deeply connected to his family. In the *family* section of his data analysis sheet, Jason wrote “the most important!!” with *important* written in a different color, underlined twice, and surrounded by yellow burst lines (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). He also wrote, “1 younger brother” and drew a diagram showing his family recreated in Figure 38 (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). The diagram included Jason’s father, mother, Jason, his younger brother, and his maternal grandmother. Jason’s family diagram and labeling highlight the importance Jason placed on his family unit.

In addition to the high value Jason placed on his family, he was also proud of his friendships. On his identity chart, shown in Figure 36, he listed specific friendships with peers at school (Jason, identity chart, October 14, 2021). In the friendship section of his data analysis chart, he wrote “have many friends” and “kind” (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). He also drew two images, one with a large group of people labeled “friends” and another with just two people labeled “likes to make” (see Figure 39).

Jason’s data and his analysis highlighted that he is firmly rooted in his community as represented by his family connections and friendship group. He thought of himself as kind and well-connected. When sharing his identity chart, he said ‘not wearing glasses’ was the most important part of his identity because “Most people are wearing glasses except for him” (Jason, identity chart, October 14, 2021). For Jason, not wearing glasses seems to represent the main difference he saw between himself and others at school indicating that otherwise he saw himself as similar to and connected with his peers.

Interests and Activities

Jason’s interests intersected with his relationships. In the *interest/activity* section of his

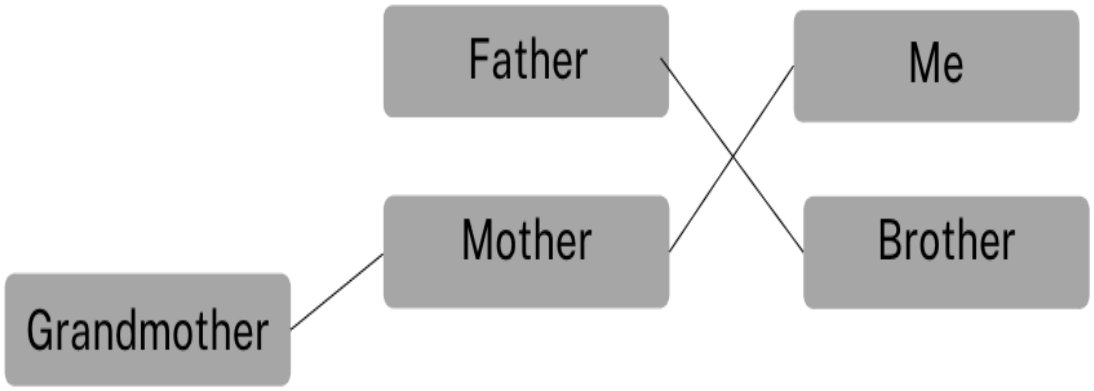


Figure 38. Jason family chart.

Figure 39. Friendship section of Jason data analysis poster.

data analysis, Jason wrote “likes school!” (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). He also drew icons for and wrote “video games, basketball, computers, and guitar” (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In our interview Jason talked about the important role video games played in his friendships. “I love to play video games.… I play with a group of friends or whoever is playing” (Jason, interview, January 24, 2022). Video games also connected Jason with his father. In our interview he said, “My dad loves games, and my mom doesn't like games. He said it is a good way to spend time because when we are bored, we can play the game…. dad can communicate with me because we can do fun things in games” (Jason, interview, January 24, 2022).

Gender

Gender was provided as a category for all student researchers as it was my entry point to discussions of identity. For Jason, gender was made known through what people wear, how they act, and who they are friends with. Jason glued his description of gender from our interview into the gender section of his data analysis sheet. He said,

> Usually, girls have longer hair than boys, and they wear skirts… the boys shout at each other, and the girls are more quiet. Usually, boys are more active than girls and play sports and run more than the girls. The girls are talking with each other. (Jason, interview, January 24, 2022)

Jason’s description of gender drew on gender stereotypes like hair length, volume, activity, and peers as ways gender shows up in the community

These gender differences are further identified in Figure 40, Jason’s gender section of his data analysis sheet. He shows boys as blue, usually having short hair, and being active while girls are pink, have short hair, and talk to each other (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). After observing groups of students around school, Jason noticed students keep apart based on

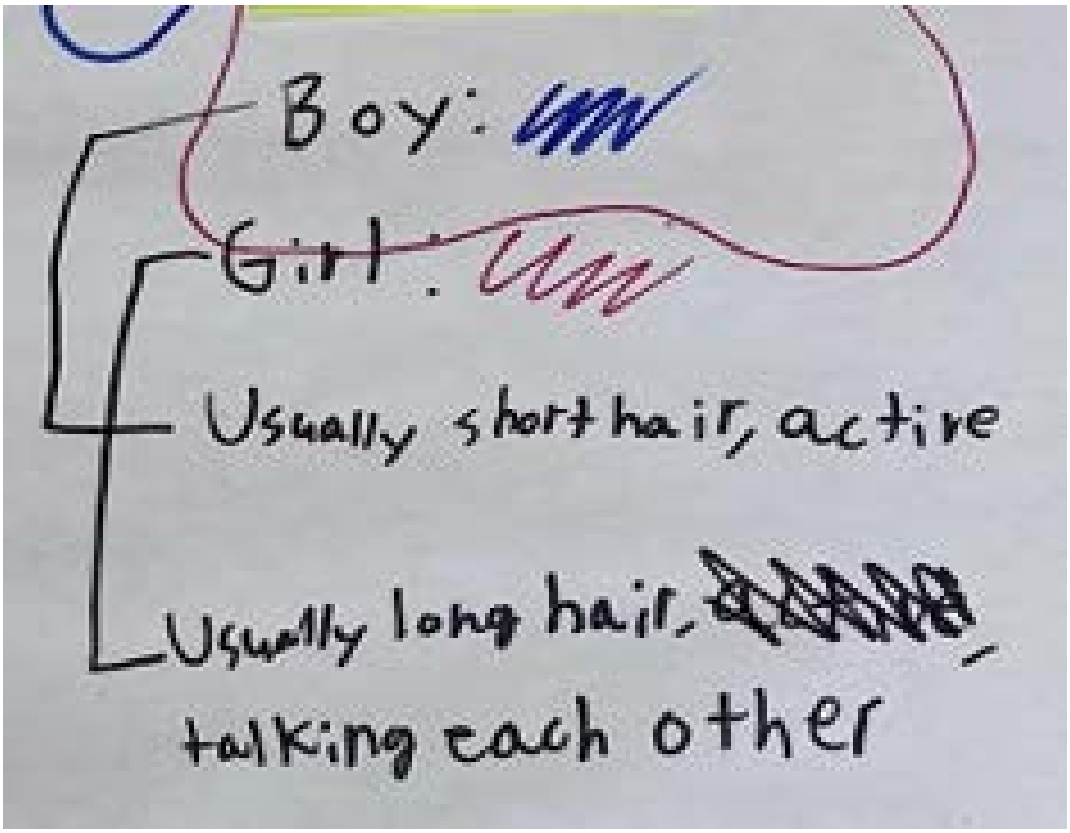


Figure 40. Gender section of Jason's data analysis poster.

gender. In his reflection on the activity, Jason pointed to peer pressure. He wrote, “I think another student will make fun of a boy or girl who played with other gender students” (Jason, this or that reflection, February 17, 2022). In our interview Jason said he thought students would be friends with more people without gender. “There will be more groups because there is no gender dividing people into boy and girl groups.” (Jason, interview, January 24, 2022).

Jason thought his life and interests would be different if he were a girl. In our interview he said that if he were a girl, “I will not play [video] games” (Jason, interview, January 24, 2022). Jason also thought his dad would keep him away from video games. “My dad would prefer for me to do other things than play a game because when I am a girl…maybe study more” (Jason, interview, January 24, 2022). Video games are for boys while studying is more important for girls.

In his reflection about his participation in our research group, Jason wrote, “I think the experience was fun because we researched and shared some opinions” (Jason, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

JiWoo

JiWoo was born in South Korea. In 2021 he moved to Jeju Island from Sacheon, a city in southern South Korea, to attend SJA Jeju. JiWoo lived in the boarding program at SJA Jeju while his family stayed in Sacheon. JiWoo had attended Korean public school from kindergarten to second grade. He then attended international school in the Philippines where he lived in a dorm. His family moved him back to South Korea in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

After my initial review of JiWoo’s data, I gave him the categories *friendship*, *gender*, *activities/interests*, and *family* for his data analysis, shown in Figure 41. JiWoo went through his data packet, cutting out sections and gluing them next to the category headings. He also glued his

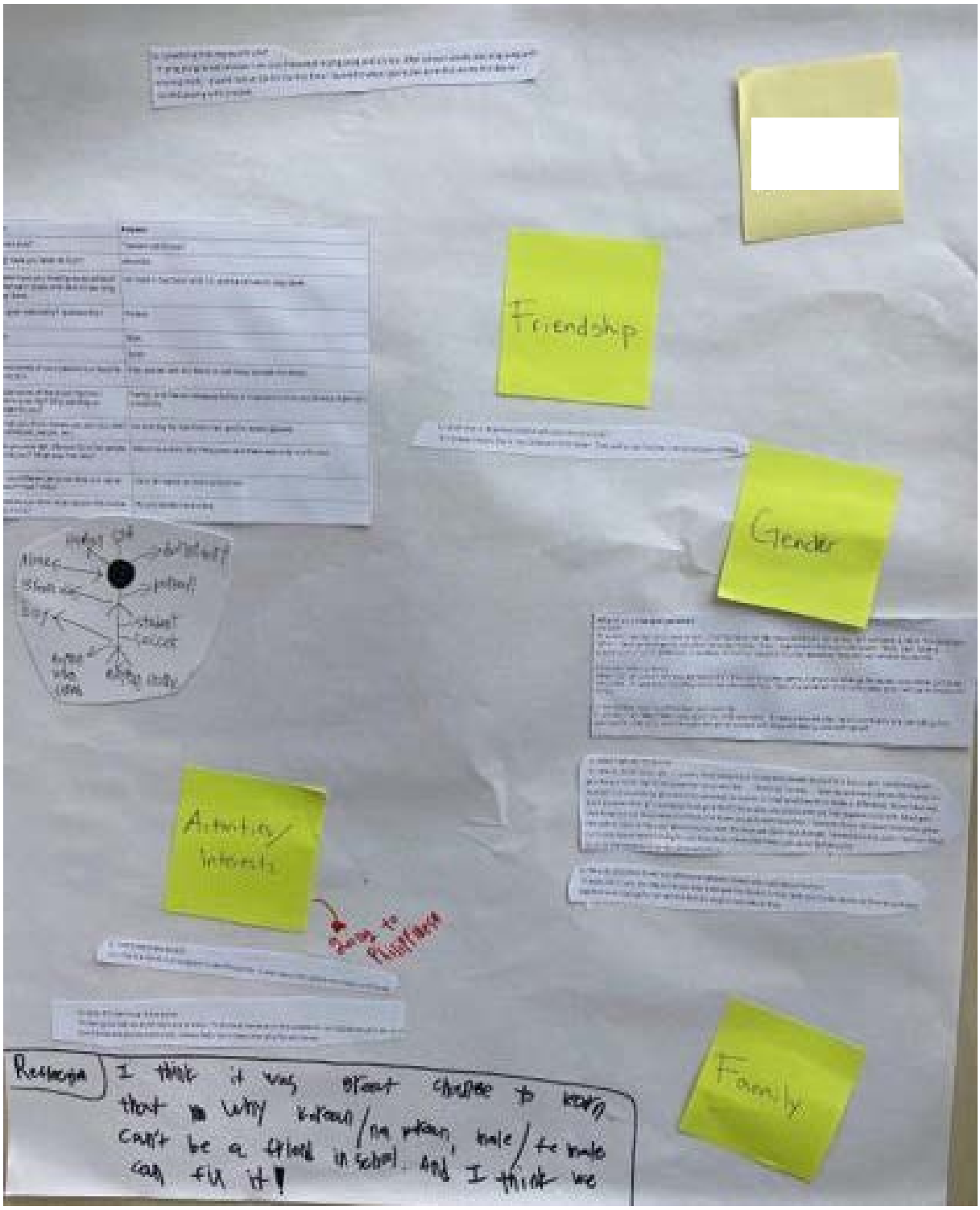


Figure 41. JiWoo data analysis poster (May 9, 2022).

identity chart and peer interview notes to the chart paper in an area with no heading. I let JiWoo know he could also write and draw on the page and encouraged him to add connections between different pieces of data. He expressed satisfaction with his data organization.

Based on further review of JiWoo's complete data set including his data analysis chart, I adjusted his categories from *friendship, gender, activities/interests,* and *family* to *residential life, relationships,* and *gender.* Figure 42 illustrates the interconnected nature of JiWoo's data categories. Living in boarding schools since third grade shaped JiWoo's relationships, interests, and identity. He spent more time with residential life staff and teachers than with his parents and family during the school year. The importance of these school-based relationships in his life showed up in how JiWoo talked about his interests and school experiences. JiWoo said Korean cultural norms around gender and the gender-separated nature of the residential program contributed to how he thought about gender at school.

Residential Life Background

JiWoo's first experience living in boarding school was in third grade when he attended an international school in the Philippines. Next to the *interests and activities* category on his data analysis chart, JiWoo wrote "going to Philippines" (JiWoo, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). In our interview, he said that he was the only Korean student there but nonetheless spoke fondly of his friendships and experience. He explained that "most Korean students go to the US or Canada" but added that "there is no difference between Korean friends and Filipino friends because we can connect and play together" (JiWoo, interview, January 2022). He was in the Philippines for only 1 year and left when COVID started in Korea. "My mom wanted me to come back home," he said (JiWoo, interview, January 2022).

JiWoo joined the boarding program at SJA Jeju in Grade 6, the youngest grade in the

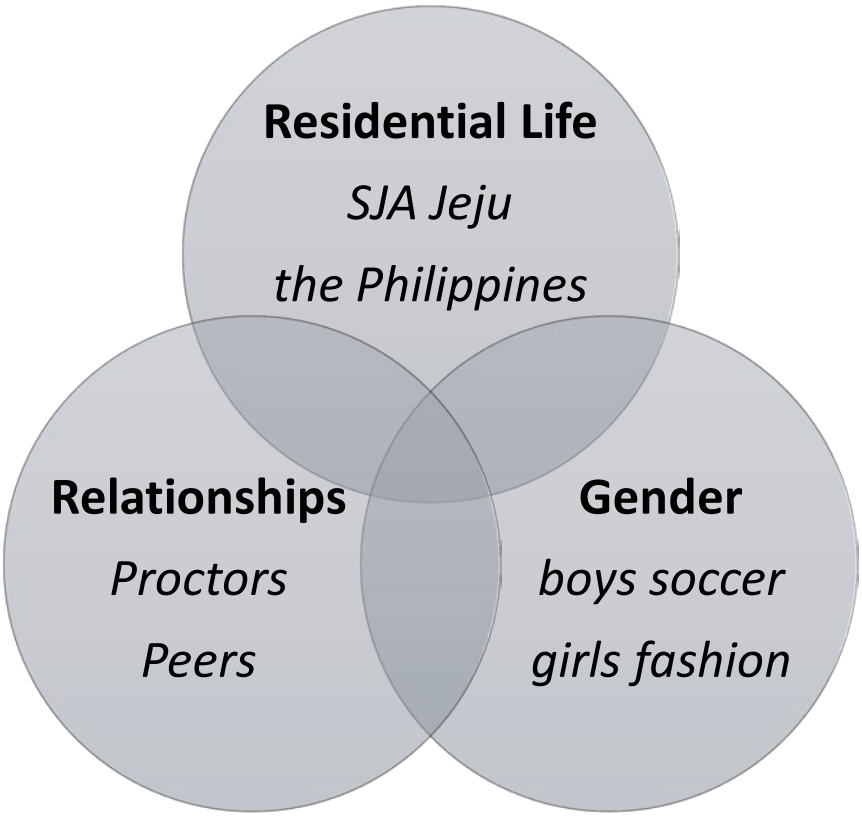


Figure 42. JiWoo data categories.

boarding program. For the 2021–2022 school year, JiWoo lived with approximately eight other Grade 6 boys in SJA's residential program. The residential program housed approximately 120 students from Grades 6 through 12. Boys lived in one dorm building while girls lived in another. Overall, there were more boys than girls in boarding with only two Grade 6 girls in boarding in the 2021–2022 school year. Residential life officials ran programming every day after school and on the weekends. Some students went home to the mainland or had family visits on the weekends while others only went home during holidays.

JiWoo expects to continue in a residential structure after high school graduation when he, like all South Korean men, will do 18 months of mandatory military service. JiWoo spoke about his future military responsibility in our interview.

> I'm not excited, but I want to do it. Sometimes I feel scared when I see movies about the military or war. When I was younger, I wanted North and South Korea to reunite, but now I know that won't happen. (JiWoo, interview, January 2022)

Residential Life: Peer and Mentor Relationships

JiWoo got along well with the other students in boarding and enjoyed living in the dorm. He was surrounded by friends and participated in different planned activities. JiWoo glued a quote from our interview about his experience living in the dorm at SJA in the *interests and activities* category of his data analysis chart (JiWoo, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

> Living in the dorm is very good, but we don't have any privacy. I'm alone at home so on the weekend I can decide what to do. In the dorm there are planned activities. It always felt like a sleepover at a friend's house. (JiWoo, interview, January 2022)

I taught several other students who also lived in the dorm with JiWoo. They were a tight group of friends who got along well at school. This group of dorm boys ate three meals a day together,

attended evening study together after school, and spent most weekends together participating in organized dorm activities. He was surrounded by a community he cared about and that cared about him.

JiWoo's interests were shaped by his close relationships with dorm staff, called proctors. He brought a ping pong racket to our interview as his item to represent who he was and spoke about how he loved to play after school. He glued an interview quote about ping pong to the top of his data analysis chart.

> I am interested in ping pong, and it is fun. After school, I usually play ping pong until evening study. I played it for the first time at SJA. I learned it when I got to the dorm on the first day, so I played with proctors. (JiWoo, interview, January 2022)

He pointed to ping pong as a key part of who he was. JiWoo's strong relationships with proctors shaped his interests and sense of self.

JiWoo's interests, relationships, and identity were tied to his experiences in residential life. JiWoo glued his identity chart, shown in Figure 43, to his data analysis sheet (JiWoo, identity chart, October 14, 2021). His identity chart included words related to school: SJA, dormitory, and student. It also included ways he spent time in residence: soccer, playing games, playing with friends (JiWoo, identity chart, October 14, 2021). JiWoo glued quotes connected to his dorm experiences in the *activities/interests* section of his identity chart. He did not include anything in the *family* section (JiWoo, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). JiWoo's sense of self appeared to be shaped more by his time spent living and boarding at school than by his family relationships.

Gender

I gave each student researcher a *gender* category for their data analysis as it was my entry

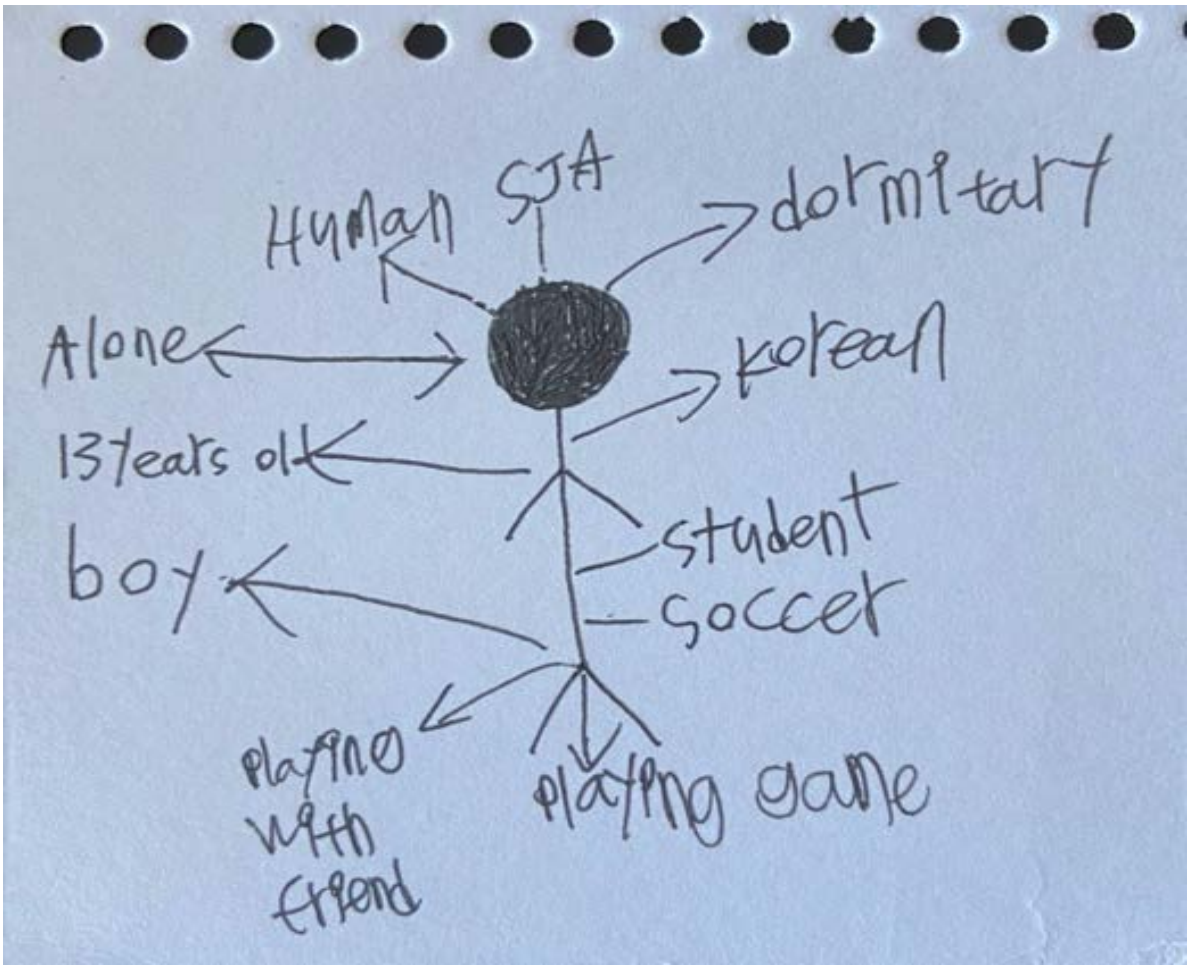


Figure 43. JiWoo identity chart (October 14, 2021).

point for investigations of identity. Gender played a role in JiWoo's friendships and peer relationships at school as gender was made known through interests and who students spent time with. JiWoo pointed to gendered family and cultural norms as playing a role in how students behaved and interacted. In our interview JiWoo described gender, saying,

> It is how to divide people. Usually, most people just know if someone is a boy or girl… girls have a more high tone voice than boys … More boys are playing soccer than girls because most girls don't like to play any sports and just stay together and talk. Most girls have long hair, but boys have short hair. But there are girls with short hair. I learned at my old school that girls grow first before boys, so they are taller now. But later, the boys get taller and stronger.…Boys don't care about fashion, but girls use it to show others that they care about fashion a lot. (JiWoo, interview, January 2022)

In this quote JiWoo uses physical features, physical development, and interests as defining people's gender.

JiWoo did not see boys and girls spending time together unless there was romantic interest. In his 'This or That' reflection, JiWoo said most Korean students assume romantic interest between a boy and a girl if they spent time together. He said,

> Most Korean students have the idea that if we are playing with a girl or a boy, other students will think that we like her or him even if we don't. So, other students don't want to try to sit or play with each other. (JiWoo, this or that reflection, February 17, 2022)

JiWoo wished this was not the case. In our interview he talked about how he wished it were easier to make friends with girls, but he felt pressure from his friends to avoid girls. He said, "If I try to talk to the girls, then my friends will make fun or ask if you like her. I would like to be able to make friends with girls, but boys and girls only mix if they are couples" (JiWoo,

interview, January 2022). Boys and girls did not spend time in mixed gender groups to avoid peer comments about romantic interests.

In the gender switch reflection, shown in Figure 44, JiWoo wrote about what his life would be like if he were to become a girl. The reflection was divided into what life would be like as the opposite gender at school, at home, and in society. JiWoo included his gender switch reflection in the *gender* section of his data analysis chart.

JiWoo's reflection on his life as a girl illustrates the role JiWoo saw gender playing in his interest, behavior, family, and friendships. The reflection indicates violent video games and swearing were fine in his family because he was a boy, but both would need to change if he were a girl. Instead of playing hard with his friends, he would need to just sit and talk with the other girls.

While JiWoo pointed to girls and boys being separated from one another by their gender, he was hopeful it could change. In his reflection on his experience as a member of the research group, he said, "I think it was a great chance to learn why Korean/non-Korean, male/female [students] can't be friends in school. And I think we can fix it!" (JiWoo, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). JiWoo's experience in the research group opened his eyes to the experiences of different members of the school community and motivated him to want to bring people together.

Chapter Summary

In the PAR project students participants and I explored factors shaping their gender identity at school. Ongoing cycles of data collection, reflection, and analysis informed each data event and were supported by consultation conversations with colleagues, along with field notes and reflective memos. Coding and analysis generated a set of categories for each student, which are presented in the form of student vignettes. The vignettes themselves were produced using an

At school	At school, I am going to have a very uncomfortable life.
At home	When I am at home, I will play games, and if I play some violent game, it would be strange because most of the girls do not play violent games. If I was playing battleground, boys can swear too, but then my mom will think I am crazy, and I will go to Asylum to fix me.
In society	I will really care about my clothes and body. If I was a boy, we would play hard, but the girls would just sit and talk with other girls.

Figure 44. JiWoo gender switch reflection (December 2, 2021).

interactive process aimed at facilitating deeper analysis of each student's complete data set. Students' data included their self-analysis poster, which showed how they understood their own data and experiences as they emerged through the data collection process. The eight student researchers were the experts of their own identity and best positioned to provide insights into how their identity played a role in their experiences at school. The eight vignettes presented in this chapter are meant to capture key components of their experiences.

Through data analysis, we uncovered a set of patterns (see Figure 45): *relationships*, *language and culture*, and *context*. Each of the patterns highlighted sets of dominant categories as they emerged from student data. Student identities were informed by and made known via meaningful relationships. Language and culture played a significant role in determining how and with whom students felt they were able to connect. The context itself, including the place and its norms in references to students' prior experiences, dictated what aspects of each student's identity emerged as meaningful to them. These data patterns informed the final round of data collection, outlined in Chapter 5, in which a set of findings crystalized as themes.

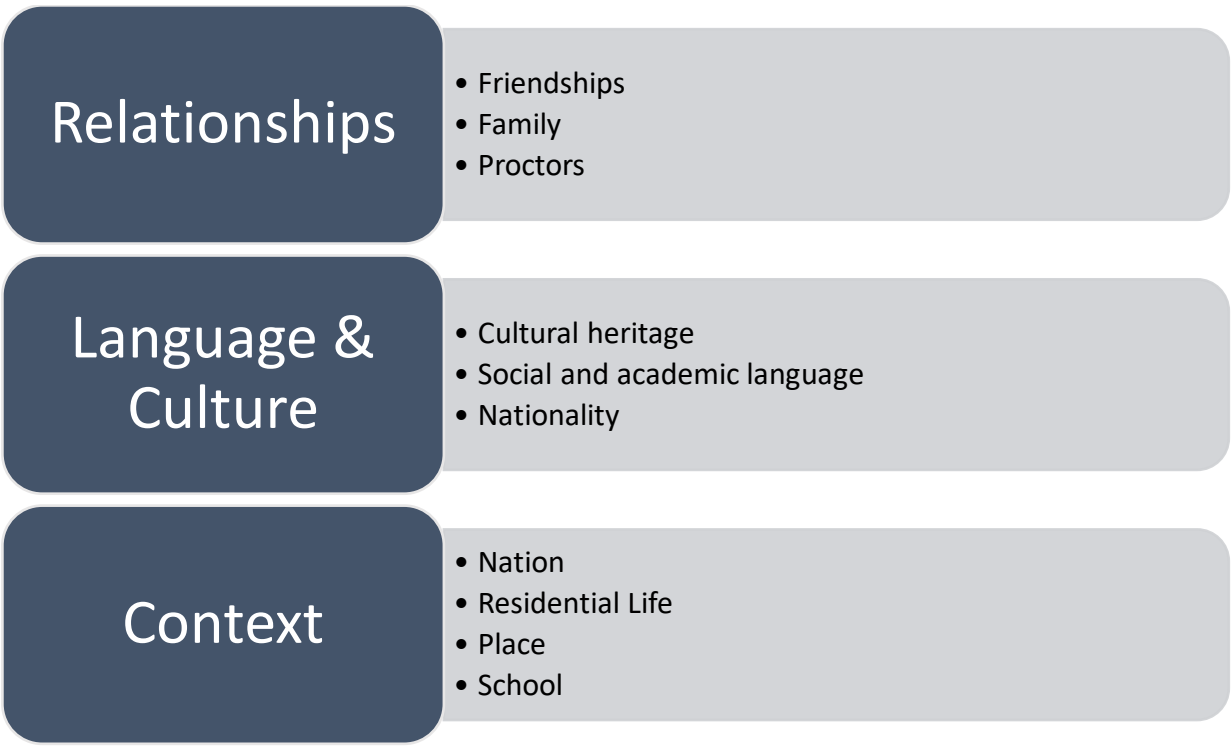


Figure 45. Student data patterns.

CHAPTER 5: PAR CYCLE TWO

I sought in the PAR project to explore the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity to support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school. The final round of data collection, PAR Cycle Two, took place from May to June 2022. In Cycle Two students had an opportunity to share their personal learning with one another in the final CLE. Students generated autobiographical data analysis charts in the first section of the final CLE. These posters are discussed in Chapter 4 as they anchor the student vignettes. In subsequent portions of the final CLE students used the data analysis posters to support discussions about their experiences of identity, in particular gender identity, at school.

The event culminated with the student research team crafting a statement directed at their peers. The statement read, "We want to encourage students to be friends with more different kinds of people and not let things about identity like gender or language create separate groups." In their reflection on identity, students identified that differences like gender and language were dividing them into different groups. They were eager to change that and hoped to create a more inclusive peer community at school. A subset of students decided to extend their work beyond the final CLE and put their vision into action by planning and leading an advisory lesson centered on gender and inclusivity.

The data generated during Cycle Two served to address a number of the research questions guiding the PAR project. The group discussions provided insights into how intersecting identities of gender, race, language, and culture influence experiences and learning, providing a response to one of the PAR project's research sub-questions. Discussions of identity also served to substantiate patterns identified in earlier data analysis namely the importance of

relationships, language and culture, and *context* in shaping their experiences of gender identity at school. These data patterns are summarized in Table 7.

In the final round of data collection, students actualized the theory of action that grounded the PAR project: If we engage students as co-researchers in explorations of identity at school, then students will demonstrate increased belonging and agency. The summary statement the students crafted, along with the advisory lesson, demonstrated that students were ready to create a more united and equitable experience amongst their peers at school. The following chapter presents the data collection events from Cycle Two and student reflections on their experiences.

Culminating CLE: From Individual Reflection to Collective Processing

In the final CLE, students worked in progressively larger groups to identify similarities in factors shaping their gender identity as revealed through the data generated during the research process. Discussions began in pairs, then groups of four students, then to a whole-group discussion. This structure provided students multiple opportunities to share their perspectives about the role of identify in their experiences and also to learn from the stories of their peers and identify similarities. The CLE culminated with students generating a summary statement to share the key message from their experiences to their peers.

Partner Discussions

In the first round of discussions, students were paired up and tasked with finding similarities and differences in their data and experiences. Students were intentionally paired with the goal of facilitating discussion across identities. The pairs were: Tad and Marc, Max and Jason, JiWoo and Sophie, and Lexa and Marja. Table 8 summarizes the categories student pairs

Table 7

Summary of Student Data Analysis Categories

Student	Gender	Relationships	Language	Interests and activities	Context
Marja	•	•		•	
Max	•	•		•	
Lexa	•	•			•
Sophie	•	•	•		
Tad	•		•		•
Marc	•		•		•
Jason	•	•		•	
JiWoo	•	•			•
	•	•			•

Table 8

Student Partner Discussion Categories

Pairs	Language	Sports	Gender	Expectations	Friend & Family	Place (Myanmar)	Physical Features
Tad & Marc	•	•				•	•
Max & Jason	•	•	•		•		
JiWoo & Sophie	•		•	•	•		
Lexa & Marja			•	•	•		

identified as similar in their discussions. Images of the notes students took in their discussions can be found in Appendix M.

Tad and Marc: Place, Physical Features, Language, Sports

Tad and Marc discussed their experiences living in Myanmar and the struggle to fit in due to limited Korean language skills. In their discussion notes they wrote, "Me (Tad) and Marc both lived in Myanmar. We are both incredibly handsome individuals. We both struggle a little bit with Korean. Tad is very good at sports. Marc is also kind of good at sports" (Tad and Marc, CLE partner discussion, May 9, 2022). The summary highlighted the aspects of their experience that were meaningful with regard to their school identities.

Max and Jason: Gender, friendship, language, sports

Max and Jason's discussion focused primarily on their experiences with friendship and sports at school. They identified differences such as "Jason has more friends" (Max and Jason, CLE partner discussion, May 9, 2022). I asked them to share why they thought that was so, and they agreed it was because he was fluent in Korean (Lappé, final CLE reflective memo, May 9, 2022). Max listed his friends, naming mainly non-Korean students, but he also listed a few Korean national students as well. He said all of his Korean friends were from sports. They pointed to a similarity of their experiences as "both play sports at school" (Max and Jason, CLE partner discussion, May 9, 2022). While Max and Jason identified that they found friendship with different people through sports, all the friends they listed were boys. They also identified an attitudinal difference: "Jason thinks we should keep gender the same. Max thinks we should unite them" (Max and Jason, CLE partner discussion, May 9, 2022).

Sophie and JiWoo: Gender, Friendship and Family, Language, Expectations

Sophie and JiWoo were each English Language Learners, but JiWoo spoke Korean, the primary social language at school while Sophie was the only native Spanish speaker in her grade. In the summary of their discussion they wrote, “Family and friends are important. We are both foreigners (not American)” (Sophie and JiWoo, CLE partner discussion, May 9, 2022). This was an interesting stance given JiWoo is local to the study site, but identified as foreign. They used a table entitled “Gender” in their notes to summarize the differences between boys and girls. The gendered expectations JiWoo felt as a boy included “sports (basketball), video games, are active, Instagram, YouTube, Asian (Korean)” (Sophie and JiWoo, CLE partner discussion, May 9, 2022). Sophie expressed she was unsure of the expectations placed on girls because she is not Korean. Sophie and JiWoo seemed surprised to find a common experience across gender; each felt pressure to fit a set of expectations based on their gender (Lappé, final CLE reflective memo, May 9, 2022).

Lexa and Marja: Gender, Friendship, Expectations

Lexa and Marja were each from North America, spoke English and not Korean, and spent much of their schooling overseas but had different experiences of gender (see Figure 46). In their discussion, Lexa and Marja identified similar experiences of feeling doubted or underestimated based on their skills, gender, or position in the community (Lappé, final CLE reflective memo, May 9, 2022). Lexa expressed feeling pressured to conform to particular behaviors and interests as a girl, and Marja expressed feeling undervalued in the academically rigorous school.

Their experiences in the research group along with their data analysis posters empowered students to have meaningful discussions of identity. Students were able to articulate factors influencing their experiences of gender identity, many of which fell into the patterns of

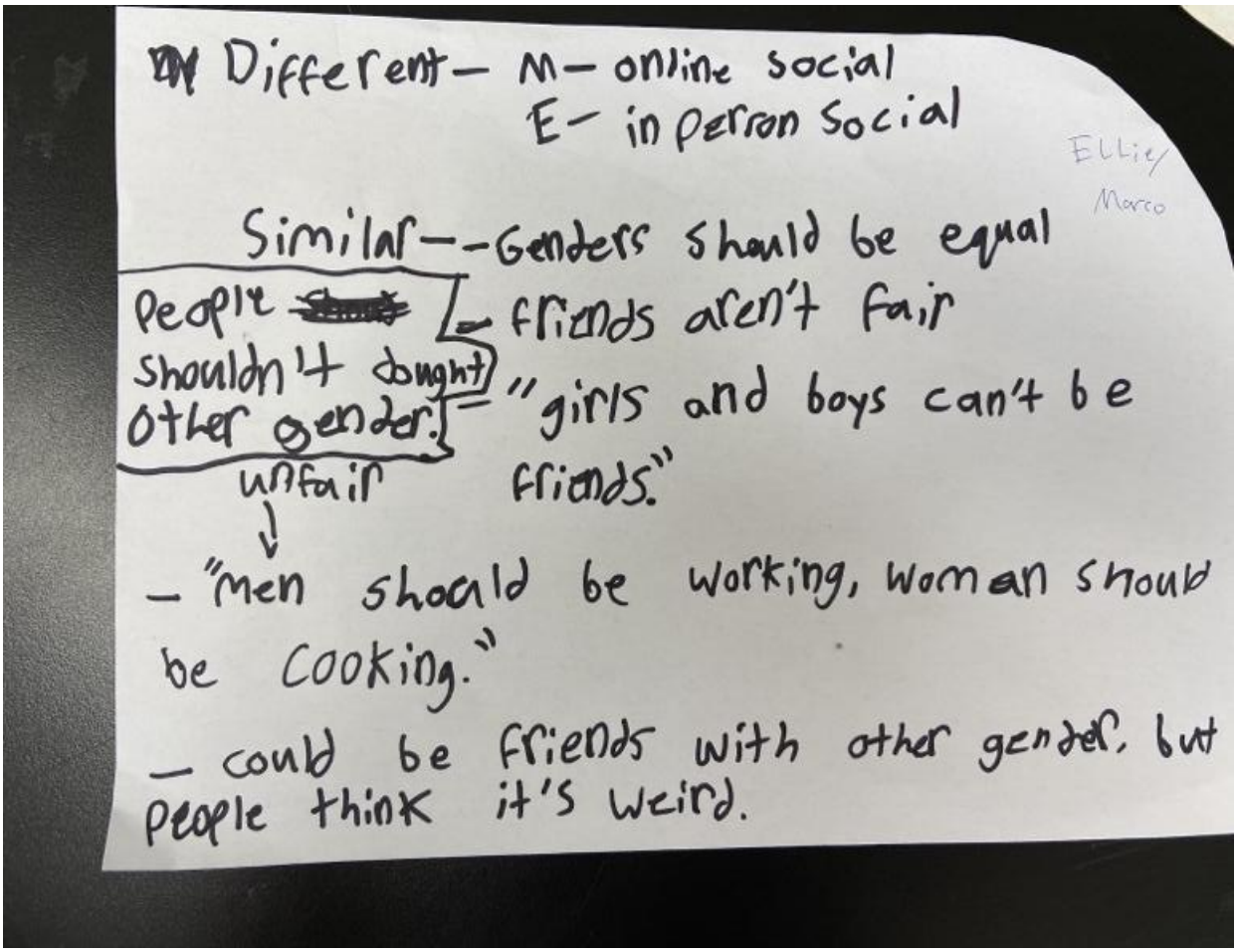


Figure 46. Lexa and Marja discussion summary.

relationships, language and culture, and *context* identified in earlier data analyses. Meaningful relationships were highlighted in how students talked about their friendship and family influences. Students discussed how they navigated different spaces and experiences given their mother tongue and cultural background. Students talked about the differences between their own expectations and those placed on them at school and compared theirs with their peer partners'.

Building the Conversation: Groups of Four

In the next stage of the CLE, student pairs joined to make two groups of four. I encouraged groups to identify differences but to focus primarily on similarities in their data. Gender and language emerged as salient topics in each of the two groups. Students took fewer notes, but transcripts taken from the video footage allowed for analysis of the conversation. Max, Jason, Tad, and Marc' discussion centered on the intersection of *language* and *friendship*. Max pointed out it was challenging to make friends in the context if you do not speak Korean. Tad shared the difficulty he felt as a bilingual member of the community who felt pulled between the foreign English-speaking group and his Korean friends. He said it was difficult to balance the different groups and to figure out where he fit in (final CLE video transcript, May 9, 2022). Jason and Marc expressed they felt they have many friends and did not struggle. This was different from what Marc shared in his individual and partner discussion and may be informed by the presence of Jason, a native Korean speaker, in the group. The group all agreed people should be encouraged but not forced to be friends with different genders. They also decided the Korean and non-Korean speakers each needed to help bridge the language divide with Korean speakers speaking more English during social times and non-Korean speakers working to learn more Korean.

Sophie, JiWoo, Lexa, and Marja's discussion centered on the intersection of *gender* and *friendship*. Sophie and Lexa expressed frustration with the pressure they feel to fit into a girly-girl role. Marja and JiWoo expressed they felt pressure to be sporty and powerful. All of them wished it was easier to be friends across genders but felt they would be made fun of by their peers because people would assume there were romantic interests involved. Sophie also told JiWoo that she found it hard to establish friendship with many Koreans because some are very shy and quiet. She told JiWoo he was an exception to her observation.

In the group discussions student researchers continued to demonstrate the ability to both articulate their own experiences and to find commonalities across experiences. They were equipped with the necessary vocabulary and a level of self-awareness that supported them in discussing identity and experience honestly. Their discussions spoke to the role of intersectional identities of gender, language, and culture in shaping experiences at school. It was clear that more was at play in shaping student experiences than their experiences of gender. Listening in on these discussions highlighted to me the power of creating a space for identity-centered reflection where students can unpack who they are and what that means for their experiences at school. Be feeling seen as individuals by their peers, they were in turn about to better see connections between themselves and others in the group.

Culminating Statement: Whole Group Discussion

The final group discussion was designed to address the overarching research question of the PAR project: How can understanding the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school? As well as sub question one: To what extent and how does student agency manifest in response to opportunities to reflect on their experiences of gender identity at school?

All eight student researchers sat around one table to discuss their experiences of identity at school and to craft a summary statement to capture their experience. The objective was for students to share a salient theme regarding their experience of identity at school with the wider community as the final event of the PAR project. In keeping with the participant- centered design of the study, I left it open for the students to decide *whom* the summary statement would be directed towards and exactly *what* they wanted to communicate.

Students began the discussion by brainstorming to whom to direct the summary statement. Tad started the discussion saying, "I think we should tell [the PE teacher] because he is very sexist". Sophie expressed confusion about his assertion, which was met with a chorus of responses such as, "He lets girls leave first. He has them use different equipment. He treats girls and boys differently." Students agreed that there were different expectations for boys and girls in PE class, many of which students did not understand or agree with.

While PE class quickly emerged as a space where gender issues were front and center, the students were not satisfied with directing their statement at only one teacher. Max changed the tone of the conversation when he suggested the group instead focus on peers. He said, "I think we need to tell the students because they need to know about it because it is affecting them." The research group agreed and went around the table with each sharing their perspectives and ideas. Table 9 shows each student researchers' comments from the round table discussion.

In their comments the students echoed key ideas from the data. For example, students raised the pressure they felt to be friends with their only own gender. Max, JiWoo, and Marc pointed to the risk of being made fun of if you are friends with someone of a different gender based on the assumption of romantic interest. Tad highlighted language barriers as potentially more important than gender in dividing students into groups. Sophie pointed to the student

Table 9

Student Thoughts on Final Summary Statement

Student	Ideas and Perspectives
Marja	Tell the kids to help them change their thoughts and ideas.
Max	Tell the students there aren't many differences, don't need to make fun of students who have different gender friend groups. You can be friends without being in a relationship.
JiWoo	Tell them that having friends of different genders is not strange.
Sophie	I agree, and also we are all having a fun time here even though it is more boys than girls (boy agrees). We can have fun without being in a relationship.
Jason	Most of my friends are boys, and I should change to have more different friends.
Marc	You should be able to be friends with different people without being made fun of.
Tad	Everyone is talking about gender, but I feel like we aren't talking about the language barrier, Korean versus non-Korean. Mostly, Korean speakers are friends with each other, and non-Korean speakers are friends—not a lot of mixing. People have different language skills, and some people don't speak great English or great Korean. So, that means they are left out all the time.
Lexa	People should try to be friends with everyone, not just the people they are used to being around. Try to keep making friends instead of staying only with one person.

research group as an example of what is possible: while the group had more boys than girls, they are all getting along and having fun.

The group then began crafting the summary statement. The group decided to direct it towards peers and to focus on the theme of friendship across differences. The final summary statement read, “We want to encourage students to be friends with more different kinds of people and not let things about identity like gender or language create separate groups.” I asked if they wanted to list more or different parts of identity, but all eight agreed language and gender were most important.

At this point, the student participant researchers were motivated to extend their activities beyond the initial goal of the final CLE. They were eager to turn their ideas and experiences from the research group into action. They wanted to lead the activities they talked about as a way to help change the culture of their peer group to be more inclusive. I encouraged them to instead focus on the small group example we had created in the research group of what is possible. The eight of them represent many of the identities they discussed: different genders, backgrounds, first languages, etc. The group of eight demonstrated what was possible, and that was enough all on its own. I did suggest that interested students could share their work through an advisory lesson. All eight students expressed a desire to design and lead an advisory lesson. This decision ended the final CLE.

Prior to the final CLE, students had engaged in deep reflection on factors shaping their gender identity and experience at school had shared their reflections with peers in the final session. In the whole group discussion, they explored how to leverage their awareness to increase inclusivity at school. Some students were motivated by the discussion to see how they could put their awareness into action in the form of an advisory lesson. The next section summarizes the

work five of the eight student researchers undertook to design and lead an advisory lesson for their peers.

Student-Led Advisory Lesson

At the conclusion of the final CLE a number of student researchers were eager to share their experiences with their peer community through an advisory lesson they would design around the summary statement crafted by the group. Five of the eight student researchers, Max, Lexa, Sophie, Tad, and Marja, decided to join this additional activity.

The five students met during an advisory period to plan the lesson. I provided a few ideas for activities they could use. They decided the Four Corners activity was the best fit for their goals. The students wrote eight statements connected to gender and friendship and placed them on slides. On each slide, the statement is in the center, and students are told to move to one of four corners of the room, each representing an opinion about the statement—strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. An example slide for the activity is shown in Figure 47. After designing the slides, the students decided they would split up and lead the lesson with their respective advisory groups.

Leading the Lesson: Student Researcher Reflections

Lexa and Sophie led the lesson with my advisory. There were 10 students in my advisory for the 2021–2022 school year, six girls and four boys, including Lexa and Sophie, all of whom attended the lesson. The other eight students were Korean nationals who spoke Korean as a first language. Lexa and Sophie introduced the main goals of the lesson and then began using the slides to guide the activity. Because the students were familiar with the four corners activity from other classes, including in science class with me, they were familiar with the format. When each

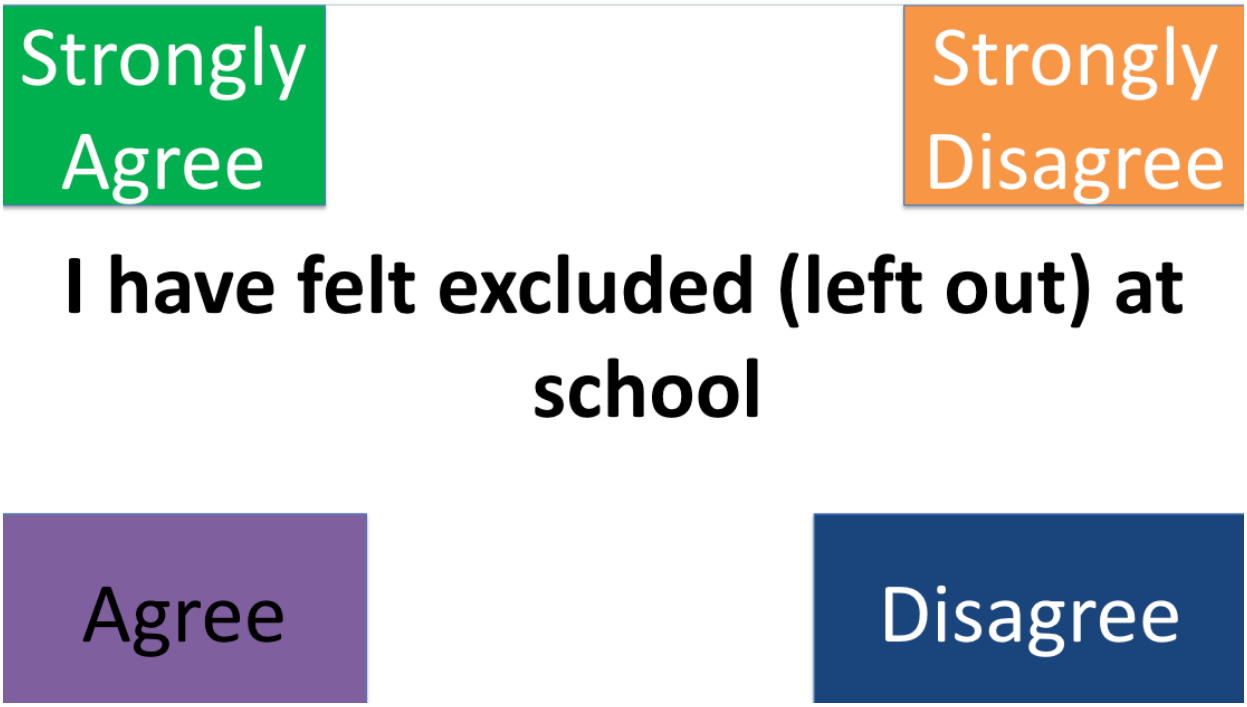


Figure 47. Example advisory lesson slide.

statement was projected on the board, students moved to the corner best reflecting their opinion. They were asked to talk about their choice with others in their group and then invited to share a key idea. I filmed the lesson and stayed as separate as possible to leave Lexa and Sophie in charge.

Although all students participated in the advisory lesson, the boys insisted on staying in one corner, *disagree*, for the entire lesson. The girls moved to different corners but always stayed together in a group. When the boys would share with the group, they would find a way to make their ideas fit the disagree stance for the statement. The girls shared in general terms with one girl in particular being the primary voice for the group. Lexa and Sophie did their best to ask follow-up questions and to encourage authentic engagement from the group.

After the lesson, I debriefed the experience with Lexa and Sophie. They shared a combination of satisfaction with making the lesson a reality and disappointment with how the group participated. Lexa said, “I feel like the boys especially didn’t participate well. They were in the same spot the whole time.” Sophie agreed saying, “I don't know if the topic was uncomfortable for them, but they didn’t seem like they wanted to talk about the topic.” Lexa said, “I feel like the girls were choosing the space based on what they thought they were supposed to do and not what they actually thought.” Later, Lexa generalized her observation to other interactions with girls: “In my experience with Korean girls, they will choose what they are supposed to do or what they think is right and not necessarily what they really think” (Lexa, advisory lesson debrief, June 10, 2022).

One of the statements in the lesson students had to respond to was, “I feel excluded at school.” This was the only question where all the boys and girls in the advisory were together in the *disagree* corner. Lexa and Sophie were not surprised the students chose this corner because

they observe them as all having friends at school. Lexa and Sophie said they would not have joined the rest of their advisory in response to the exclusion question and instead would agree with the prompt. Lexa said, “I don’t feel completely excluded, but if my friends aren’t here, I’m super lonely.” Sophie also said she would agree with the statement, saying that it is hard to make friends with Korean students due to cultural differences: “I guess but some of it is cultural. I don’t think Koreans are really talkative with foreigners. I can talk with anyone, but Koreans don’t do that” (Sophie, advisory lesson debrief, June 10, 2022).

Lexa and Sophie saw their experience in the research group as different from their experience with peers in the rest of the school. While the research group was majority boys, they felt more included. Sophie said she was glad to get to talk with boys more. She said, “I did like the research group. Even though it was more boys than girls, the boys were really talkative, and I like to talk, so I enjoyed it.” Lexa agreed: “I was able to talk to boys here for once. It was fun.”

Tad led the advisory lesson with Max and Marja for Lindsey’s advisory. There were eight other students in the advisory group; two boys and six girls. I debriefed the lesson with Tad after. Tad’s experience was similar to Sophie and Lexa’s as the students participated but were not as authentically engaged as Tad hoped they would be. He also reported the boys and girls stayed in separate groups for the duration of the lesson.

> It was good, but in the beginning all the people stayed in the place where they were sitting because they didn’t want to move. Then Lindsey said they couldn’t sit, so they started moving. But just Jason and Alvin stayed together, and all the girls stayed together. (Tad, advisory lesson debrief, June 10, 2022)

Similar to the group in my advisory, the boys and girls stayed separate from one another and chose the same responses by gender for each question.

Nonetheless, Tad heard a few interesting responses from his peers during the lesson. In response to the statement, “Boys are better at sports than girls,” girls in the advisory shared a gendered disparity around sports at school. While they don’t think it should be this way, they saw some boys as being better than the girls at sports at school and teachers being more supportive of boys playing sports than girls. In response to the statement about feeling excluded at school, Tad reported that the boys in the group disagreed and the girls strongly disagreed because they all feel they have friends at school.

While the student researchers expressed some disappointment in how their peers participated in the lesson, they were also proud of themselves for carrying it out. This final act in the PAR project actualized the theory of action of the project as students who had participated in explored factors shaping their gender identity demonstrated agency through their motivation to share their learning with their peers in an effort to create a more inclusive and equitable experience for everyone at school.

PAR Cycle Two Summary

The PAR project sought to explore how understanding factors shaping student gender identity could support educators and supporting students in cultivating a sense of belonging in an international middle school in South Korea. The final round of data collection, Cycle Two, took place from May to June 2022. Cycle Two gave students an opportunity to share their personal learning with one another in the final CLE. The event culminated with the student research team crafting a statement directed at their peers. The statement read, “We want to encourage students to be friends with more different kinds of people and not let things about identity like gender or language create separate groups.” In their reflection on identity, students identified that differences like gender and language were dividing them into different groups. They were eager

to create change and hoped to build a more inclusive peer community at school. A subset of students decided to extend their work beyond the final CLE and put their vision into action by planning and leading an advisory lesson centered on gender and inclusivity. Five of the eight student researchers collaborated to design and lead an advisory lesson with their grade six peers focused on the intersection of gender identity and friendship at school.

In articulating this vision for their peers and electing to extend their learning to include teaching, student participant researchers actualized the theory of action which grounded the PAR project: If we engage students as co-researchers in explorations of identity at school, then students will demonstrate increased belonging and agency. In the Pre-Cycle and Cycle One of the PAR project, student participant researchers generated rich data that captured their experiences of identity at school. The final CLE of the research project created a final space for students to share their experience and to find commonalities across their experiences as a group. They identified similar patterns, many of which fell into the previously identified patterns of *relationships, language and culture*, and *context*. The patterns were sufficiently substantiated to reveal findings presented in the form of four themes: *The Influence of Context, The Role of Relationships, The Importance of Language and Culture,* and *The Power of Elevating Student Voice* in shaping student experiences of gender identity at school. These themes are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

Data generated through the PAR project revealed three primary factors shaping student gender identity and experiences for a group of eight Grade 6 students at an American international school in South Korea, context, relationships, and language and culture. Additional data pointed to the power elevating student voice can have in helping them to exercise agency and cultivate a sense of belonging at school. The four findings were first identified as patterns based on data from Pre-Cycle and Cycle One. The patterns became findings as they were substantiated by literature and by the data generated in Cycle Two, the final round of data collection (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The four findings that emerged from student data are: *The Influence of Context, The Role of Relationships, The Importance of Language and Culture,* and *The Power of Elevating Student Voice* (see Figure 48). In the *Influence of Context*, we saw how the dynamics of the school where the research took place and the positionality of each student researcher within the school affected how students experienced identity. The PAR project took place at an international school in South Korea that enrolls primarily local students, which influenced how many of the student researchers, in particular the Third Culture Kids (TCKs), saw themselves fitting in. In the *Role of Relationships,* students revealed how those around them were a meaningful part of how they came to know themselves. Student researchers highlighted friends and family relationships as being particularly meaningful factors shaping how they understand who they are. The *Importance of Language and Culture* came up repeatedly across student data as they worked to understand how identity is expressed in situations where people may not speak the same language or come from the same cultural background. Students shared insights on the role

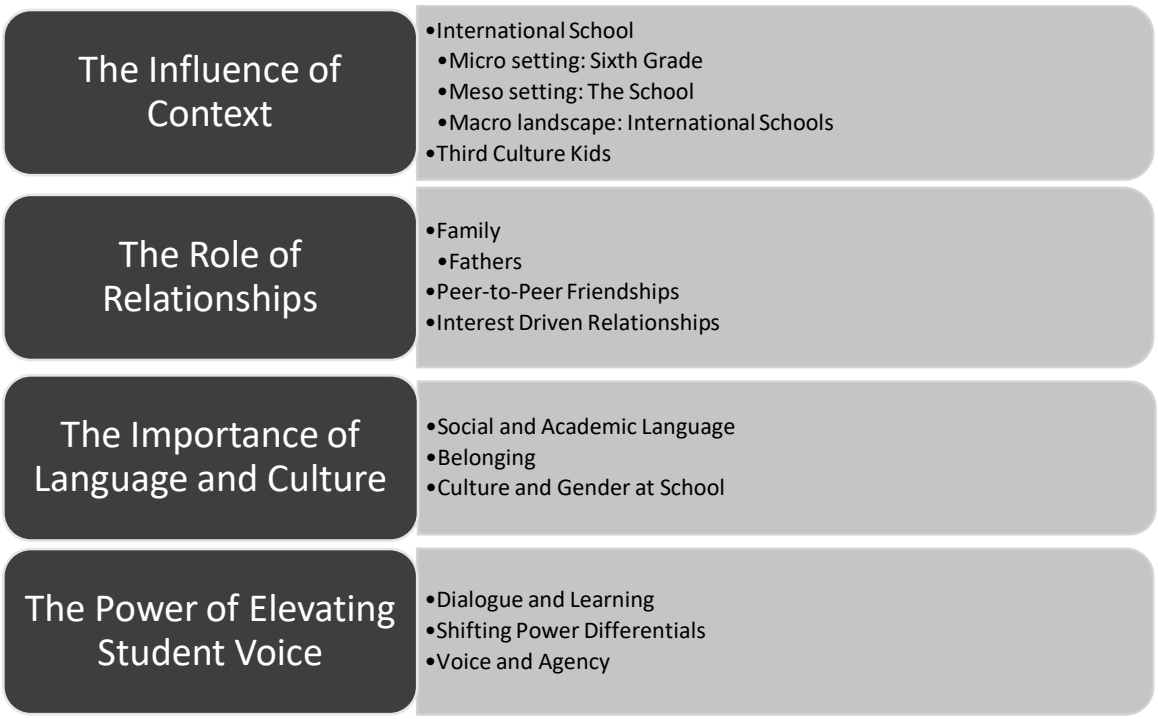


Figure 48. PAR project findings.

language and culture play in their sense of self and their sense of belonging in the school community.

The fourth finding, the *Power of Elevating Student Voice* emerged from the methodological practices used in the study. The methods used in the PAR project created a space where students were not only comfortable sharing insights into factors shaping their identity at school, but within which their voices were elevated to being equal to that of a teacher. Students demonstrated increasing agency as the study unfolded. They went from following instructions and sharing their ideas to examining their data both individually and in groups and acting to motivate positive change in their community. The students expressed a feeling of belonging as a member of the student research team. Through ongoing participation in CLE protocols, students were able to become co-researchers who were truly immersed and assisted in guiding the research process. This shift in dynamic revealed the power of creating nonhierarchical, student-led learning space at school.

In this chapter, I outline the PAR process and findings. First, I provide an overview of data collection events and the analysis process. I then present the four findings which emerged from the PAR project. The findings are substantiated using study data as well as relevant research both from the literature review and additional research which emerged as meaningful to the study. Finally, I share the conceptual framework which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for the PAR project began following IRB approval in October 2021 and concluded in June 2022. The Pre-Cycle along with Cycle One and Cycle Two were designed around iterative cycles of data collection, analysis and reflection (see Figure 49). Each cycle built

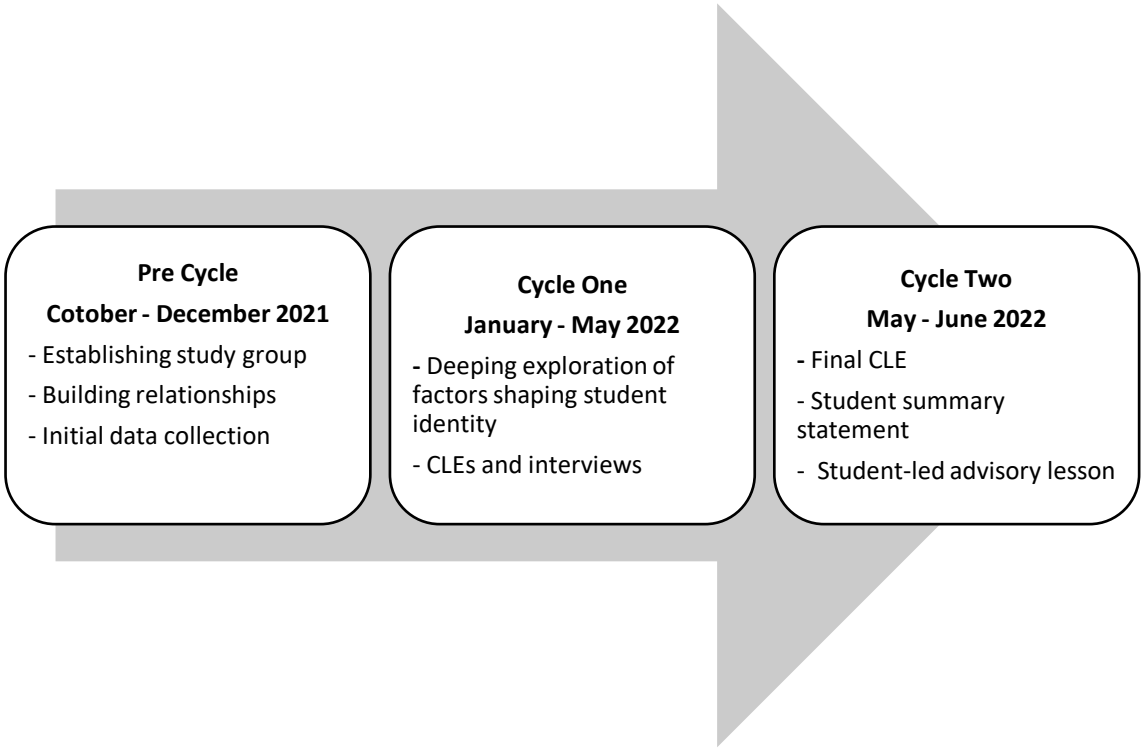


Figure 49. Data collection cycles.

on the one before as I built skills as the lead researcher and students gained confidence with the research process.

In each cycle students participated in data collection events designed to explore factors shaping their gender identity and experiences at school. A group of professional and academic peers supported the process by sharing insights into how best to structure data events and in supporting my data analysis and reflection. Figure 50 summarizes the PAR project data collection events. Data collection occurred during advisory periods, which were scheduled into the school day and allowed for flexibility in meeting with student participants.

Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. During the Pre-Cycle, I built and maintained a code book (see Appendix H) to capture codes as they emerged from student artifacts, reflective memos, and field notes. The code book helped me to identify early patterns in student data related to factors shaping their identity at school. As the research unfolded, I took a more organic approach to data analysis which centered on reflective memos and collaborative discussions with my academic peers and dissertation coach.

In preparation for the final CLE, I did a full review of each student participants data set. I organized all data into a single document and coded it in search of categories. I shared each student's data categories with them as they embarked on their own data self-analysis that resulted in a visual poster. My review of each student's data combined with each student's own self-analysis of their data set (their poster) helped to frame the student vignettes (Chapter 4). Writing and rewriting the vignettes provided me with the opportunity to conduct a deep analysis of all student data. I interacted with every word and artifact each student produced with the goal of uncovering factors shaping their gender identity and experiences at school while representing each individual student as faithfully as possible.

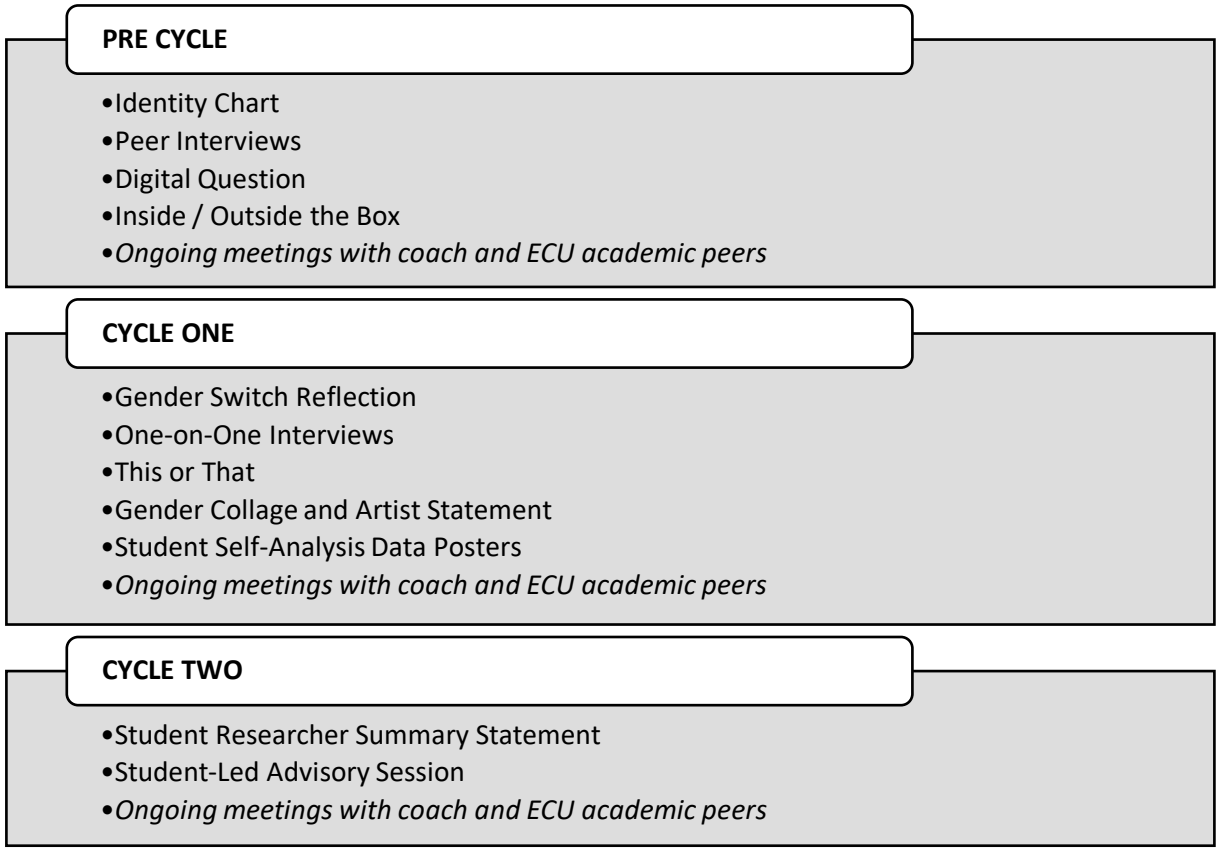


Figure 50. Data collection events.

Findings

The following sections present the findings of the PAR project followed by the conceptual framework. The first three findings focus on factors shaping students experiences of gender identity at school, namely context, relationships, and language and culture. Each of these factors emerged from student data and were substantiated by literature focused on Third Culture Kids (TCKs), adolescent identity and relationships, and the role of language and culture in influencing students sense of belonging at school. The fourth finding highlights the impact of elevating student voice by co-creating a dialogue driven learning space with students to support them in cultivating a sense of belonging and exercising agency at school.

The Influence of Context

The data collected indicated context played a meaningful role in shaping the gender identity and experiences of the eight Grade 6 student researchers at the school. Key aspects of the context emerged at the micro, meso, and macro scales as shown in Figure 51. The micro dimension was student researchers' status as a Third Culture Kid, which shaped how they each felt they fit in at school. The term Third Culture Kids (TCKs) describes kids who spend much of their life outside of their parents' home country (Useem & Downie, 1976). The school presented the meso dimension of the study and provided a window into international schools serving primarily local students. The macro dimension of trends in international schools helped us to position the study within a broader educational landscape. Research on international schools and TCKs provided additional insight into the role of student identity in learning spaces (Allan, 2002; Brummitt & Keeling 2013; Bunnell, 2021; Fail et al., 2004; Miller et al., 2020; Tanu, 2017; Useem & Downie, 1976).

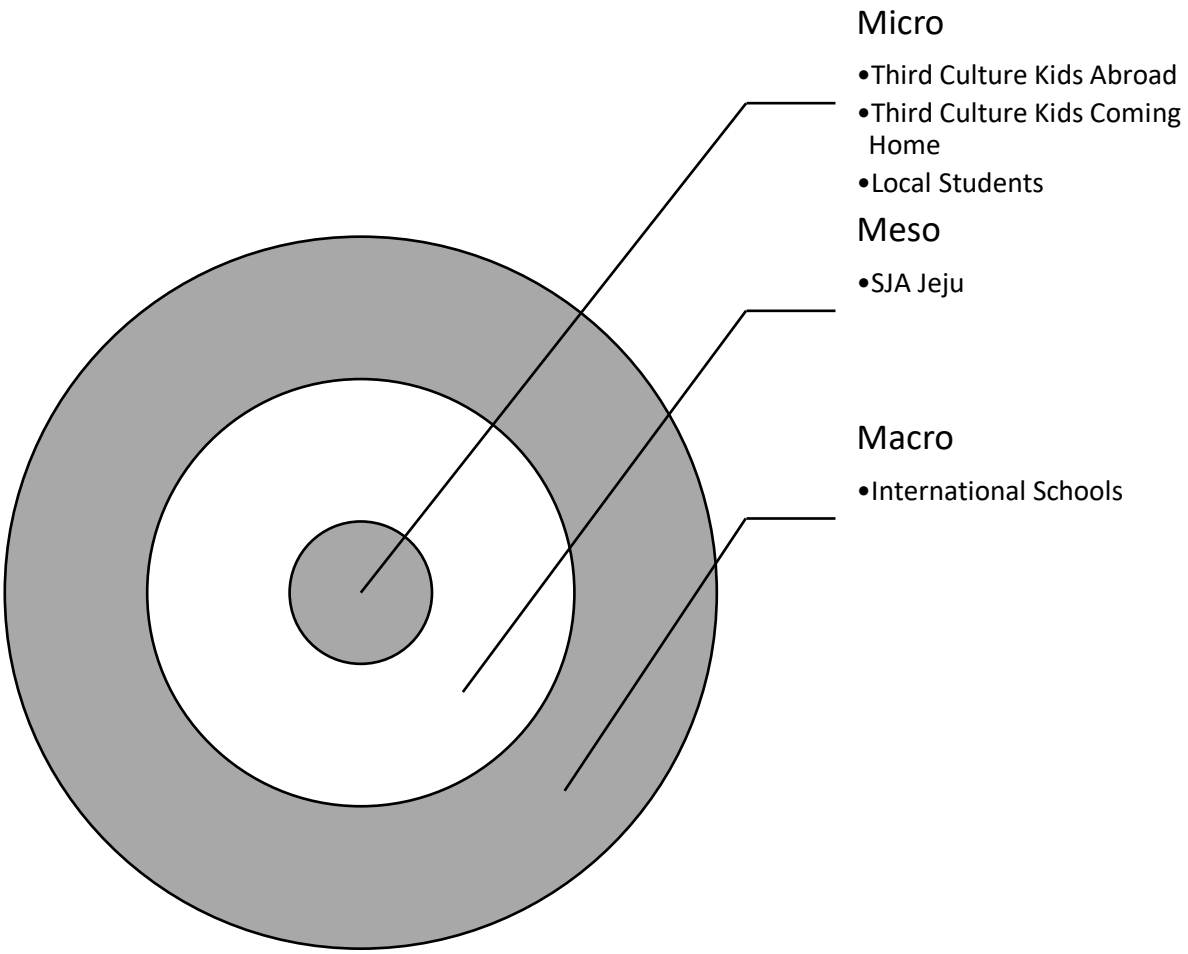


Figure 51. Micro, meso, and macro study factors.

At the micro scale, the relationship each student had with the school played a significant role in their experiences of identity. This occurred regardless if the student researcher was a TCK who had lived abroad like Sophie, Max, Lexa, and Marja, or a TCK coming home to Korea like Marc and (in some ways) Tad, or a local student like JiWoo and Jason. Allan's (2002) work on belonging and culture in international schools helps us to understand student experiences at international schools. He highlights the importance of understanding the "overlapping cultural environments of school, host country, majority student culture, other student cultures and own culture" (p. 78). Tad's experiences of friendship mirrored Allan's framework as he expressed feeling pulled between his English speaking and Korean speaking friend groups. The framework (see Figure 52) provides a valuable visual to consider when thinking about how students establish a sense of self amidst the overlapping cultural dynamics shaping their day-to-day experiences at school.

The four foreign students, Lexa, Marja, Max, and Sophie, were living the life of TCKs during the PAR project. They did not use TCK language to describe themselves but instead referred to themselves as foreigners. Each of them pointed to the challenges they faced to feel fully connected to the peer community at school. Max felt like an outsider on his sports teams. Marja felt overlooked within the grades centered value structure of his peers. Sophie and Lexa each said they felt lost at school when the other one was absent. They felt gender, language, and cultural differences isolated them from Korean peers. While they felt like the other at school, being a foreigner served as a meaningful description of their group, which helped to create insider status for them in a school where they often felt like outsiders.

Tanu (2017) affirms the need for such terms to help people form insider status saying the term Third Culture Kids is "better understood as an emotionally powerful insider construct that

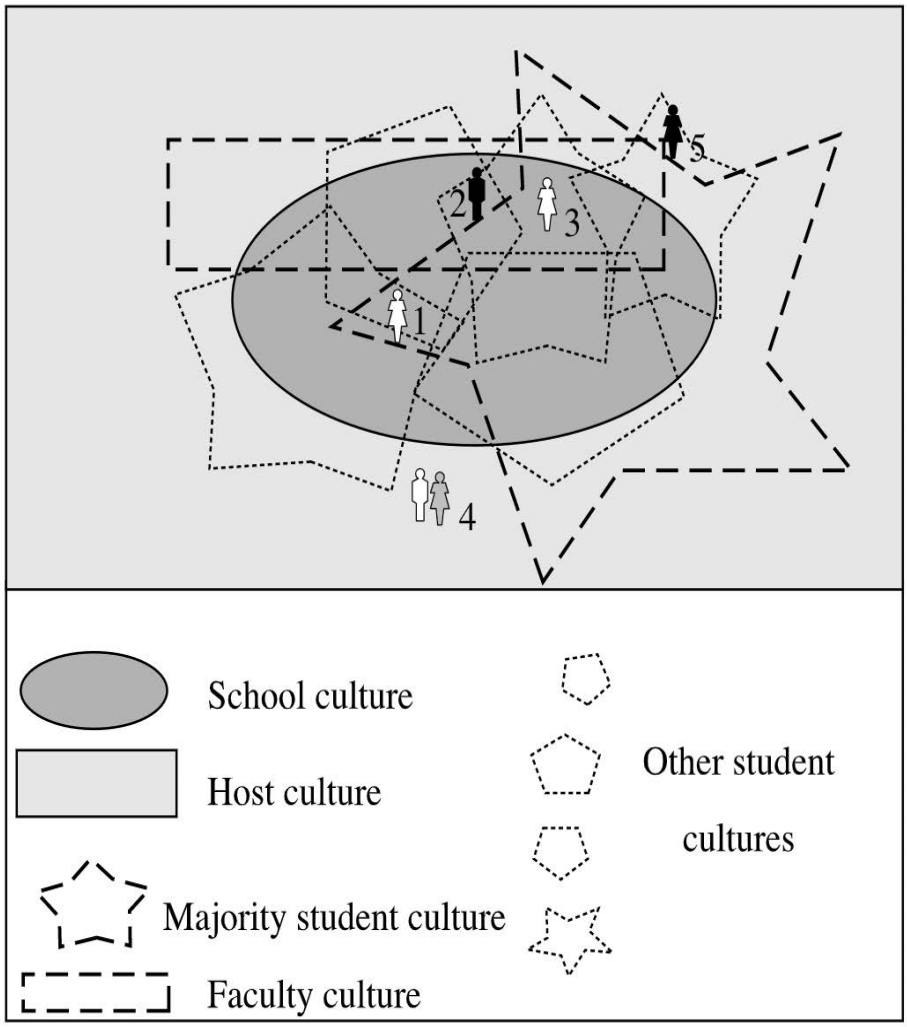


Figure 52. Allan (2002) cultural borderlands framework.

narrates identity and belonging for people with a transnational upbringing in the same way that 'Italy' or 'Indonesia' can represent geographical and emotional homelands" (p. 9). Creating a group for themselves within a context where they often felt excluded from the norms of the majority Korean community helped to create a sense of belonging for the TCK, or foreigner, group within the student research team. Fostering such a sense of belonging can be challenging for TCKs as they must work to find who they are against shifting cultural frameworks in different school settings (Fail et al, 2004; Miller et al., 2020; Tanu, 2017).

Marc, and to some extent Tad, were experiencing what happens when TCKs return to their home nation. Miller et al. (2020) and Fail et al. (2004) found returning to the home country as particularly challenging for TCKs as they struggle to align the identity they cultivated abroad with the expectations of their home nation. Marc was a Korean national who had spent his entire life overseas and had just moved back the year the research took place. He revealed a strong desire to assimilate to the Korean cultural context and his struggles to do so. On his data chart, Marc highlighted his struggle to connect in Korea with phrases such as "hard to make friends because I cannot speak Korean well," "Sometimes I feel like I am from Myanmar," and "Some people stare at me because of my skin color" (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

As a multinational student, Tad seemed to navigate both aspects of being a TCK at once. While his mother is Korean and his dad is Canadian, he had spent most of his life away from their birth countries. Tad's experiences of friendship reflected a unique blend of dual national identities. "My friend group is mostly boys, but it has two groups: Western or foreign friends and Korean friends…. There is overlap, but not really" (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022). Tad's sense of belonging seemed to be in-between cultural communities. In response to the interview question, "Where do you feel like you are from?" Tad responded, "I associate myself more with

Canada, but sometimes I think I'm Korean because I'm closer to my mom" (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022). Tad and Marc' data points reveal their struggle to establish insider status with the majority Korean group at school while holding onto the identities they each cultivated while living abroad.

As local students, JiWoo and Jason represented the school majority and provided contrast to the experiences of the other six student researchers. For example, language was not as meaningful for Jason and JiWoo as they both communicated fluently with the majority of the other students at school while also having sufficient English fluency to be successful in class. Jason's and JiWoo's identity reflections revealed their sense of belonging. They felt included and well liked, and they had a clear sense of how they fit in. They revealed how being part of the majority group at school made their experience uncomplicated.

The meso dimension of the study was the school where the PAR project took place. The school's status as a newly opened, for-profit, American international school on Jeju Island influenced the student researchers' experiences of identity at school. Students at the school were both living in South Korea and separate from it. In the forward to Tanu's (2017) book, *Growing up in Transit,* Rizvi describes international schools as "highly complex and contradictory places where global forces often conflict with local and national imperatives, where it is possible for students to experience lives that are divorced from the pressures of life outside the walls of their school" (p ix). Given the rural nature of campus, the students were more connected to the culture of the school than to the culture of the country itself. For the student researchers, this meant their sense of belonging was deeply tied to how well they felt they fit in at school. For example, Jason centered his friends from school in much of his data; Max referenced his school-based sports

teams as central to his sense of community; and Marc focused intently on building relationships at his new school.

The school is also part of a macro-level shift in the landscape of international schools towards homogeneous student bodies, which further influenced student participants' experiences of identity at school. Whereas international schools were originally designed to serve mainly children of diplomats and international corporations, in the past 20 years there has been a shift in the demographics, goals, and distribution of international schools across the globe. Now, close to 50% of international schools are opening in response to demands for English options from the growing upper and middle classes, predominantly in the Middle East and Asia (Brummitt & Keeling 2013; Bunnell, 2021). Many of the new wave of international schools, including where the PAR took place, are for-profit and enroll predominantly local children. The schools are motivated to enroll as many local students as possible to reduce host country brain-drain and to stay ahead of the competition from other international schools. As Bunnell (2021) puts it, “In effect, the entire South East Asia region is competing within itself for the same students with numerous education hubs emerging amidst a plethora of similar-sounding titles” (p. 9). The study site exists within one of those education hubs in which four international schools sit next door to one another and jockey to differentiate themselves to ensure ever growing enrollment. The study school aligned itself with American educational ideals by licensing the name of a 150-year-old boarding school, using American curricula, and hiring predominantly American teachers.

For the student researchers this meant their experiences of identity were happening in a relatively new educational space where local students are taught by foreign staff in a school largely isolated from the host country. In light of this, teachers and staff are not provided training

to assist them to navigate the cultural landscape or to incorporate this perspective in the work they do. This meant staff and students were left to figure out how they fit in on their own. Not surprising, students pointed to a desire to feel a stronger sense of belonging at school through better support of their cultural diversity. Sophie wanted to speak more Spanish; Lexa wanted a more gender-inclusive friend group; and Tad wanted to feel more at ease in his movement between his Korean and foreign friends. Student researchers wanted access to a more diverse set of experiences, but at a homogeneous school, they were instead forced to question why they did not quite fit in. Conversely, Jason, a local student who embodied the majority community of the school, seemed to feel at ease.

The additional themes which emerged from the student researchers' data were all situated within the school context where the study took place. Lexa, Sophie, Max, Marja, Marc, and Tad were all affected by being TCKs. For Lexa, Sophie, Max and Marja being one of only four non-Korean students in your grade inevitably shaped the role of relationships, language, culture, and more in how they experienced identity at school. Similarly, Marc' was seen as a local student while learning to live in Korea for the first time. Finally, Tad's family and educational experiences revealed how intersecting identities of language and culture can shape a student's sense of self and their experiences at school. In summary, the micro dimensions of TCK versus local student status, the meso location and demographics of the school, and the macro landscape of international schools in Asia emerged as factors shaping student experiences of identity at school.

The Role of Relationships

Meaningful relationships with friends, family, proctors, teachers, and others played a role in defining how each student researcher made sense of who they were and how they fit into the

school community. Such relationships were cornerstones in the students' process of coming to know their identity, in particular gender identity, at school. Some student researchers pointed to meaningful family relationships, in particular fathers, as helping to shape their sense of self while others lifted up friendships and to relationships based on common interests as most influential. Cooley's (1922) concept of the Looking Glass Self corroborates the importance of interactions between self and others in identity development in that how one views oneself does not happen in isolation. In some cases, relationships themselves define particular aspects of student identity; for example, gender identity was largely made known through friendships.

Family anchored some student researchers' identity across experiences in different schools, countries, and cultures. Seeing themselves as part of a family unit helped to orient some student researchers and played a role in defining who they were. Jason summed it up when he identified family as "the most important!!" on his data analysis chart (Jason, data analysis poster, May 9, 2022). Many student researchers included their position within their family as daughter, brother, or cousin on their identity charts, indicating their family role as a key component of how they thought about who they were.

Throughout the vignettes there are powerful stories of family. For the Third Culture Kids, in this study, family connections supported their sense of identity and belonging throughout their global travels and served to anchor their sense of self. Fail et al. (2004) surveyed a group of TCKs and found their sense of belonging was "three times stronger to relationships than to a particular country" (.p 321). Lexa, who had attended international schools in multiple countries outside the United States, identified as a traveler. She was proud of her positive attitude and her ability to make friends wherever she went. Though she mourned how hard it was to maintain friendships over multiple moves. Her attachment to a particular home country had waned over

time, she said home “feels like where I am with my family” (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022). Her relationships, even those spread over the world, anchored her identity and bonded her tightly to her family unit.

Max and Tad’s relationships with their fathers arose repeatedly in their data. Max saw himself as an athlete and his father was key to his experiences with sports. His father coached his baseball and basketball team, woke up early to watch live American sporting events with him while living in South Korea, and supported Max in his athletic pursuits. Tad identified himself as an avid reader and budding author, interests he said were cultivated by his father. For Max and Tad, fathers served as role models and supporters of their son’s emerging passions, which in turn shaped how each of the boys understood their identity.

In addition to family, student researchers’ gender identity was, to some extent, realized through the peer group they connected with at school. For example, I am a boy because all my friends are boys. This dynamic positioned gender as something you ‘do’ based on cultural constructs and societal expectations at school (Pateman, 1998; Pyke & Johnson, 2003; Thompson, 2003). As Lexa put it, “Boys only want to be friends with boys, and the same with girls,” and “People don’t expect girls and boys to be friends” (Lexa, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Pateman (1998) pointed to the term *gender* as a mechanism to highlight the culturally prescribed differences between men and women, those “not dictated by nature, by biology or sex, but is a matter of social and political contrivance” (p. 248).

The cultural constructs and social norms at school meant genders needed to remain in separate friend groups. Each of the student researchers observed their peers as divided along gender lines with single-gender friend groups connecting over common interests, activities, and ways of interacting at school. Boy groups were described as playing soccer and video games and

being active and loud. Girls, on the other hand, were described as typically quiet groups talking together, interested in fashion and Instagram. JiWoo summarized it in our interview saying, “As long as boys can play and have fun then, it is fine. Girls don't play sports, so they would stay together, and many girls can see the fashion, so girls care about that” (JiWoo, interview, January 20, 2022). As indicated by how students talked about gendered groups, stereotypical gendered pressures further defined students' experiences of gender identity at school.

Peer groups were so consistently divided by gender at school that some student researchers were unable to confidently describe the opposite gender. As Marc said, “Lots of female friends together or male groups together—I don't know what girls do” (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022). Other students felt pushed into single gender groups due to social pressures to only connect with the other gender for romantic reasons. JiWoo summarized the pressure: “Most Korean students have the idea that if we are playing with a girl or a boy, other students will think that we like her or him even if we don’t” (JiWoo, this or that reflection, February 17, 2022).

Students imagined new relationships would open up if gender disappeared. Without gender, most student researchers said they would probably have more friends. Lexa said without gender it would “be a lot easier to make friends” (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022). In the absence of pressures associated with current gender norms dictating the nature of their peer relationships at school, student researchers anticipated less division between groups and the elimination of pressure for romantic connections.

For some student researchers, especially Marja and JiWoo, interest-driven relationships were cornerstones of their identities. As JiWoo lived as a boarder at school, his relationships with dorm staff were particularly meaningful to him. JiWoo made his sense of belonging in the dorm known through his love of ping pong, an interest he cultivated with dorm staff. He brought

a ping pong racket to our interview as his item to represent himself. The space he and his proctor created over the game of ping pong cemented a relationship, an interest, and, in turn, an aspect of JiWoo's identity.

Similarly, Marja found a community within the gaming world where he felt supported and at ease. Marja said he "likes the gaming world more than the real world" because he "has less friends in the real world than in the gaming world" (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022). The relationships he formed over the shared interest of video games provided Marja a space for validation and belonging. While Marja struggled to feel valued and accepted in a school where academic success was valued over other skills, he found a supportive community through his love for gaming. Marja saw himself as being skilled, inclusive, kind, and popular, aspects that emerged from his links with the gaming community.

Relationships, including family connections, friends, and interest-based communities, arose as critical to how the student researchers defined their identities at school. Those with whom each student connected helped them to understand how their identity fit in with those around them. Marja's gaming community showed him what he wanted more of at school. JiWoo's sense of belonging in the dorm was formed over a game of ping pong. Both Tad's and Max's sense of self was deeply grounded in the passions they formed with their father's guidance. All of the student researchers pointed to friendships as critical to how their gender identity was made known in the community. While each student researcher explored aspects of identity in each research cycle, it became clear multifaceted identities cannot easily be broken down into their parts. The student researchers' intersecting identities were, in large part, built and made known through their relationships.

The Importance of Language and Culture

The PAR Study revealed that language and culture shaped student researchers' identity and sense of belonging at school. Language was more than a means of communication for the student researchers but also a mechanism to anchor their sense of belonging within the school community. As the school was American international school, all non-language courses were taught in English; English was the official academic language of the school. The language policy identified English as the language of inclusion, and the school encourages students to speak English at all times during the school day. However, in reality, Korean was the dominant social language and permeated the campus during unstructured times. Amongst the student research team, there was a spectrum of skill with spoken Korean, which influenced their social experiences at school. Figure 53 summarizes the mother tongue and additional languages spoken by each of the student researchers. Student researchers identified language as an identity factor that divided students into different groups at school.

Non-Korean-speaking student researchers struggled with feelings of exclusion and isolation due to the dominance of spoken Korean during social times at school. Marja imagined his social life would be easier in an English-speaking context. He imagined that in Canada he would “have a lot more friends because here most people speak Korean all the time. In Canada they speak English so I would be able to communicate better” (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022). Max similarly felt isolated from his peers saying, “I feel not as included because people speak a lot of Korean, and I can't understand it very well” (Max, interview, January 20, 2022).

Sophie, the only native Spanish speaker in her grade, struggled to feel at ease. In our interview she spoke about feeling insecure at school and pointed to “not being able to speak my native language because I don't feel like myself anymore” (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022).

	Laura	Haram	Ellie	Marco	Thomas	Charles	Scott	Noah
Korean		1st	Some	Some	Some	2nd	1st	2nd
English	2nd	2nd	1st	1st	1st	1st	2nd	1st
Spanish	1st		Some					

Figure 53. Student researchers languages.

She missed her friends in Colombia: “For me, speaking Spanish with my friends means we are having fun and are connected” (Sophie, interview, January 19, 2022). The role of language in social connection influenced how all the student researchers felt they could express their full identity in the school community.

For Tad and Marc, TCKs who had family roots in South Korea, language served as a measure for their sense of belonging in their family’s home nation. Marc spent his life living overseas. His family returned to their home country of South Korea in response to the combination of the military coup and COVID-19 pandemic in Myanmar in 2021. When I asked Marc where he felt he was from, he quickly answered, “Myanmar. I want to go back” (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022). Marc spoke fondly of his apartment complex where all his friends from school lived and of his vibrant friend group in Myanmar. He wanted to return to his old school, and the life he built in Myanmar. While he felt his roots were in Myanmar, Marc did feel life was getting easier in Korea as his Korean improved, saying, “I have more friends here now, and I am getting more comfortable with my Korean” (Marc, interview, January 25, 2022).

Tad, who straddled multiple groups at school, spoke English and Korean in his friend groups respectively but felt more understood in English. He connected language to belonging, saying, “I feel like the foreign group understands me more. I speak Korean really well, and everyone says so. But I don't speak Korean that well. So, westerners understand me more because they understand how I talk” (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022). In our interview Tad first said he was from Canada “because I talk in English more than I do in Korean.” However, he went on to say that “maybe now I think I’m more Korean because I’m living in Korea, and there are lots of people to speak Korean to” (Tad, interview, January 21, 2022). For Marc and Tad, as their Korean improved, their sense of belonging in South Korea became stronger.

In addition to language, cultural norms played a role in students' sense of belonging at school. Max felt rooted in his identity as an athlete but didn't always feel accepted on his teams in Korea. For Max, the culture of sports in the United States connected him to a sense of home: "I'm excited for sports, family, food, back in the States" (Max, interview, January 20, 2022). He played sports in Korea as well but said on his final data analysis poster that "some kids think I don't belong because I'm not Korean" (Max, data analysis poster, May 9, 2022). Marc struggled with the cultural norms around skin tone. Because Marc saw Koreans as being light-skinned, his darker skin tone makes him feel separated from the Korean community as "some people stare at me because of my skin color" (Marc, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Marja struggled with the high value placed on academic success, saying, "People are recognized at school based on their skills, like being good at sports or good at art or music or math. I am in the middle. More people talk to those people or give them more attention than other people" (Marja, interview, January 20, 2022). Marja felt overlooked as a student who struggled in school.

The diverse cultural identities represented in the student researcher team was a factor in how they navigated experiences of identity, in particular gendered identity, at school. Local students JiWoo and Jason were able to provide a window into how Korean cultural norms around gender showed up, for example, in determining how students interact at school. In Korean culture, he said, students only interact across gender if they are seeking romantic connection. This, he said, is why boys and girls are not friends. If they seek one another out then other students will assume they want to date and may make fun of them. Jason agreed that is why boys and girls are not friends saying "I think another student will make fun of a boy or girl who played with other gender students" (Jason, this or that reflection, February 17, 2022). Jason extended cultural norms around gender into his family as well. "My dad would prefer for me to

do other things than play a game because I am a girl…maybe study more" (Jason, interview, January 24, 2022). For JiWoo and Jason, the way individuals interact and what families expect are determined along culturally derived, gendered lines. This is echoed in research on CHCs where social roles associated with gender persist (Chong, 2006).

Gendered identity also influenced the student researchers' experiences in classrooms, in particular for the girls. As Lexa saw it, "Girls don't tend to talk in class very much. I am usually the girl who talked the most in all my classes. The girls seem too scared to talk in front of the boys because there are so many more boys than girls" (Lexa, Interview, January 19, 2022). The girls Lexa compared herself to in this quote were largely Korean. The quiet demeanor she mentions may have roots in the hierarchical gender expectations that remain entrenched in many Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHC). Researchers of academic settings in South Korea identified that while academic success is culturally valued, lower expectations are placed on girls, especially in science and math (Bahng & Baker, 2013; Li, 2012). Gendered expectations result in girls staying more quiet in class and defering to boys.

In the final CLE Sophie struggled to identify the pressure put on girls at school because she was not Korean (Lappé, final CLE reflective memo, May 9, 2022). Her confusion highlighted how being separate from the dominant cultural group at school made it hard to identify commonalities between her experiences and those of her peers.

The Power of Elevating Student Voice

The research project uncovered the power of elevating student voice in a learning space as an approach to help students explore, self, form connections, and enact positive change in their community. Throughout the research process I worked to position student voices as equal to mine by co-creating a learning space centered around cycles of dialogue, reflection, action, and

agency. Elevating student voices as those closest to the issues and empowering them to recognize themselves as best positioned to identify solutions aligns with the CLE axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016) and the goals of PAR work (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013; Militello et al., 2009). In our work together I thought of dialogue driven learning as only truly possible when students feel their voice is considered equal to that of the teacher or adult. As students transformed from participants to co-researchers their voices were elevated to a point where they felt empowered to not only analyze data, but to extend the research to enact positive change in their community.

Works by Freire, Vygotsky, and Weiler all point to true learning as a deeply collaborative experience in which people work side by side to explore ideas and learn about themselves in the process. Freire (1970) in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* declares dialogue to be the foundation of learning, of humanity. He writes, “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (Freire, 1970, p. 61). Freire further highlights the power of dialogue in learning in his description of a problem-posing educational model in which teachers and students work alongside one another to gain understanding of themselves and the world. Vygotsky’s (1987) work on intersubjectivity also pointed to the power of collaborative, non-hierarchical learning as people work side by side to generate true understanding. Finally, Weiler’s (1998) work on radical feminist pedagogy calls voice “a pedagogical category to examine the interaction of teachers and learners and the knowledge they both bring to the classroom as well as the knowledge they produce together” (p. xii).

Elevating student voice and engaging in dialogue-driven learning supports student growth and the development of student agency. Research on student agency highlights the importance of

creating spaces where students can take an active role in their learning (OECD, 2021; Tran & Thao, 2017; Vaughn, 2019). The OECD (Student Agency for 2030) summarizes student agency as

> rooted in the principle that students have the ability and the will to positively influence their own lives and the world around them. Student agency is thus defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect, and act responsibly to effect change. It is about acting rather than being acted upon; shaping rather than being shaped; and making responsible decisions and choices rather than accepting those determined by others.

Students' demonstration of agency grew through the PAR process. By leveraging the community learning exchange (CLE) axioms “Learning and leading are dynamic social processes”; and, “Those closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns,” the PAR project revealed the power of elevating student voice as a tool to support student agency and sense of belonging (Guajardo et al., 2016).

During the pre-cycle, students approached the research space like a class, giving me power as the teacher over the learning. They looked to me for direction and followed instructions without asking too much about what was behind the work. As the research progressed and students began to become more connected to the process, the power within the group shifted. During the This or That CLE, which took place over 3 days, students were especially eager to gather observational data of what they had been discussing in the research team. They were looking to see if students really did tend to divide up by gender. Students were focused, excited, diligent in their data collection, and eager to share their observations. They were seeing themselves as researchers with valuable insights to share and data to gather. Their excitement indicated to me that power within the group was shifting from a hierarchical model with me, as

the teacher, at the top, to a student centered space where they felt ownership and agency. As students got to tell their stories and share their experiences, they saw themselves as increasingly powerful agents.

Consistently meeting a few times a month allowed the students' relationship to our work to deepen over time. They asked questions which indicated an evolution of their thoughts on the topics we were exploring. For example, during a session toward the end of Cycle One when students were working on their gender collages, Tad asked, “Are there only two genders?” (reflective memo, March 8, 2022). His question started a discussion among the group where students reflected on the accuracy of the idea and what gender might mean in other contexts. I posed the idea of gender being on a spectrum, that maybe there isn’t a certain number of genders. Students seemed content with the question not having a specific answer. The initial question and the subsequent discussion would not have happened earlier in the research process, but the space we built together allowed for a new type of dialogue and learning to take place as a group. Our relationships as teacher and student, and among the student-peer researchers, had evolved. In this new learning setting, students could be vulnerable sharing their ideas and be comfortable with ambiguity.

The culminating CLE provided each student an opportunity to study their own data set and generate a data analysis poster. Students then collaborated to find connections between their data and experiences. In this CLE, the power of creating a student-centered learning space came to life. Students were vulnerable and honest with their experiences, expressed authentic appreciation for one another and the opportunity to be part of the research group, and learned new things about one another. Gillian (1982) says of dialogue, “To have something to say is to be a person” (p. xvi). In the final CLE students spoke, listened, and were heard. In being heard,

they felt empowered to have something to say. They were able to "make themselves *present* in history and to define themselves as active authors of their own worlds" (Giroux & Freire, introduction to Weiler, 1998, p. xiii). Not only did the student research team articulate a summary statement focused on building an inclusive community, some of them took the extra step of putting their vision into action by designing and leading an advisory lesson.

In their final reflections regarding being part of the research process, student participants expressed new ideas about what they saw as possible at school. Max said the experience taught him that "anyone can be friends with anybody, and there aren't very many different differences" (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Similarly, JiWoo said he learned "why Korean/non-Korean, male/female [students] can't be friends in school. And I think we can fix it!" (JiWoo, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Lexa found belonging in the group, expressing "I started by thinking I'm the only one in this situation, but I now realize that everyone wants to be friends with different genders/nationalities" (Lexa, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022).

Through the PAR project we set out to understand the factors shaping students' gender identity in an international middle school. In addition to finding key factors shaping student identity at school, our experience showed how elevating student voice by co-creating a dialogue-driven learning space with students can support them in exercising agency and in cultivating a sense of belonging at school. Students were empowered by their participation in the research space to enact change in their community by extending the research to include an advisory lesson they themselves designed. Students felt seen and heard in the research group, appreciated the opportunity to connect with a diverse group of peers, and were then motivated to share their experience with their classmates. After co-creating dialogue driven learning environment with their peers, students felt confident in naming the world and acting to transform it (Freire, 1970).

Conclusion

Through the PAR project I worked with a group of eight students in an international school in South Korea. The student group reflected on their experiences of identity, in particular gender identity, at school. The student participants became co-researchers as their investment in the study increased through consistent and meaningful time spent together. The students expressed feeling a sense of belonging as a member of the diverse student research team and were motivated to create positive change in their community by the end. Given the small number of participants in the study, it is not possible to transfer the specific findings to other contexts. What did emerge as transferable from the study are the opportunities to support students in reflecting on factors shaping their identity and experiences at an international school. The learning space we created as a research term served as a vessel for change as students worked to take positive action in their community.

My proposed conceptual framework (see Figure 54) from the PAR project builds on Allan's (2002) work on belonging and culture in international schools. Allan's cultural borderlands (see Figure 52) example illustrates a moment of "overlapping cultural environments of school, host country, majority student culture, other student cultures, and own culture" (Allan, 2002, p. 78). His work inspired the overlapping nature of the conceptual framework, with identity factors and learning endeavors situated within a particular context. While his work explores the landscape of cultures students navigate as members of an international school community, my conceptual framework it meant as a tool for educators working to create a space to explore alongside students in making sense of who they are. The framework is meant to support international school teachers and leaders interested in applying my study findings to gain a deeper understanding of student experience in their particular school settings.

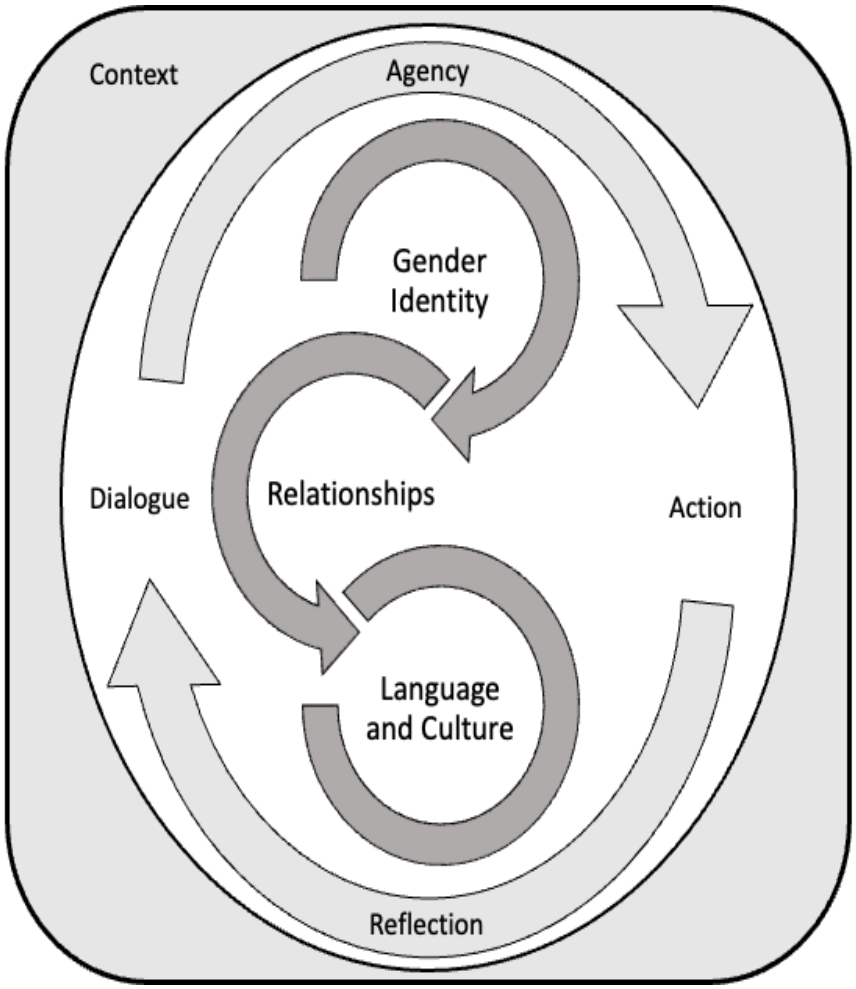


Figure 54. Proposed conceptual framework.

For this study, gender identity served as an appropriate entry point into discussions of identity at school. The student researchers demonstrated an understanding of gender-based cultural expectations and could point to patterns of student experience at school drawn on gendered lines. Through discussions of gender, students were able to begin expressing other meaningful factors shaping their identity at school, namely, relationships, language, and culture. These reflections, while central to the work, were only possible in the space we created together as a research team. My goal as the teacher and lead researcher guiding the project was to shift power towards the students and let them guide the outcomes of the research process. This became possible by elevating student voice through cycles of dialogue, agency, action, and reflection. Each component of the experience, from the dialogue-driven research environment to the factors shaping student identity, were all situated within, and influenced by, the context where the study took place.

While the specific findings of the study may not be replicated in other contexts, the process presents opportunities for similar explorations of identity in other international schools although a different entry point into discussion of identity may be more appropriate. Similarly, the factors students cite as meaningful to their experiences of identity at school may be different from those which emerged in this PAR project. Nonetheless, creating a non-hierarchical space with students where they can engage in dialogue and reflection on their experiences of identity is transferable to other settings. Such an environment has the potential to foster belonging amongst the students and may empower them to enact positive change.

International schools are complex and dynamic places full of different languages, cultures, relationships, and histories. Students and teachers are asked to navigate diverse cultural landscapes, and students are sometimes left to figure out who they are and where they fit in

without support. The PAR project presents a framework to support students and teachers in creating spaces together where their identity is central to the discussion and from which opportunities for belonging, empowerment, and meaningful change may emerge.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the participatory action research (PAR) study, I examined how understanding the factors shaping students' gender identity can help educators to create spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school. A group of eight Grade 6 students participated in the PAR project. Through their exploration of factors shaping their gender identity they demonstrated increased agency and a desire to enact positive change in the school community. The students formulated a statement encouraging their peers to be more inclusive despite differences among identity groups, and they created a lesson to highlight how they felt gender was splitting their peers into separate groups.

The following research question guided the PAR study: How can understanding the factors shaping middle school students' experiences of gender identity support educators in creating spaces for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school?

In addition, the study explored the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent and how does student agency manifest in response to opportunities to reflect on their experiences of gender identity at school?
2. To what extent does the intersection of students' gender, racial, linguistic, and cultural identities play a role in students' academic and social experiences at school?
3. To what extent can gaining insights into factors shaping student experiences of gender identity inform international school teaching practices, policy, and research?
4. How does my practice as a teacher leader change in response to working with students to explore factors shaping gender identity at school?

The PAR project consisted of a pre-cycle and two subsequent rounds of data collection spanning from October 2021 to June 2022 (see Figure 55).

Figure 55. Data collection timeline.

A study group consisting of eight volunteer Grade 6 students conducted the data collection. Five of the students were children of faculty at the school; three were from North America; one spoke Spanish as a first language; four had one or more Korean parents; and one was returning to his parents' national homeland of Korea after spending his entire life overseas. Summary introduction of each student researcher can be found in Chapter 3 and in-depth presentations of each student participant researcher's data can be found in Chapter 4. Each student's uniquely intersectional identity provided rich opportunities for exploration, reflection, and discussion.

A group of adult colleagues and peers also supported the research. As lead researcher, I designed events to stimulate students to explore factors shaping their gender identity as an entry point to more expansive identity exploration. Pre-Cycle and Cycle One events included community learning exchanges (CLEs), interviews, and reflection sessions with the adult feedback team. Cycle Two culminated the research process and included a final CLE and an advisory lesson that a subset of the student researchers elected to design and lead with their peers.

The setting of the PAR project created substantial opportunities to explore questions of student identity and their implications. The study was conducted in an American international school in South Korea that had only opened a few years prior. The student body was majority local Korean students with a handful of international students in each grade, primarily children of faculty. However, there were no specific programs or activities dedicated to explorations of student identity. While teachers could discuss what they thought was driving students' experiences of gender identity, we did not have any direct insights from students.

A number of assets supported the establishment of a PAR project to discover student

perspectives on their experiences and identity at school. Students, the primary assets to the study, were generally eager, engaged, and happy to be at school. Additionally, an advisory pastoral program was built into the middle school week, which occurred at a convenient time during the school day when a PAR project with students could take place. The advisory program was a time for teachers and students to focus on non-academic school issues and skills, but did not have a set curriculum. The PAR project fit appropriately into advisory time as it focused on student identity and experiences at school. Finally, my position as a teacher at the school allowed me to lean on the relationships I had formed to get support from leaders, colleagues, families, and students in the design and execution of the PAR study.

Four findings, shown in Figure 56, emerged from the study. Three of the findings were related to the factors shaping student gender identity and experiences at school: (1) The Influence of Context, (2) The Role of Relationships, and (3) The Importance of Language and Culture. The fourth finding, The Power of Elevating Student Voice, concerned how the methodology of the study illuminates opportunities for schools to impact pedagogical practices to empower students. Over the course of the study, students transformed from participants to co-researchers as they became invested in the process and outcomes of the research. Students shared details with one another about their sense of self, their life experiences, meaningful relationships in their lives, and patterns connected to identity they experienced at school. They highlighted the role identity played in dividing them and their peers into affinity groups around gender and language. The homogeneity of the student body as a whole, majority boys and over 90% Korean national, made those students who found themselves in the minority finding it challenging to make a wide range of friends at school.

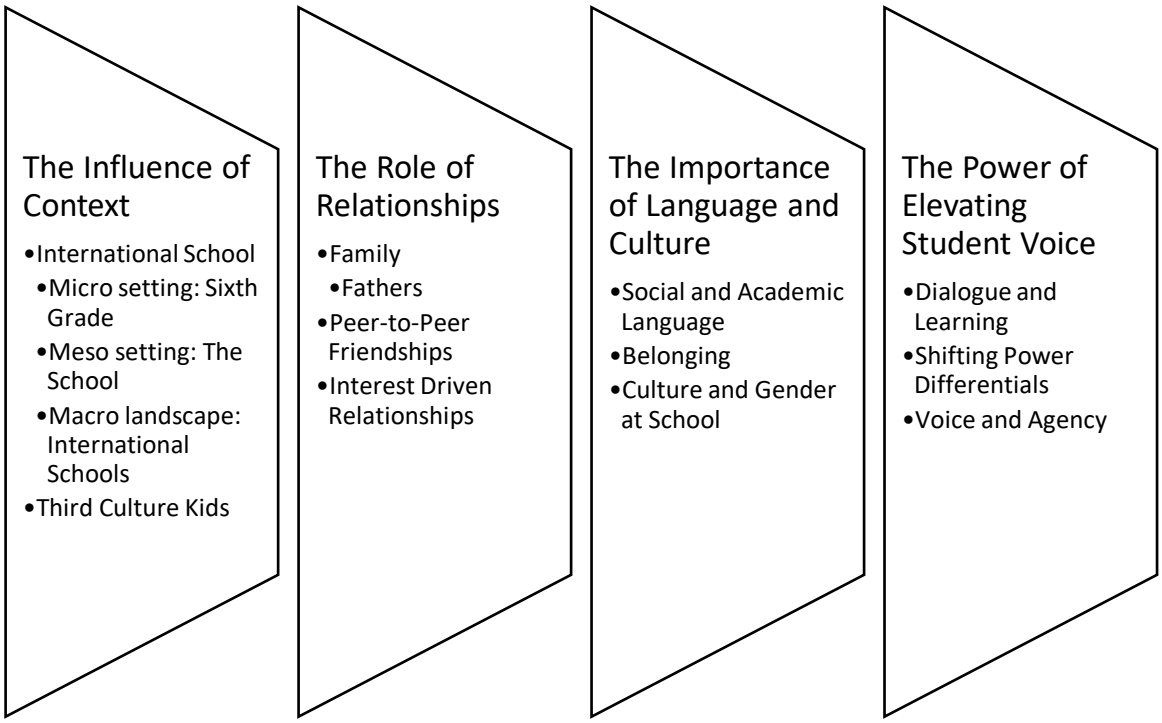


Figure 56. PAR study findings summary.

The study findings underpin the conceptual framework shown in Figure 57. The framework is inspired by Allan's (2002) work on the cultural landscapes of international schools and aims to provide a starting point for transferring the findings of the study to other international schools. Allan's (2002) framework informs the interconnected nature of the framework as well as the positionality of all the identity factors and learning spaces as situated within a given context. The internal arrows indicate gender identity as our entry point and show the other meaningful factors shaping the study participant's identity. Our explorations into identity were anchored in efforts to elevate student voice which happened through cycles of dialogue and reflection. These learning cycles lead to student taking action and demonstrating increased agency. This process is indicated by the outer white arrows. While true for many school sites, it is important to pay attention to the process and outcomes of the study occurring within a specific school context, shown as the outer grey box. The framework provides a starting point for educators to elevate student voices within dialogue-driven, identity-centered learning spaces within which students can cultivate a sense of belonging at school.

In this final chapter I address the research questions guiding the study by presenting the conceptual framework as a tool to understanding the applications of the PAR project. The findings address the project's overarching research question, as well as, Sub-Questions 1 and 2. I follow with a discussion of Sub-Question 3 by sharing implications of the study with regards to educational practice, policy, and research, especially focused on international schools. Finally, in addressing Sub-Question 4, I share my leadership journey and the growth I experienced as the lead researcher on the PAR project.

Discussion of Findings

In the PAR project, I explored how elevating student voice by co-creating a dialogue-

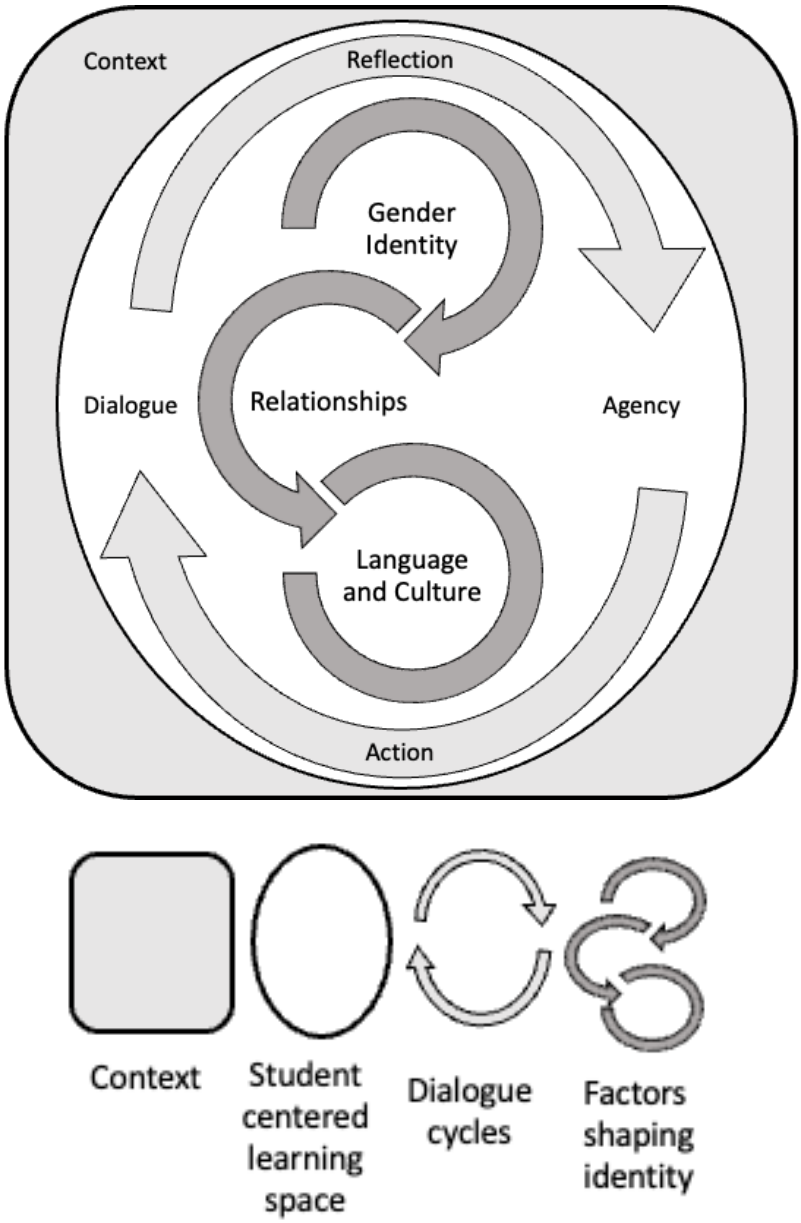


Figure 57. Conceptual framework.

driven learning space with students can support them in cultivating a sense of belonging at school. As the student researchers felt seen within the community we created together, their agency increased to the point where they felt empowered to take action towards positive change in the wider school community. While certain components are specific to this particular PAR project, a similar approach could be carried out with students, teachers, or school leaders in a range of international school settings. When students can explore who they are and what is driving their experiences of identity at school, they can be transformed as individuals, acquire a sense of belonging at school, and be empowered to create positive change in their community.

The teachers who navigate a learning process alongside students may also experience change as I did. In the following sections, I unpack the conceptual framework with the goal of inspiring other educators and leaders to build student-centered learning spaces for identity exploration as a means for cultivating belonging and agency at school. The findings discussed here address the overarching research question, along with Sub Question 1 and Sub Question 2. I approach the framework in four sections: the context shown in the outermost grey box, the identity factors shown by the interior dark grey arrows, the dialogue cycles shown in the light grey arrows , and the student learning space shown by the white oval.

Context: Finding an Appropriate Entry Point

Factors shaping our identity are situated within a particular place and time (the outer grey box of Figure 57). Research by Pyke and Johnson (2003) revealed how gender identity is impacted by context as women shared how their expression of their gender identity shifted based on cultural norms. Women interviewed in their research said they tended to be quieter and more reserved in Asian dominant spaces, and more vocal in white dominant spaces. Lexa echoed a connection between voice and gender in the classroom at SJA. She said, “Girls don't

tend to talk in class very much. I am usually the girl who talks the most in all my classes. The girls seemed too scared to talk in front of the boys because there are so many more boys than us" (Lexa, interview, January 19, 2022). The context, cultural and academic, of SJA created spaces where gender identity was influencing student experience. This further reinforced the importance of gaining a deep understanding of context as a meaningful part of engaging in identity work with students.

Finding the right entry point into discussions of identity with students is a critical step to consider when exploring this work with students. In the PAR project, gender identity best fit this role. I, as the lead researcher, brought my own experiences and interests in gender identity to the research, which allowed me to offer authenticity and insight to the study. Power dynamics between teachers and students can play a significant role in determining how discussions of identity unfold. Hierarchical power dynamics placing teachers above students needed to be gently deconstructed to allow for students to take a leadership role in the research (Li, 2012; Weiler, 1998). I tried to dissolve this hierarchy by being authentic with the students about my experiences of gender and my immense curiosity to hear directly from them about their experiences at school. Gender identity was quite binary at the study site, and students entered the study able to express their understanding of gendered expectations in society and at school. The division between student groups along gender lines was pervasive and obvious to students. Each of these factors made gender identity a safe entry point for broader discussion of factors shaping identity for the student participants.

Given these dynamics of the school, building a space for students to feel seen as individuals was dependent on several factors: the age of the students, the logistics of the setting, and the comfort level of the adults involved. Jumping straight into contentious or

vulnerable aspects of identity when adult participants themselves are not comfortable with them could undermine relationships and the research process. Instead, I started with the identity chart activity, which allowed students to decide how much to share revealed students' current thinking about identity. In addition, I was intentional throughout the PAR project in letting students know how any artifact they made would be used, that is, if they would be expected to share personal information with others or only with me. At all times, students could decide what they were comfortable sharing and with whom.

The early phases of the process should center on building relational trust as a group, which will require vulnerability from the adult. I worked to be honest with the student researchers about my interest, my own experiences with gender, what I noticed about gender at school, and what I was trying to achieve with each event I designed. In sharing the *why* behind the work, I wanted to assure them that their input was meaningfully driving the process. Once trust started to form in the research group, students felt safe sharing more information about themselves and their school experiences. In the following section, I explain the center arrows of the conceptual framework, factors shaping students' intersectional identities.

Factors Shaping Identity: Gender, Relationships, Language and Culture

Starting with gender identity then allow us to dive into deeper explorations of student experiences at school. The factors students recognized as shaping their identity aew shown by the grey arrows in the center of the conceptual framework. Gender identity was our entry point, so it is placed first. Through our explorations into gender identity, students identified relationships, language, and culture as particularly meaningful factors shaping their social and academic experiences at school. These factors are shown in the additional arrows in the center of the conceptual framework. The center arrows indicate the reciprocal nature of the factors shaping

identity. For example, for the student researchers, gender identity was largely made known through their relationships with their friends and peers and was further reinforced through their family relationships and other cultural expectations. We sought to examine each piece in turn while also recognizing their interrelationships.

Research on adolescent identity in school indicates students sometimes struggle to determine who they are amidst shifting, and sometimes conflicting, expectations. For example, research by Carlone et al. (2014) found middle school girls struggled to maintain dual identities as girls and scientists as science was thought of as being for boys. Tad spoke to feeling pressured towards math and science by his gender, even though he preferred reading and writing. Intersecting racial, cultural, linguistic, gendered, and academic identities can make it challenging for students to cultivate a sense of belonging at school as they can feel pressure towards behaving a certain way based on who the community perceives them to be.

Some of the student researchers mentioned components of identity that undermined their sense of belonging at school. Marc brought up insecurity about his darker skin. He felt he had gotten too much sun in the years he lived in Myanmar with his family and that his skin color was culturally unacceptable in South Korea. He saw his skin as a signal to those around him that he did not belong. His experience as a young person returning to Korea after living abroad his whole life spoke to challenges faced by TCKs coming home. His struggles were largely invisible to those around him until the PAR project provided an opportunity for him to share it. Similarly, Sophie shared her struggle with being the only Colombian in the school. She felt isolated and not fully connected with her peers because they did not know her culture. On the other hand, sports served as a huge source of connection for Max. His identity as an athlete provided a throughline of experience for him to rely on.

Exploring gender identity was the entry point but not the end goal of the PAR project. I hoped to create a space where students could reflect and share a more complete window into their full experience of identity at school. Through these explorations, we saw how important gender identity was as a component of their school experience. From there, students delved into issues of interpersonal relationships, language, and culture as factors shaping their social and academic experiences. Elevating student voice by co-creating a dialogue-driven space led to insights into student experiences. Students themselves drove the process and in doing so found belonging on the research team. Students highlighted how the inclusive experience they desired at school was happening on the research team and wanted to find ways to expand the experience to include more of their peers. The next section outlines how the dialogue-driven space we built together served to support students in feeling seen, cultivating a sense of belonging, and increasing their agency at school.

Elevating Student Voice: Engaging in Dialogue to Inspire Action and Agency

Dialogue-driven learning spaces in international schools can become vessels for student empowerment and meaningful community change. Students were able to explore the factors shaping their identity within the space we created as a research team as represented by the white oval and light grey arrows in the conceptual framework (see Figure 57). The space we co-created as a research team was rooted in cycles of dialogue and reflection, which led to agency and action. Cycles of engagement were grounded in the methods of the PAR project, namely Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles as defined by the improvement sciences (Lewis, 2015, an emphasis on reflection as a mechanism for meaningful change (Herr & Anderson, 2014), and the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016). Freire's (1970) work on liberatory pedagogy further emphasized priority be placed on dialogue-driven

learning as an appropriate vehicle for generating meaningful change. As Freire (1970) wrote, “If it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings" (p. 61).

Student agency also increased over the course of their participation in the research process. Early in the research process, students were relying on me as their teacher to guide the work. They approached each session like a class. They were eager to follow instructions, but at first, they were doing just that—following. As the research continued, students’ agency began to grow. The one-on-one interviews were a meaningful turning point as significant trust grew between myself and each student on the research team. After the interviews students began to take a more active role in the research process. They were bolder with their ideas, asked more questions, and were more vulnerable in what they shared with each other. They gathered data, produced artifacts, and reflected on patterns they saw at school, and their commitment to the research process grew.

The final CLE demonstrated how much the student researcher’s agency had grown. They took the lead role in analyzing their data, looking for patterns, and identifying shared experiences across differences. They collaborated to produce a statement to their peers meant to increase equity and encourage a more inclusive experience for all students at school. The most significant demonstration of their increased agency came when a subset of the student researchers chose to design and lead their own advisory lesson. They wanted to share their learning with others and encourage their peers to create more inclusive friend groups. The student researchers transformed from followers to leaders.

In particular, they transitioned from following a teacher’s lessons to creating and leading their own lesson. They felt the power of their voice and perspective and wanted to

share that from the front of a classroom, a space typically reserved for the adult in change. By leading from that space and sharing their experiences with their peers they demonstrated the power of PAR research to "not just to understand the world but also to work within it in order to change it, that is, to change social structures, institutions and cultures" (Hunter et al., 2013, p. 2). Through collaborative cycles of dialogue and reflection, students became agents of change empowered to take action.

In leading the advisory lesson, the students demonstrated the power they felt at school. In international schools the distribution of power is driven by expectations of students and teachers, the policies and norms of the school itself, the culture of the majority of students, and the context of the host nation (Allan, 2002). Situating the dialogue-driven learning space within the contextual landscape of a given school allowed students to meaningfully connect with their voice within their community. The CLE axioms remind us that the people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns (Guajardo et al., 2016). By creating a space centered on student voice, they were able to learn about themselves, observe patterns at school, and connect across differences with other members of the research team.

As Max wrote in his reflection on the research process, "This experience has taught me that anyone can be friends with anybody, and there aren't very many different differences" (Max, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). They built a community at school that looked at how they wanted their school experience to look with students of varying identities coming together for fun and connection. JiWoo also shared how his thinking had changed based on his participation in the research process, and his motivation to make a difference, writing "I think it was a great chance to learn why Korean/non-Korean, male/female [students] can't be friends in school. And I think we can fix it!" (JiWoo, data analysis chart, May 9, 2022). Based on seeing

what was possible together, they then felt motivated and safe to work towards changes in their community.

Student-Centered Learning Spaces: Vessels for Belonging

The conceptual framework is meant as a model for building a space for reflection and belonging with community members. I co-created such a space with a group of Grade 6 students at an international school in South Korea, but similar approaches are transferable to a range of settings and groups. I see potential in teachers and leaders experiencing such a dialogue-driven space focused on identity and belonging as part of onboarding to a new school. After their own experiences reflecting on identity and connecting with their peers, educators may be motivated to create similar spaces with their students. The conceptual framework can serve as a guide for those interested in replicating the experience in their own setting. Each school leader would need to identify a meaningful entry point to discussion of identity and elicit the factors shaping participant experiences of identity. Finally, by allowing for iterative cycles of dialogue and reflection, participants may then feel empowered to exercise agency and take action in their community.

The findings of the study align with research by Weiler (1998) on liberatory pedagogy. She positions voice as a powerful mechanism to transform learning spaces. She encourages teachers and students to work together to reimagine what is possible in classrooms when each member of the community is meaningfully seen as a complete person. Her work aligns with seminal liberatory pedagogy revolutionary Freire (1970). Both focus on redistributing power in learning spaces to elevate student voice to align with teachers so learning can become a meaningfully collaborative endeavor. Participatory action research methodologies provide tools to guide such transformational work (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Hunter et al., 2013; Kemmis et

al., 2014). The CLE axioms further frame how to build participant centered spaces where community voices can guide new learning and lasting change. While the findings of my PAR project are focused on a small number of students, the methods and goals of the research demonstrate the potential of PAR methodologies to elevate student voices to the position of co-research and changemaker in school settings.

I built the PAR project around my desire to better understand how my students' experiences at school were shaped by components of their identity, especially gender identity. My initial motivation grew into an opportunity to build a meaningful space for students to connect with themselves and with one another. Student researchers expressed a sense of belonging as a team after participating in a space focused on their experiences at school. This sense of belonging motivated them to create similar experiences with more of their peers. My hope is that applying the conceptual framework from the study to other contexts will give more people, students and educators, the chance to experience similar feelings of belonging and empowerment.

Implications

Given the small sample size of the PAR participant group, specific findings related to factors driving student gender identity at school are not directly transferable. The methodological findings, on the other hand, illuminate the opportunity for connection and student insights that can emerge from a learning space centered on student identity and agency. The study findings are particularly relevant to international schools. At these schools, students and staff are navigating a landscape of overlapping cultures and identities amongst a diverse mix of students. Students are powerfully positioned to provide insights that can support practitioners, policy makers, and researchers in better understanding and meeting their needs.

The study illustrates the power of centering student voices as a way to better understand factors shaping student experiences at school. The following sections address sub research question 3 as I present implications of the research with regards to international school teaching practices, policy, and research.

International School Teaching Practices

The conceptual framework and findings from the PAR project are most relevant to international school educational spaces working to hear directly from students about their identity and experiences. Pastoral care directors, curriculum facilitators, counselors and teachers may find this work useful in uncovering factors that shape student experience to support students in exercising agency and in cultivating a sense of belonging at school. Many international school students face challenges when establishing community and a sense of belonging in a school. High teacher turnover, frequent moves, and separation from local culture can make it hard for students to feel a sense of connection to their community. In international schools where local students are the majority, the TCK minority may find it particularly challenging due to linguistic and cultural differences. School practices aimed at including these students may amplify a wider range of student experiences and voices and thus support all community members in feeling they belong.

The study highlights a need to support teachers in growing their skills in elevating student voice in their classrooms. Working with teachers to help them to build student-centered, dialogue-driven learning spaces could increase students' sense of belonging while also improving learning outcomes. Teachers may need training in how to teach students to engage in productive dialogue, share ideas, listen to others, and understand a range of perspectives. The findings of the study, alongside literature on teaching and learning, highlight the meaningful

learning opportunities embedded in creating dialogue-driven learning spaces with students. Such training could be structured in a peer-to-peer teaching model that begins during staff onboarding and continues throughout the academic year. Faculty would be able to form meaningful connections with professional peers while also expanding their pedagogical skillset with the goal of elevating student voice in classrooms. This model may also support teacher retention, an issue many international schools struggle with, which would further support community building in international schools.

The PAR study findings and conceptual framework have implications for work being done in international school classrooms to hear directly from students about their experiences. Given the need to support international school students in cultivating a sense of belonging, I recommend specific programs be built with this goal in mind. Many international schools currently have advisory programs, but these lack sufficient curricular materials specifically targeted at international school students. International schools need curriculum resources for advisory programs focused on student identity, the realities of living abroad, building cultural competencies, and supporting community members in connecting across difference.

Once a common set of skills and experiences has been presented through advisory groups, schools could then work with teachers and students to bring the ideas to life in classrooms. A shift towards dialogue-driven learning may require teachers to reimagine how power is distributed in the classroom. Instead of positioning themselves as in charge of learning, educators need to consider themselves as skilled facilitators of the learning space. Such a reimagining of power and relationship aligns with work on culturally responsive teaching and ELL best practices (Carder, 2018; Gay 2010). In culturally responsive learning spaces, student identity and background are celebrated and meaningfully integrated into

learning experiences. By listening directly to students, teachers can ensure their classroom truly does include every learner. Teaching dialogue skills would also support the ELL students who typically represent the majority of the learners in international schools. Because ELL students do not always gain sufficient access to higher level thinking tasks given limited English proficiency, opportunities to share their experiences can promote better inclusion of ELL students and deeper learning.

In addition to curriculum resources and changes to classroom practices, international schools need to address if their policies support the learning environment they hope to create. The following section outlines how policy at the micro and macro level can further support such work.

International School Policy: Micro and Macro

The study highlights opportunities for crafting international school policies designed to support students at the micro and macro scale. At the micro scale, student researchers in the PAR project pointed to language and other components of identity as divisive. Schools can address this through well-crafted language policies celebrating mother tongue while also supporting teachers in creating linguistically inclusive classrooms. Schools also need to develop policies to support connection across differences and meaningful inclusion of all groups. At the macro scale of international schools, in particular the new wave of schools serving majority local students, the study points to the need for policy targeting meaningful inclusion of TCKs in the school community.

Schools must craft language policies that accurately reflect the connection between language and a student's sense of self while also supporting students and staff in navigating the diverse linguistic landscape of many international schools. Student researchers in the PAR

drew strong lines between language and belonging. Students who felt their spoken Korean was inadequate (or nonexistent) struggled to fit in. While the challenges of learning a new language upon arrival to a new country are somewhat inherent to the experience of living overseas, school policy can be crafted to support students in navigating such challenges.

The language policy at SJA identified English as the language of inclusion and expected English to be the primary language spoken at all times at school. Similar language policies prioritizing English above all other languages are common in international schools. Such language policies are at best unrealistic to enforce and at worst damaging to students' fluency and pride in their mother tongue. Crafting language policies centered on student belonging, mother tongue fluency, and connection between different groups would better support students in growing as multilingual learners.

Experiences of the third culture student researchers highlight opportunities at the macro scale of international schools around the world to craft policies to ensure inclusive experiences for students who are moving from school to school throughout their lives. Such a macro scale approach to policymaking, potentially driven by accreditation programs, could support cohesion across schools with the aim of helping students to quickly fit into new school settings. By crafting policies targeted at supporting TCKs, schools can promote integration of help all students. Policies could target onboarding or buddy programs for new students, skills training for teachers in supporting TCKs, and school-wide education about the TCK experience to cultivate empathy. Such policies could also support TCKs in articulating their own experience to better understand how they fit in with a larger community.

The PAR project indicates a need for a range of micro and macro level school-based policies focused on student connections and crafted to support all students cultivating

belonging across their international school experiences. This study assists us to learn that policies can be tools to create a common set of terminology as well as a common set of approaches to use when navigating differences. Such policies can support new faculty in quickly aligning their practices with a common set of expectations at school. Given the generally high turnover rate of international school faculty, these school-based policies become even more important to maintaining continuity in student experiences at school. The following section highlights the importance of continuing to research international student identity to better understand their experiences and serve their needs.

International School Research: Students as Co-Researchers

I found gaps in the research on international schools through my work on the PAR project. There is very little research targeted at student experiences in international schools, in particular research that meaningfully includes student voices. Hence, opportunities exist to better understand how to include students as co-researchers as a means to elevate student voice, access student insights, and truly understand student experiences in international schools. Such research would be best conducted at a micro scale of school based research projects guided by research questions including:

- What practices can best support students in transitioning from participants into co-researchers?
- How can research practices transform to meaningfully include students as co-researchers in school based research?
- How can researchers center student voice to better understand student experiences of belonging in international schools?

By building researcher methodologies aimed at elevating student voice the international

school community can begin to gain meaningful insights into student experiences. Hearing from students about who they see as most successful in school and if any particular identity factors unite that group would help to uncover who feels like an insider at school versus who feels excluded. Research exploring the experience of TCKs who spend sustained portions of their educational experiences as the minority group can help to uncover how best to support this community. Such research could help schools to increase learning outcomes while also supporting students in cultivating belonging at school.

Summary

In summary, the PAR project has implications for international school practice, policy, and areas for further research. The PAR project process and outcomes demonstrated that international school teachers and students can work together to better understand student experience at school. Changes to practice and policy, coupled with insights gained from further research, could continue to uncover mechanisms to support students in cultivating a sense of belonging at school. Curriculum resources focused on identity centered teaching can support international schools in building inclusive community. Further, practitioners can learn to teach students dialogue skills while also working to redistribute power in learning spaces to better center student voice. Micro- and macro-scale policies can reflect a recognition of the value students' unique identities and encourage them to cultivate community across differences. Research into how best to elevate students from participants to co researchers could fill in gaps in our current understanding of international school student experience. Such work, aimed at practice, policy, or research, can be supported by the methods embedded in the conceptual framework.

Limitations

It is essential to understand the limitations of this PAR study with regards to sample size, time scale, and the complications presented by the COVID19 pandemic. The small number of participants and the relatively short time frame of the study limits the generalizability of the PAR project study findings to different settings. Within the school where the study took place, a different group of students could have revealed different factors shaping their experiences of gender identity. Similarly, different age groups may arrive at different conclusions. As the study team looked over a single school year, we cannot make claims with regards to the lasting impacts of student involvement in the PAR, or changes to student thinking over time. However, this time frame is realistic for international school research given the high turnover rates of students and teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic also complicated the data collection during the study as student researchers were often absent due to infection or precautionary measures. (COVID-19 interruptions are further outlined in Chapter 3.)

Leadership Development

Sub-Research Question 4 challenged me to explore the impact of this process on my own leadership journey, in particular, how I changed as an educator throughout the PAR project. Participatory action research methodologies and community learning exchange axioms are based on researchers and practitioners listening to those closest to the issues as the ones best positioned to identify solutions (Guajardo et al., 2016; Herr & Anderson, 2014). These methodologies allowed me to explore factors shaping identity alongside a diverse group of students. The PAR methodologies along with course readings on equity and liberatory pedagogies allowed me to enter the research with authentic curiosity and openness to change based on participant insights. Designing meaningful community learning exchanges, analyzing

on student data, and collaborating with colleagues to reflect on my research findings and experiences taught me a new way of engaging with students and brought my attention to dynamics I was previously blind to. Such dynamics included subtle cues signally who is an insider versus an outsider in the community. Some such cues were clearly drawn along gendered and linguistic lines, but I learned to look for more subtle cues associated with, for example, TCK students coming home, who felt estranged from both the local and internationals students.

Throughout the research I documented my thoughts and feelings about the research itself, providing insights into my insecurities, “aha moments”, and changes to my thinking. I also generated a number of artifacts on my understanding of leadership and my leadership growth, including two digital stories on leadership. I created my first digital story, entitled “Self as Leader,” in 2020 during the first summer learning exchange. I built the story around Joy Harjo’s (1994) poem about a kitchen table, “Perhaps the world ends here” and the metaphor of a leader who sets a table and invites others in. While I knew my leadership style was focused on creating meaningful space for others to connect, I struggled to see where I fit at that table myself. I worried that creating space for myself would make me an ego-driven leader.

In a reflective memo, I spoke to this sense of insecurity and to my change in thinking over time. “I understand now that having a sense of who I am allows me to hold space for others. Focusing on myself as I grow as a leader doesn’t mean I have to lead from a place of ego. It might even free me from doing that” (reflective memo, October 19, 2022). In my final digital story entitled, “Leadership Journey,” from the summer exchange 2022, I described my journey through insecurity to finding my place as a leader. The story is built around the metaphor of forests or ecological systems in which each component plays an important role.

Instead of conceptualizing leadership as meaning the one in charge of the forest, it can instead mean being someone who acknowledges and values the role of each piece and sees leaders throughout the ecosystem.

Tending to an ecosystem is complex work that requires knowledge of each component, as well as an understanding of the relationships between them. Similarly, setting a table and inviting people to gather around it requires careful attention to detail and authentic love for community. While I entered this work feeling like I was on the outside looking in, without a seat at the table I was working to set, or without a role in the ecosystem of the schools I love, now I see myself and my role differently. I see myself as curious by student experiences and deeply committed to keeping student voice at the center of my work. I value my commitments now and am now able to appreciate the skills I bring to cultivating meaningful spaces in school communities.

Working directly with students opened my eyes to how much educators have to learn from them. I have always been a student-centered teacher who builds my classroom around student voice, but the PAR project showed me there is more to be done. The student researchers were insightful, eager, compassionate, and vulnerable. They were generous in sharing about who they are and brave in their commitment to create change in their community. By building a space within which the student participants grew into co researchers I saw how much more students have to offer. It was a privilege to see them learn and grow together. If we, as educators, researchers, and leaders, can get out of the way and allow students to lead as researchers and experts, there is truly no telling how schools could transform.

I have always believed that learning spaces should be lead by student voice. As educators, we are tasked with supporting students in connecting with themselves and each other

as they grow as scholars and people. My work in the PAR project helped me to crystalize my values into a clear set of guiding principles that can support my work as an educational leader. No matter my role in a school, I am guided by the following principles:

- Students deserve to be seen and heard as complete people with attention paid to their intersecting identities.
- Educators should strive to build student centered spaces within which student voices are safe and central.
- Students deserve opportunities to exercise agency to enact positive change in their community, an educator's role is to support them in doing this.
- Content is a tool to support students in growing as scholars and people, it is not the end goal.

As an international school teacher, I see students navigating a particular set of realities related to language, culture, race, gender, ability, values, and voice, often without support or guidance from their teachers or the school. Teachers do not need to be the expert in student experience—how could we be? — but we do need to find ways for students to make meaning of their experiences of identity at school. My position as a teacher leader equipped with the tools from the PAR study empowers me to hold space for student experience. As I said in one of my last reflective memos for the program, "My insecurity has shifted to gratitude that I was a teacher for this program, so I got to work with students in this way" (reflective memo, October 19, 2022).

Conclusion

I set out on this research journey hoping to hear directly from students about their experiences at school. The research questions were shaped by my own curiosity about how

gender identity shapes our relationships and interactions. I wanted to know what students thought about gender identity at school, what other identity factors they felt were impacting their experiences, and what they would do in response to participating in the work. I was hopeful something meaningful would come out of the research experience for me, but primarily for them. Now that the research process has come to a close, I could not be more grateful for my experiences.

Students were generous with their insights and experiences, revealing the primary factors shaping their gender identity at school to be context, relationships, and language and culture. They agreed that gender identity was meaningfully shaping their academic and social experiences at school and highlighted how language, culture, skin tone, sports, and other factors also played a role. Students connected across differences as they realized their experiences with gender identity were similar to other students in the research group. In sharing their experiences, the student researchers found belonging with one another. Once they saw it was possible, they wanted to spread the word and teach their peers in their advisory lesson. They became agents of positive change in their community.

I believe opportunities for students to become leaders of change exist in all school settings. Through elevating student voice and co-creating identity centered learning spaces, educators can learn directly from young people. It requires us to dissolve hierarchical power dynamics and engage with students as our authentic selves. The conceptual framework provides an entry point into such work, namely, to start with context, look for patterns, and above all else, let students lead the process. Others can apply the methods of the study to support students in cultivating belonging in international schools, which many students struggle to do. Working alongside students in this work has the power to transform educators and

leaders and to build international schools where students are at the core of all decisions. Students have something to say, let them speak.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Gina Lappé
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 9/21/2021
Re: UMCIRB 21-001525
They're Speaking

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 9/20/2021. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

As the Principal Investigator you are explicitly responsible for the conduct of all aspects of this study and must adhere to all reporting requirements for the study. Your responsibilities include but are not limited to:

1. Ensuring changes to the approved research (including the UMCIRB approved consent document) are initiated only after UMCIRB review and approval except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All changes (e.g. a change in procedure, number of participants, personnel, study locations, new recruitment materials, study instruments, etc.) must be prospectively reviewed and approved by the UMCIRB before they are implemented;

2. Where informed consent has not been waived by the UMCIRB, ensuring that only valid versions of the UMCIRB approved, date-stamped informed consent document(s) are used for obtaining informed consent (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the ePIRATE study workspace);

3. Promptly reporting to the UMCIRB all unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others;

4. Submission of a final report application to the UMICRB prior to the expected end date provided in the IRB application in order to document human research activity has ended and to provide a timepoint in which to base document retention; and

5. Submission of an amendment to extend the expected end date if the study is not expected to be completed by that date. The amendment should be submitted 30 days prior to the UMCIRB approved expected end date or as soon as the Investigator is aware that the study will not be completed by that date.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Advisory Protocol	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions

Name	Description
Assent Form	Consent Forms
CLE Protocol	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
CLE Protocol	Data Collection Sheet
Consent Form	Consent Forms
Interview Protocol	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
IRB Complete Proposal	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Parental Consent Form	Consent Forms
Parental Information Email	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Reflective Memo Protcol	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Translated Assent Form	Translated Consent Document
Updated Translated Parental Consent	Translated Consent Document
Verbal Assent Script	Consent Forms

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

APPENDIX B: CITI TRAINING CERTIFICATE

tiprogram.org/verify/?w1fd60d23-53f8-4ed1-8c86-f821093306a3-40143092

APPENDIX C : CONSENT FORM: PARENTS (ENGLISH)

Parental Permission to Allow Your Child to Take Part in Research

Information to consider before allowing your child to take part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: They're Speaking: Gender identity, student voice, and learning at an international middle school
Principal Investigator: Gina Lappé
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership; 5th Street, Greenville, North Carolina 27858
Study Address: St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju
10, Global edu-ro 304beon-gil, Daejeong-eup, Seogwipo-si, Jeju, 63644, Republic of Korea
Telephone #: + 82 064-801-1200
Study Coordinator: Dr. Matthew Militello
Telephone #: (252) 328-6131

Participant Full Name: _____Date of Birth: _____

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why is my child being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this research is to work with students to explore how their gender identity plays a role in student experiences at school. Your child is being invited to take part in this research because they have valuable insights to share as a student in the middle school at SJA Jeju. The decision for your child to take part in this research will also depend upon whether your child wants to participate. By doing this research, we hope to learn how gender identity impacts student experiences at school.

If you and your child agree for him/her to volunteer for this research, your child will be one of about 15 people to do so.

Are there reasons my child should not take part in this research?
There are no known reasons for why your child should not participate in this research study.
What other choices do I have if my child does not take part in this research?
Your child can choose not to participate.
Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted at the SJA Jeju middle school. Your child will need to come to MU 212 once a week for a 30-minute advisory session focused on the research questions. They will also need to attend a 1 hour after school session 4 times during the school year. The total amount of time your child will be asked to volunteer for this study outside of school is 4 hours over the next 9 months. There will not be space available for you to wait for your child during the research.

What will my child be asked to do?
Your child will be asked to do the following: keep a reflective journal, participate in one-on-one interviews with the lead researcher, participate in group learning events in advisory and after school, review data for the project, share reflections on the data and research process.
What might I experience if I take part in the research?
We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if your child will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to your child, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.
Will my child be paid for taking part in this research?
We will not be able to pay you or your child for the time you volunteer while being in this study.
Will it cost me anything for my child to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.
Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that your child took part in this research and may see information about your child that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your child's private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your child's welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify your child.

How will you keep the information you collect about my child secure? How long will you keep it?
The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Information gathered from the interview will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be destroyed upon successful completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.
What if my child decides he/she doesn't want to continue in this research?
Your child can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if he/she stops, and he/she will not be criticized. Your child will not lose any benefits that he/she would normally receive.
Who should I contact if I have questions?
The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at +82 010 5873 2899 anytime Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm.
If you have questions about your child's rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.
Is there anything else I should know?
Identifiers will be removed from your child's identifiable private information, and, after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you. However, there still may be a chance that someone could figure out the information is about you.

I have decided my child can take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that my child can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, my child is not giving up any of his/her rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____

Parent's Name (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM: PARENTS (KOREAN TRANSLATION)

자녀의 연구 참여를 위한 학부모의 허락
최소한의 위험만 있는 연구에 참여하기 전에 고려해야 할 정보.

연구 제목: 그들은 말한다: 성별 정체성, 학생의 의견, 국제 중학교에서의 학습
연구책임자: 지나 라페(Gina Lappé)
소속기관 및 부서: 이스트캐롤라이나대학교, 교육지도성학과, 노스캐롤라이나
그린빌 5 번가, 27858
연구지 주소: 세인트 존스베리 아카데미(SJA) 제주
대한민국, 제주, 서귀포시, 대정읍, 글로벌에듀로 304 번길, 10, (우편번호) 63644
전화 번호: + 82 064-801-1200
연구 코디네이터: Matthew Militello 박사
전화 번호: (252) 328-6131

이스트캐롤라이나대학(ECU)의 연구원들은 사회, 건강 문제, 환경 문제, 행동 문제 및 인간 상태와 관련된 문제를 연구합니다. 이를 위해서는 연구에 참여하고자 하는 자원자들의 도움이 필요합니다.
제 아이가 이 연구에 참여하도록 권유를 받는 이유는 무엇입니까?
이 연구의 목적은 학생들과 함께 성별 정체성이 어떻게 학교에서 학생 경험에 영향을 주는지 탐구하는 것입니다. 귀하의 자녀는 세인트존스베리아카데미제주의 중학교 학생으로서 함께 공유할 수 있는 귀중한 정보가 있기 때문에 이 연구에 참여하도록 권유를 받았습니다. 귀하의 자녀가 이 연구에 참여할지 여부를 결정하는 것은 자녀가 참여하기를 원하는지 여부에 따라 달라집니다. 저희는 이 연구를 통해 성별 정체성이 학교에서 학생의 경험에 어떤 영향을 미치는지 알게될 수 있기를 바랍니다.
귀하와 귀하의 자녀가 이 연구에 자발적으로 참여하기로 동의할 경우, 귀하의 자녀는 15 명 중 한 명이 될 것입니다.

제 아이가 이 연구에 참여해서는 안 되는 이유가 있습니까?
자녀가 이 연구에 참여해서는 안 되는 이유는 없습니다.
아이가 이 연구에 참여하지 않을 경우 다른 어떤 선택을 할 수 있습니까?

귀하의 자녀는 참여하지 않기를 선택할 수 있습니다.
연구는 어디서, 그리고 얼마나 오래 지속됩니까?
이번 연구는 세인트존스베리아카데미제주 중학교에서 실시될 예정입니다. 귀하의 자녀는 일주일에 한 번 MU 212 에 와서 연구 질문에 초점을 맞춘 30 분 간의 학습지도 세션을 해야 합니다. 또한 1 시간의 방과후 활동을 한 학년동안 4 회 참여 해야 합니다. 귀하의 자녀가 학교 밖에서 본 연구에 자원할 수 있는 총 시간은 앞으로 9 개월 동안 4 시간입니다. 연구 진행 중 귀하의 자녀를 기다릴 수 있는 공간은 없습니다.
제 아이가 무엇을 해야 할까요?
이 연구를 위해, 우리는 학습지도와 방과 후 활동을 일부 함께 하게 됩니다. 연구를 위해 여러분은 다음 사항을 수행하게 됩니다.

- Lappé 선생님과 일대일 면담. 이 면담내용은 녹화됩니다.
- 성찰일지 작성.
- 학습지도시간 모둠성찰활동에 참여.
- 1 년에 4 번 정도 방과후 단체연구활동에 참여. 이 내용은 녹화될 수 있습니다.

면담 및 단체연구행사의 녹화테이프는 연구를 진행하는 관계자만 열람할 수 있습니다. 원하는 경우 면담 중에 언제든지 비디오 녹화를 꺼달라고 요청할 수 있습니다.
연구에 참여하면 어떤 경험을 할 수 있습니까?
저희가 알고 있는 바로는 이 연구와 관련된 위험(유해 가능성)은 없습니다. 이 연구에서 발생할 수 있는 위험이 있다면 일상 생활에서도 경험할 수 있는 정도입니다. 귀하의 자녀가 이 연구에 참여함으로써 혜택을 받을 수 있을지는 알 수 없습니다. 자녀에게 개인적인 혜택이 없을 수도 있지만 이 연구를 통해 얻은 정보는 향후 다른 사람들에게 도움이 될 수 있습니다.
이 연구에 참여하면 제 아이가 금전적 보상을 받을 수 있을까요?
이 연구에 참여하는 동안 자원활동에 대하여 귀하 또는 귀하의 자녀에게 비용을 지불할 수 없습니다.
제 아이가 연구에 참여하려면 제가 대가를 지불해야 하나요?
연구에 참여하기 위해 어떤 비용도 들지 않을 것입니다.
제가 이 연구에 참여했다는 사실과 저에 대한 개인 정보를 누가 알게 되나요?
이스트캐롤라이나대학교(ECU)와 아래에 나열된 사람 및 조직은 귀하의 자녀가 이 연구에 참여했다는 사실을 알고 있을 수 있으며 일반적으로 비공개로 유지되는 귀하의 자녀에 대한

정보를 열람할 수 있습니다. 귀하의 허가를 받아야만 이러한 사람들이 귀하의 자녀의 개인 정보를 사용하여 이 연구를 수행할 수 있습니다.

- 대학 및 의료센터 임상시험 심사위원회(UMCIRB) 및 그 직원은 본 연구 기간 동안 귀하의 자녀의 복지를 감독할 책임이 있으며, 귀하의 자녀의 신상을 파악하는 연구 기록을 확인해야 할 수도 있습니다.

제 아이에 대해 수집한 정보를 어떻게 안전하게 유지할 계획입니까? 얼마나 오래 유지할 계획입니까?

본 연구에 포함된 정보는 법률이 허용하는 한도 내에서 최대한 기밀로 유지됩니다. 기밀성은 데이터 수집 및 데이터 분석 프로세스 전반에 걸쳐 유지됩니다. 인터뷰에서 수집한 정보는 안전하게 잠긴 장소에 보관되며, 연구 완료 시 삭제됩니다. 구두 또는 서면 보고서에는 귀하를 연구와 관련지을 수 있는 어떤 언급도 하지 않을 것입니다.

제 아이가 이 연구를 계속하기를 원하지 않는다고 결정한다면 어떻게 해야 할까요?

연구가 이미 시작된 후에도 언제든지 중단할 수 있습니다. 자녀가 참여를 중단한다해도 그에 따른 아무런 책임을 지지 않을 것이며 비난을 받지도 않을 것입니다. 귀하의 자녀는 일반적으로 받게 되는 어떠한 혜택도 잃게되지 않을 것입니다.

질문이 있는 경우 누구에게 문의해야 합니까?

이 연구를 수행하는 사람들은 현재 또는 향후 이 연구에 관련된 모든 질문에 답할 수 있습니다. 월요일부터 금요일, 오전 8 시부터 오후 5 시까지 언제든지 +82 010 5873 2899 로 책임연구자에게 연락할 수 있습니다.

연구에 참여하는 사람으로서 귀하의 자녀의 권리에 대해 질문이 있는 경우, 대학 및 의료센터 임상시험 심사위원회(UMCIRB)에 전화 번호 252-744-2914(주간 오전 8:00 - 오후 5:00)로 전화할 수 있습니다. 이 연구에 대한 불만 사항이나 우려 사항을 보고하려면 임상연구보호실장에게 전화번호 252-744-2914 로 문의하세요.

내가 알아야 할 다른 것이 있습니까?

식별자는 자녀의 식별 가능한 개인 정보에서 제거되며, 이러한 제거 후에 정보는 귀하의 추가 사전 동의 없이 향후 연구 연구에 사용되거나 향후 연구 연구를 위해 다른 조사자에게 배포될 수 있습니다. 그러나 누군가가 귀하에 관한 정보를 알아낼 가능성이 있습니다.

저는 제 아이가 이 연구에 참여할 수 있다고 결정하였습니다. 이제 어떻게 해야 합니까?

사전동의 의뢰인이 귀하에게 다음 내용을 읽도록 요청할 것입니다. 그 내용에 동의할 경우 이 양식에 서명해야 합니다.

- 위의 모든 정보를 직접 읽었습니다 (혹은 읽어주는것을 들었습니다).
- 저는 이 연구에서 이해할 수 없는 일에 대해 질문할 기회가 있었고 만족스러운 답변을 들었습니다.
- 저는 제 아이가 언제든지 이 연구에 참여하는 것을 중단할 수 있다는 것을 알고 있습니다.
- 본 사전 동의서에 서명함으로써 제 아이가 자신의 권리를 포기하는 것은 아닙니다.
- 본 동의서의 사본을 수령하였으며, 이 사본은 제가 보관하기 위한 것입니다.

_____

부모 이름 (정자체) 서명 날짜

사전동의 의뢰인 : 본인은 고지에 기반한 초기 사전 동의 절차를 수행했습니다. 본인은 위에 서명한 사람과 함께 동의서의 내용을 구두로 검토하고 연구에 대한 모든 질문에 답변했습니다.

_____

동의 의뢰인 (정자체) 서명 날짜

APPENDIX E: ASSENT SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANTS UNDER THE AGE OF 12

Informed ASSENT SCRIPT to Participate in Research for
Participants Under the Age of 12
Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

IRB Study #_____
Title of Research Study: They're Speaking: Gender identity, student voice, and learning at an international middle school
Principal Investigator: Gina Lappé
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership; 5th Street, Greenville, North Carolina 27858
Study Address: St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju
10, Global edu-ro 304beon-gil, Daejeong-eup, Seogwipo-si, Jeju, 63644, Republic of Korea
Telephone #: + 82 064-801-1200
Study Coordinator: Dr. Matthew Militello
Telephone #: (252) 328-6131

Today I am going to talk with you about a research study that you can be part of if you want. People at ECU and SJA Jeju study ways to make people's lives better. These studies are called research. This research study is trying to find out how parts of your identity play a role in your experiences at school.

Your parent(s) needs to give permission for you to be in this research. You do not have to be in this research if you don't want to, even if your parent(s) has already given permission.

You may stop being in the study at any time. If you decide to stop, no one will be angry or upset with you. If you choose not to participate then you will join activities in other advisories when the research is happening.

We are asking you to take part in this research because, as a student in the middle school student at SJA Jeju, you have valuable experiences to share. The study will include you, as students in my advisory, a couple grade 7 students will help us, and a couple other teachers from SJA.

For the study, we will do some of the work in advisory and some of the work after school. For the study you will be asked to:

- Do one-on-one interviews with Ms. Lappé. I will record these. The tapes from the interviews and group research events will be viewed by me and other adults in the research study only. You can ask for the video recording to be turned off at any time during the interview if you want.
- Keep a reflective journal
- Participate in group reflection activities in advisory
- Participate in group research activities after school about 4 times over the year. These may be recorded.

I will keep everything you share private and will ask your permission to share it with other adults in the research study or with your parents. If you share that you are thinking of harming yourself or other people, then I have to share that information with the counselor at our school. Data from you and other students in the study will be used to write a report at the end of the research. This report will be shared publicly. You will choose a fake name for us to use in the research report.

If you have questions about the research, you can talk to me. you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Do you want to participate? If you have any questions or don't want to participate, please let me know.

_____ _____

Signature of person obtaining assent Date

Participant's Name	**Date assent script was read**	**Participant agreed to participate**	**Participant refused to participate**

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM: ADULTS

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: They're Speaking: Gender identity, student voice, and learning at an international middle school

Principal Investigator: Gina Lappé
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership; 5th Street, Greenville, North Carolina 27858
Study Address: St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju
10, Global edu-ro 304beon-gil, Daejeong-eup, Seogwipo-si, Jeju, 63644, Republic of Korea
Telephone #: + 82 064-801-1200
Study Coordinator: Dr. Matthew Militello
Telephone #: (252) 328-6131

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this research is to work with students to explore how their gender identity plays a role in student experiences at school. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a teacher in the middle school at SJA Jeju. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn how gender identity impacts student experiences at school.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about 20 people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
There are no known reasons for why your child should not participate in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted at the SJA middle school. You will need to come to room 212 approximately 12 times during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 12 hours over the next 18 months.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to do the following: review research plans and tools including interview questions and agendas; be recorded reflecting on your experiences with students in the research process; assist the lead researcher in data analysis and reflections on the research process;

participate in group research events with other colleagues and students. You will have opportunities to review all data collected to ensure the data collected matches your words and intentions.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?
The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Information gathered from the interview will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be destroyed upon successful completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?
You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at +82 010 5873 2899 anytime Monday-Friday from 8am-5pm.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?
Identifiers will be removed from the identifiable private information, and, after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you. However, there still may be a chance that someone could figure out the information is about you.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

APPENDIX G: SCHOOL APPROVAL LETTER

St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju
10, Global edu-ro 304beon-gil, Daejeong-eup, Seogwipo-si, Jeju-do, Korea
제주특별자치도 서귀포시 대정읍 글로벌에듀로 304번길 10
Tel. 064.801.1200
www.sjajeju.kr

June 28, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju recognizes the benefits of participating in relevant, well-designed research studies proposed by qualified individuals. Approval for conducting such studies is based primarily on the extent to which substantial benefits can be shown for St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju and its mission of educating students. The purpose of this letter is to notify you of the **approval** to use conduct your dissertation study titled, "They're Speaking: Uncovering the impact of gender identity on student voice at an international middle school" with participants in our schools. We also give permission to utilize the spaces at SJA Jeju to collect data and conduct interviews for her dissertation project.

The project meets all of our school guidelines, procedures, and safeguards for conducting research on our campus. Moreover, there is ample space for Gina Lappé to conduct her study and her project will not interfere with any functions of St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju. Finally, the following conditions must be met, as agreed upon by the researchers and St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju:

- Participant data only includes information captured from the local data collection strategies.
- Participation is voluntary.
- Participants can choose to leave the study without penalty at any time.
- Any issues with participation in the study are reported to the school administration in a timely manner.
- An executive summary of your findings is shared with the school administration once the study is complete.

In addition to these conditions, the study must follow all of the East Carolina University IRB guidelines.

We are excited to support this important work.

Respectfully,

Dr. Jeannie Sung
Head of School, St. Johnsbury Academy Jeju

APPENDIX H: CODEBOOK

Data Source	RQ	Possible Theme	Category	Code	subcodes	Source	Notes	Quotes
4	Sub2		Activities	Help teachers		Open		
4	Sub2		Activities	Interviewed		Open		
4	Sub2		Activities	Okay with anything		Open		
4	Sub2		Activities	Beginning activity		Open		
4	Sub2		Identity	Identity x 5		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	Discover about each other		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	How lives similar		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	Interact with others		Open		What I find interesting about the idea of identity is how it makes us who we are and how it changes the way we interact with others (Noah)
4	Sub2		Learn about others	Learn about other people		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about others	People's lives		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Discover about ourselves		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Hope we research us		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Know who we are		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Learn about identity		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Learn about ourselves		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Personally		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Who we are X 2		Open		
4	Sub2		Learn about self	Better for ourselves		Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Fun x 5	Games	Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Like clubs		Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Changes		Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	science		Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	decisions		Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Important		Open		
4	Sub2		Perspective	Interested x 5		Open		
4	Sub2		place	Campus		Open		
4	Sub2		Share feelings	How we feel at school		Open		
4	Sub2		Share feelings	How we feel deep down		Open		
4	Sub2		Share feelings	Share how we feel at school		Open		
4	Sub2		Share thoughts	Share our thoughts		Open		I like the idea of being able to share our thoughts about how we feel at school. (Ellie)
5	Sub1		Active / sports	Active				
5	Sub1		Active / sports	I am active				
5	Sub1		Active / sports	Love to watch sports				
5	Sub1		Active / sports	I am fast				
5	Sub1		Active / sports	I'm active				
5	Sub1		Active / sports	Soccer				
5	Sub1		Active / sports	Swimmer				
5	Sub1		Active / sports	Like sports				
5	Sub1		culture	My culture				
5	Sub1		dissonance	Don't feel that way				
5	Sub1		dissonance	Hard to decide				
5	Sub1		Dorm	Dormitory				
5	Sub1		Food	Like candy, but mostly fruit				
5	Sub1		Food	I love cucumbers				
5	Sub1		Food	I love food				
5	Sub1		Food	I love fruit				
5	Sub1		Food	Like food				
5	Sub1		gender	Girl				
5	Sub1		gender	Male				
5	Sub1		gender	Girl				
5	Sub1		Gender	Male				

APPENDIX I: PEER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

We will be working closely as a research group. Please use this sheet to interview another student in the research group.

Interviewer name: Interviewee name:

Question	**Answer**
How old are you?	
How long have you been at SJA?	
Where else have you lived / gone to school? Please list each place and about how long you were there.	
What is your nationality? (passport(s))	
Gender	
Race	
What are some of your passions or favorite things to do?	
Who are some of the most important people in your life? Why are they so important to you?	
What do you think makes you who you are? - experiences, people, etc…	
Have you ever felt different from people around you? What was that like?	
Are you different at home than you are at school? How? Why?	
What do you think other people first notice about you?	

APPENDIX J: GENDER SWITCH REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Instructions: Imagine that tomorrow you woke up and you were the opposite gender. You were the only one who knew a change had happened. Everyone else in your life always knew you as the boy/girl you are today.

- How would school be different? Would teachers treat you differently? How?
- How would your parents treat you differently? Would they expect different things? What about other people in your family? Grandparents, siblings, etc…
- How would your life be different? Today and in the future? Would you think differently about your future?

APPENDIX K: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

January 2022: 1-on-1 Interview Protocol

Interview goals / overview:

- One of two 20-30 minute interviews to be conducted with each student researcher. Second interview slotted for March.
- Explore each student's gender identity and how they describe it, understand it, and how they see it showing up in school.
- Students will be instructed to bring in an example song, book, movie, or other inspirational artifact they feel resonates with who they are and how they define their gender identity.

Interview flow:

- Read IRB disclosure script
- Frame how I came to the research questions and what I am interested in exploring with them
- Ask 2-3 prepared questions (with follow-ups as appropriate)
- Ask 1-2 student specific questions based on my observations, data collection, etc… to date

Before the interview

Between now and Lunar New Year you will each do a 1-on-1 interview with me focused on exploring your gender identity and experiences at school.
Before the interview, choose an item that you feel connects with your gender identity or otherwise inspires something about who you are. It could be a song, poem, book, movie, piece of art, role model, or something else that you feel speaks to who you are and your gender identity.
Please choose a time slot for the interview in the attached document. Do not change, move, or delete other students' names.

Script

1. IRB disclosures

   Disclosures:

   ● Your participation in the study is <u>voluntary.</u> It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
   ● The interview will be <u>digitally recorded</u> in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept <u>confidential.</u> Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the interview data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
   ● The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and skills gained and the organization practices used.

- The interview will last approximately 30 min.

2. **TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:**
"This is *Gina Lappe interviewing* (*Interviewees Name)* on *(Date)* for the Gender and Student Voice Participatory Action Research Study.

3. Personal Framing

Before we begin with the questions, I want to share a bit about why I am interested in exploring gender identity with you and the other students in the research group. There are two main places my interest comes from, my own personal experiences as a woman and my observations of students in my classes. As a woman, I notice that gender can play a pretty big role in how people communicate and interact with each other and can influence the assumptions and expectations people have about one another. As a teacher, I notice a social divide between boys and girls in class and often differences in how girls and boys, in general, participate in class, both here in Korea and when I taught in the States. I'm curious to learn more from students about how you experience your gender identity at school and how you see it impacting your voice or learning at school.

4. Questions
   - **Probe #1:** How does this "artifact" help youtube explain your idea of what gender identity is?
   - **Probe #2:** So, in light of (insert their definition), how do you see gender identity expressed in public, that is, where do you see it?
   - **Probe #3:** How do you express your gender identity in school?
   - **Probe #4:** Given how you feel gender identity is expressed at school. How do you think school would be different if there was no such thing as gender? Do you think classrooms would be different? How?

Wrap up

I am continuing these 1-on-1 interviews until (date). After these are done, then we will meet as a student research team again over a few advisory sessions. We will do activities to continue digging into gender identity and voice at school. I encourage you to just take moments in the day to notice what you see going on around you, in class, in the cafeteria, etc… and see if you notice any patterns connected to gender.

Thank you for taking this time with me!

APPENDIX L: THIS OR THAT CLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions based on your observations from Tuesday.

1) Many of you noticed groups divided by gender in your observations on Tuesday.
   a) Why do you think that is?
   b) What do you think it means?
   c) What is good about it?
   d) What is bad about it?
2) Do you think SJA is more like the land of This and That or the Land for All? Why?
3) What could we do to make it more like the Land for All?
4) What do you think we should do next in our research on gender identity, voice, and learning at school?

APPENDIX M: FINAL CLE AGENDA & ARTIFACTS

Date: May 9, 2022
Participants: Student Researchers
Facilitator: Gina

Overview

- Students will review all the data they produced over the year and work in progressively larger groups to craft a culminating message to share with an audience of their choice about gender, identity and learning in the SJA Middle School

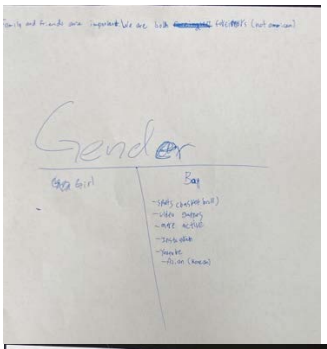
Goal(s)

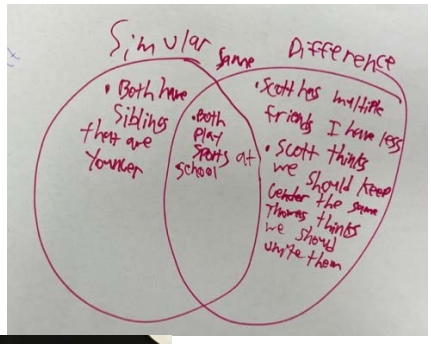
- Students to review their own data and put what it means into their own words
- Reflect on how their ideas have developed over the course of their involvement
- Craft a 'so what' statement based on what they did
- Honor their voice and involvement by putting them in a position to say what their work means

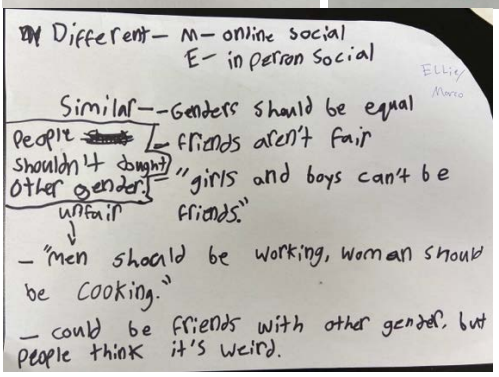
Parts

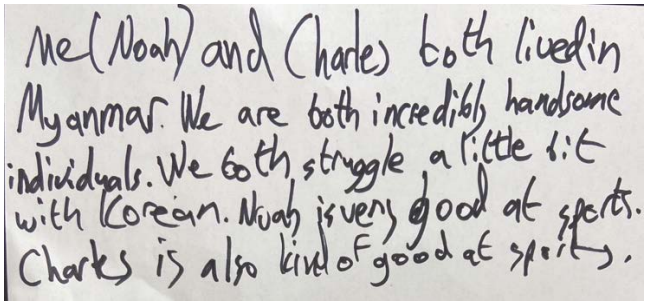
1. **Solo:** Students each review their organized data from all the sessions this year. They code their data for highlights, changes, patterns, etc… Pull out key words and ideas on chart paper (write and draw) to summarize your data and experience
    1. Something that surprises me in my data is …
    2. In my data I notice …
    3. If I did — again, I would change …
    4. I see a pattern in my data …
    5. Something that comes up more than once in my data is …
    6. Something missing from my data is …
    7. What does your data mean? What does it show?

2. **Pairs**: Bring their initial noticings to a partner. Share what they observed, compare with your partner, discuss similarities and differences. Prepare to share with small group
    1. Some similarities about our data are …
    2. Some differences between our data are …
    3. Describe what you see. Summarize what you see.
    4. What does your data mean? What does it show?

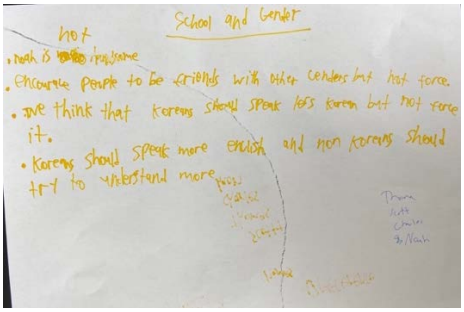








3. **Groups of 4:** Combine two pairs and share key findings and noticings. Look for similarities, differences, and missing pieces.
    1. What has changed or been added to as you moved from your data to the group data?
    2. What does your data mean? What does it show?
    3. Summarize your group's data
    4. Craft a message to share with your audience about your experiences with gender, identity, and learning at SJA based on your data.
    5. What data supports your statement (evidence)



4. **Whole group (8 students):** Present your statements and create one final culminating statement that captures your experiences with gender, identity, and learning at SJA. What do you *want who* to know / hear?