Unifying a Divided Nation:
Exploring the Challenges and Prospects for Peaceful Korean Reunification

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Abstract

This research is prompted by recent findings highlighting a declining trend in support for reunification among South Koreans, which contradicts the conventionally prevailing narrative of reunification as both “our dream” and a “national duty.” Whilst the question of what diminishes enthusiasm for reunification among South Koreans might seem self-evident—given Korea’s over 70-year division and the disparate paths taken by the North and South—this research aims to provide a more in-depth diagnosis. It seeks to identify the social constructs that have developed within this prolonged division affecting South Koreans’ perceptions of reunification. Employing a social constructivist lens, the study focuses on underexplored dilemmas specific to South Koreans in the context of intergroup relations and reunification. Grounded in Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory, the study formulates hypotheses relating to the interplay between South Koreans’ perceived “otherness” towards North Koreans, intergroup threat perceptions, and attitudes towards reunification. Using the 2022 Reunification Consciousness Survey (N=1193) data from the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS), this study runs statistical analysis through SPSS and Hayes' PROCESS Macro Model 4 to test the hypotheses. The quantitative findings reveal generational differences in which the perception of North Koreans as “others” and threat perceptions towards North Korea’s nuclear capabilities and reunification affect attitudes towards reunification. The study concludes by discussing the security and strategic implications, highlighting the often-overlooked human insecurities related to reunification and underscoring the need for further academic inquiry.

Keywords: Korean reunification, intergroup relations, threat perception, human (in-)security, social identity theory, integrated threat theory

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We attain unity only through variety.
Differences must be integrated, not annihilated, not absorbed”
- Mary Parker Follett

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1) Background

Over seven decades ago, the Korean Peninsula was split along the 38th parallel. This division, which separated the “homogeneous” Korean nation, is traditionally viewed as an artificial, unjust and abnormal by-product of the Cold War, leading the two Koreas to perceive it as provisional to this day (Lee and de Vries, 2018). Consequently, this highly politicised matter has perpetuated dialogues within and between the two Koreas, strengthened by a normative conviction that reunification is justified and inevitable (Kang and Lee, 2011). Central to this discourse is Koreans’ conventional belief in Korean mono-ethnicity, which posits South and North Koreans as members of a shared ethnic lineage, thereby suggesting an intrinsic, inseparable bond between the two (Song, 2000; Kim, 2009; Park et al., 2012; Lee and Kang, 2017). For instance, past Korean leaders articulated the vision of a unified Korea as a “desire… which our fifty million people could never forget in our dream” and “the best gift… to our [Korean] people,” underscoring the idea of “us” as the Korean collective and incorporating the Korean “people” into the narrative (Lee, 1989). Such statements signify that the idea of Korean reunification transcends mere political discourse; it is a sentiment deeply embedded in the Korean collective consciousness. Illustratively, a popular nursery rhyme encapsulates this sentiment: “Our hope is reunification/ The hope even in my dreams is reunification.” These lyrics vividly capture Korean people’s fervent yearning for reunification, underlining its significance in the national spirit.

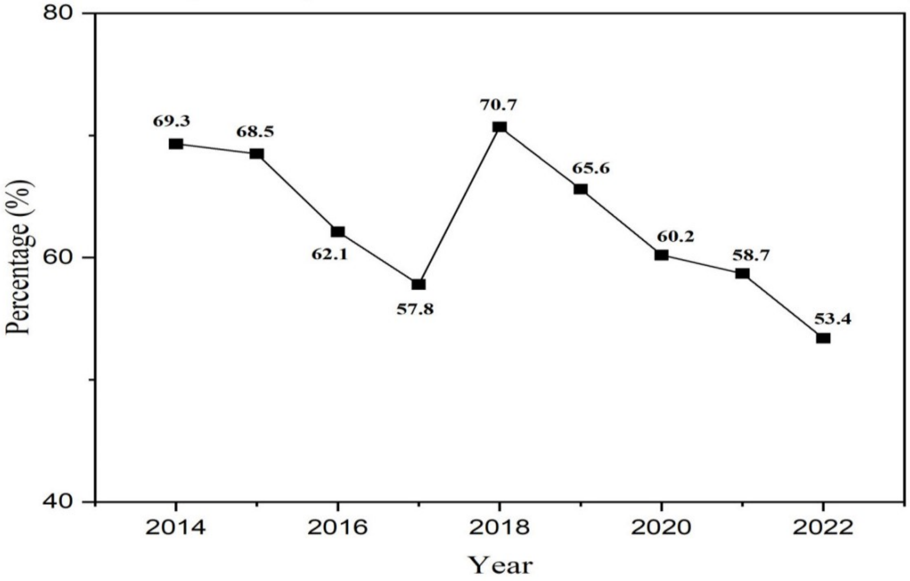
Beyond the narrative of Korean national unity, the reunification of the two Koreas is conventionally prescribed as a panacea for division-driven “intractable conflict” on the Korean Peninsula, where the war, though halted, has never been officially declared over. Park (2015, p.93) asserts that reunification represents an internal reconciliation of the Korean nation that has long lived in antagonistic confrontation due to differing ideologies and systems; it simultaneously symbolises the external overcoming of the enduring violent remnants of the Cold War era, marking a momentous entry into a “peace community” within Northeast Asia. However, whilst Korean reunification typically carries a peaceful idea and objective, Lee (1995, p.147) argues that peaceful reunification hinges upon one essential requirement, especially for South Korea: “In a democratic society, any proposal that fails to gain the empathy of its members cannot have democratic legitimacy, regardless of its logical validity”. Thus, even though reunification essentially aims to serve as a peace remedy for resolving the enduring conflicts between the two Koreas and regional instability, the endorsement of the public is paramount for a “harmonious” transition into a unified Korea (Chung, 2019). With this in mind, Park et al. (2023) contend that it is imperative first to understand the prevailing public sentiments towards reunification since effective strategies for peaceful Korean reunification surpass merely political, institutional, and territorial dimensions; they also require a dedicated emphasis on fostering socio-psychological harmony and cohesion among the people involved.

1.2) Problem Statement

In contemporary South Korean society, the perception of Korean reunification among the citizens seems to be at odds with the historically normative support for Korean reunification and state policy objectives, presenting intriguing puzzles. In the 1994 Unification Survey conducted by the Korean Institute for National Unification (KINU), a staggering 91.6% of participants answered reunification was necessary (Lee, 2020). Yet, whilst the South Korean government has remained resolutely in favour of reunification, public sentiment seems to have shifted considerably over the years, as just 53.4% deem reunification as a necessity, according to the latest KINU Unification Survey from 2022 (Park et al., 2023). This is a notable drop from the 91.6% reported just about thirty years prior.

Figure 1 displays an English translation of a time series graph from the 2022 KINU Unification Survey report, highlighting a steady decline in people's perception of reunification as a necessity, with a temporary spike in 2018 due to the inter-Korean peace summit (ibid). Additionally, it is important to notice that there is not only a decreasing trend in the acknowledgement of reunification as a necessity among South Koreans, but also a growing inclination towards maintaining the current divided state of Korea.

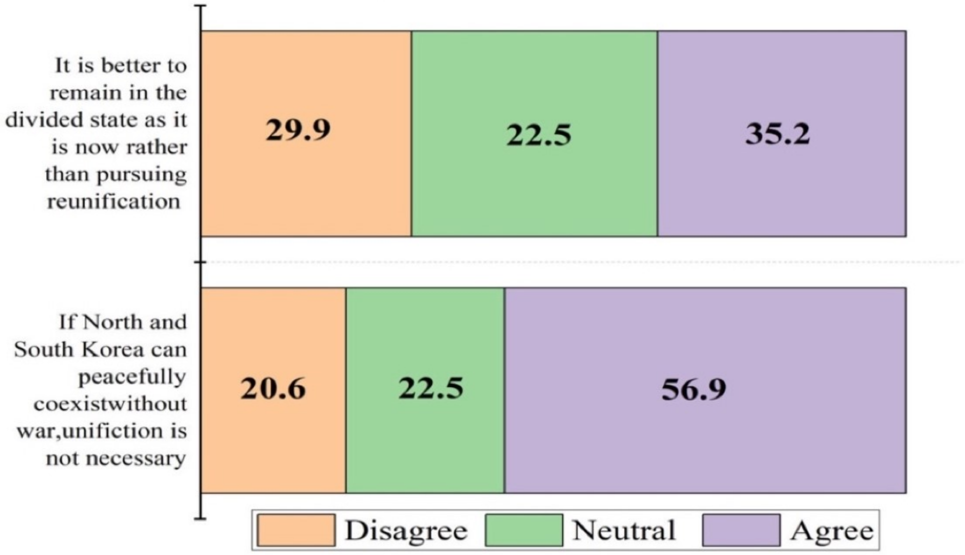
Figure 1: Respondent Views of Reunification as "Necessary" by year



For example, Lee (2014, p.170) points out that the percentage of respondents favouring the division over reunification increased from 7.0% to 16.8% between 1994 and 2014.

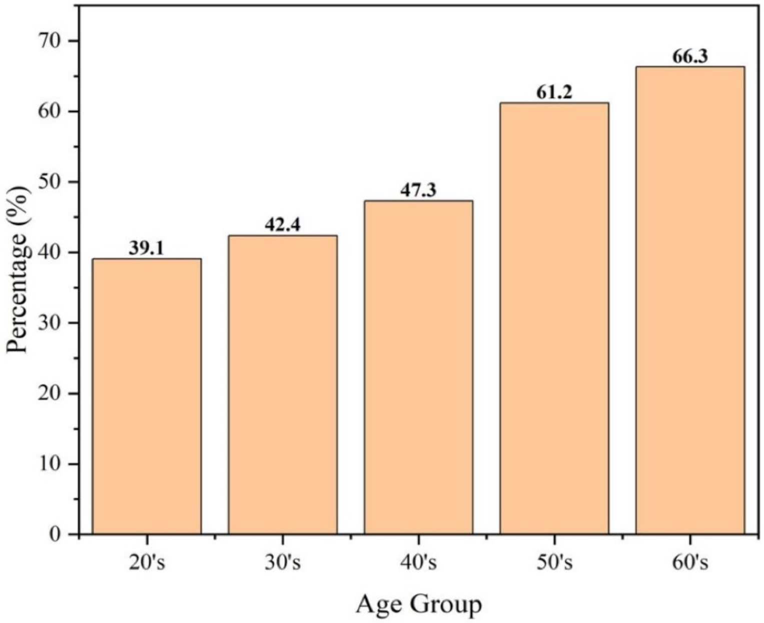
Furthermore, Figure 2, an English translation of a chart from the 2022 KINU Unification Survey report by Park et al. (2023), indicates that 35.2% of the participants believed that the current division is preferable to reunification, a percentage surpassing the 29.9% who disagreed with the sentiment that the status quo is better. Also, the majority, 56.9% of the respondents, agreed that it is better to maintain the division instead of pursuing reunification if peaceful coexistence without war is feasible, showing a notable preference for the divided state of Korea.

Figure 2: Percentage of Agreement on Peaceful Coexistence



In addition, the generational gap in reunification attitudes is striking, with younger generations showing less support for reunification and a stronger preference for division compared to the older generations. For instance, Lee (2020) discovered that younger individuals, especially those in their 20s, favour peaceful coexistence over reunification, with the gap in preference exceeding 40% since 2017. Figure 3, additionally derived from the 2022 KINU Unification Survey report (Park et al., 2023), presents a bar graph segmented by age cohorts, highlighting a pronounced generational split in perceiving the necessity of reunification: only 39.1% of the youngest age group see it as such, in contrast to 66.3% of the oldest group. The recent figures suggest that public support for reunification is not robust compared to the past, and the South Korean public, particularly the younger generation, is increasingly inclined to the idea of perpetuating the division (Lee, 2020).

Figure 3: Percentage of Answering Reunification is "Necessary" by Age Group



Moreover, it is crucial to highlight that, in the context of waning reunification support, South Korean individuals in their 20s and 30s predominantly express that they are “anxious” at the idea of reunification, whilst those in their 40s, 50s, and 60s exhibit emotions such as “happiness” and “hopefulness” at the thought of reunification (Kim et al. 2020, p. 272). Building on Glasgow et al.’s (2022) assertion that anxiety stems from an “anticipatory response to uncertain, future threats,” this dissertation begins to question if the long-held notion of reunification—as a constitutional duty and an “absolute good” to alleviate the division’s trauma—still aligns with the contemporary sentiments of the South Korean after more than seven decades of separation. The rising inclination towards separatism suggests a shift in the South Korean public’s outlook on reunification and inter-Korean relations, potentially indicating a reevaluation of the normative values associated with Korean reunification, thereby posing a challenge to the South Korean state’s steadfast efforts towards Korean reunification.

When examining the obstacles to the peaceful reunification of Korea, researchers frequently focused on the profound differences and mistrust between the two Korean states and the resulting state-driven security concerns, which are then thought to complicate efforts toward reconciliation (Cha, 1997). However, it is crucial to recognise that declining public support also poses a significant challenge to the peaceful reunification agenda, as it may hinder harmonious societal integration post-reunification, which, as Galtung (1964) argued, is essential for achieving sustainable “positive” peace. For this reason, this study incorporates a social constructivist view of intergroup relations in order to examine the South Korean people’s relationship with reunification at the micro level. Investigating what may be hampering South Koreans’ support for reunification and addressing the general perspectives held by the individuals involved in the reunification process is crucial for facilitating social harmony on the prospective path to reunification and sustaining peace thereafter.

1.3) Research Question, Aims and Objectives

This study, therefore, commences with an initial goal of addressing the following research question, which will be further refined in subsequent chapters: "What influences the South Korean public's, especially the younger generations', decreased support for reunification with North Korea?"

This study aims to decipher South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification by deriving empirical and data-driven insights, shedding light on these "unmeasurable" and intangible people's perceptions based on established theories. This newfound comprehension could subsequently be generalised to make inferences and inform strategies to appropriately foster a more conducive social environment for Korean reunification and a peaceful transition into a united Korea.

The objectives of the study are the following: 1) understand the possible reasons behind South Koreans' declining support for Korean reunification through a social constructivist lens; 2) explore and identify socially constructed factors that influence South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification; 3) develop hypotheses regarding the relationship between the social constructs and people's attitudes towards reunification based on established theories; 4) employ quantitative methods to evaluate the predicted relationships empirically; 5) aggregate different age groups to investigate any generational discrepancies within the research model; and 6) unpack societal and political implications and suggest an appropriate strategic trajectory for peaceful Korean reunification and reconciliation.

1.4) Scope and Limitations

Whilst a comparative study of both South and North Koreans' attitudes towards reunification would be fruitful, especially since the reunification process should encapsulate the opinions of both populations, obtaining data from North

Korea remains a formidable challenge. An attempt was made to access the "North Korean Residents' Reunification Consciousness" research data from the Institute of Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS), which carried out a survey on North Korean defectors' perceptions during their time in North Korea. Regrettably, the access request was not granted. Therefore, this research predominantly centres on the narrative of South Korea and its citizens regarding Korean reunification. Moreover, this study inevitably carries some limitations as the following:

1. Using a purely quantitative approach may prevent the researcher from capturing the in-depth nuances of individual sentiments and experiences regarding Korean reunification.
2. Despite rigorous efforts to maintain objectivity, the researcher's own South Korean background and perspectives might introduce biases in the exploration and interpretation of findings.
3. The use of secondary data can introduce constraints, for not being originally tailored to the current research and carrying inherent biases from the original survey.
4. By focusing primarily on the "people" aspects of the challenges and prospects of Korean reunification, this study lacks an in-depth exploration into macro-level geopolitical, economic and international considerations.

Despite these limitations, the value of this research resides in its examination of the often-sidelined human perspectives in peacebuilding, particularly the underexplored individual-level insecurities and their roots related to Korean reunification. By offering a human-centric lens on the issue of Korean reunification, this study seeks to unearth generalisable patterns within the interplay of different social constructs regarding Korean reunification. Ultimately, the insights gained from the study aim to shed light on public sentiments that could be pivotal for policy formulation. Moreover, comprehending these public viewpoints lays the groundwork for reconciliation initiatives for fostering trust and social cohesion, which are vital for a peaceful path to reunification.

1.5) Structure

The **Literature Review** chapter commences with an examination of previous debates on the challenges and characteristics of Korean reunification. The section consequently explores the past scholarship about the significance of “identity” in intergroup relations, South Koreans’ perspective of North Koreans as in/out-group, and the emergence of threat perceptions. Recognising the gaps in previous scholarship, the study constructs a theoretical framework that includes pivotal theories such as the social identity theory (SIT) and integrated threat theory (ITT) in the **Theoretical Framework** chapter. These are then explained and utilised to develop research hypotheses and construct a research model. Following the theoretical backdrop, the **Methodology** chapter delineates the research methods employed, justifies the use of quantitative research and explains the strategies used for data analysis, whilst acknowledging potential methodological limitations. The subsequent **Results** chapter provides a detailed analytical dissection of the extracted data to elucidate the statistical relationships between variables. Drawing upon the empirical findings, the **Discussions** chapter offers interpretations and suggests implications based on the observed patterns. Finally, the **Conclusion** summarises the study and suggests promising avenues for future exploration.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following literature review is structured thematically. Starting with an exploration of Korean reunification as a normative peace strategy, it delves into the previously studied challenges tied to reunification, emphasising the pivotal role of public opinion. This perspective is enriched by a social constructivist lens on intergroup peace and conflict. The review then transitions to the centrality of social identity in intergroup conflict and reconciliation. A more in-depth analysis is given to the evolving South Korean national (ethnic) identity, contrasting the traditional view of North Koreans as part of the in-group with the emerging notion of them as an out-group. Further depth is provided by integrating prior academic findings on the interplay between the in/out-group mentality and perceived threats. South Koreans' threat perceptions of North Korea's nuclear capabilities and the idea of reunification itself will be explored. After synthesising key findings, this section identifies gaps in the current literature, paving the way for the theoretical framework and laying the groundwork for the subsequent quantitative empirical study.

2.1) Understanding Korean Reunification and People's Attitudes

2.1.1) Korean Reunification as a Peace Solution for Inter-Korean Conflict

Wagner (2015, p.171) describes reunification as the fusion of separated entities, which were once viewed as a singular whole, into one nation. The two Korean states' have pursued the reunification of the Korean nation, and their resolution to achieve reunification can be witnessed by pivotal inter-Korean agreements, such as the June 15th North-South Joint Declaration in 2000, the North-South Summit Declaration in 2007, and the Panmunjom Declaration in 2018. Through these declarations, previous South and North Korean leaders committed to mutual recognition and respect, envisioning a structural and amicable reunification (Park, 2020). This pursuit of national harmony via reunification transcends mere bilateral agreements, as both South and North Korea constitutionally mandated their resolution to reunite. For instance, Article 4 of South Korea's Constitution states that “the Republic of Korea shall seek unification and shall formulate and carry out a policy of *peaceful* unification based on the principles of freedom and democracy,” whilst Article 6 outlines the South Korean president’s duty to pursue “*peaceful* unification of the homeland” (Korea Law Information Center).

Similarly, the preamble of the Socialist Constitution of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) states that “Comrade Kim II Sung set the reunification of the country as the nation’s supreme task,” marking reunification as a foremost national duty, and article 9 of the Constitution states that “The DPRK shall…reunify the country on the principle of independence, *peaceful* reunification and great national unity” (International Labour Organisation). It is noteworthy that both states have emphasised *peaceful* reunification of the Korean Peninsula as their national goal. However, it is significant to point out what “peace” entails in the context of Korean reunification.

Since the armistice of the Korean War in 1953, the Korean Peninsula has remained free from full-scale warfare, yet it continues to be marred by constant political and military tensions and occasional skirmishes from the ongoing division. As a result, Korean reunification has been deemed a peace solution for reconciling the Korean nation. For instance, Chung (2019, p.57) posits that ultimate and lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula equates to overcoming the current conflict-ridden division, asserting that “peace is synonymous with reunification and reunification is synonymous with peace”.

Drawing from Galtung (1964), Kim, K. (2020) identifies two types of peace that could manifest in the context of Korean reunification: negative and positive. Kim (ibid) contends that the goal of Korean reunification should not be solely limited to attaining a "negative peace" on the Korean Peninsula, defined by Galtung (1964) as a mere state without armed conflict and war. Instead, reunification should strive for "positive peace," characterised by Galtung (ibid) as the "integration of human society" emphasising the importance of harmonious "human" interactions and cooperation. Whilst the immediate goal of reunification might focus on preventing open hostilities and maintaining negative peace to address conflicts entrenched in the division, a lasting and stable reunification requires a realisation of positive peace. To achieve and sustain positive peace in the context of Korean reunification, the unity of the Korean people is crucial for ensuring a peaceful transition into a unified Korea and for merging into a harmonious society that upholds the spirit of positive peace (Kim, K., 2020).

Echoing this sentiment, Hwang (2009) and Park et al. (2016) note that whilst reunification is a profoundly ingrained state objective, the goal of integration centres on fostering a peaceful and harmonious co-existence for the citizenry as well, both in the transitional phase of reunification and as a definitive outcome. For instance, Kwon and Park (2019, p.270) warn that "even if systemic unification is achieved… hostile feelings and attitudes toward each other are highly likely to cause new forms of social problems". Hence, for truly peaceful reunification, it is vital to look beyond just the absence of conflict and work towards creating an orderly integrated society. For this reason, based on the previous scholarly arguments, it is also significant to consider *people* as harbingers and keepers of peaceful Korean reunification.

2.1.2) The Dilemma of Korean reunification: A Romanticised Dream?

Experts often highlight the stark divergence between the two Korean states in discussions on the hurdles of Korean reunification, as South Korea has transformed into a globalised, democratic, and market-driven state, whilst North Korea has remained an isolated, authoritarian, and self-help regime (Shin, 2011).

These profound differences are products of inevitable outcomes of the North and South's distinctive national and ideological trajectories. As a result, numerous academics have highlighted the daunting challenges and pessimistic prospects for inter-Korean relations and reunification, focusing on the dynamics and characteristics inherent at the state level.

For instance, from a neorealist perspective, numerous scholars regard the states' support for the peaceful, non-absorption type of reunification as an inherently self-sabotaging behaviour since reunification is deemed to fracture the current state survival, which has perpetuated the existence of the two separate Korean states. For this reason, Lee (1989, p.366) contends that the apparent commitment to peaceful reunification is merely perfunctory, asserting that "despite its long-term benefits, reunification is not favourable to either regime". Similarly, Kim (1992) believes that achieving a "free and peaceful" reunification on the Korean Peninsula will be onerous, mainly due to unbridgeable state ideologies.

Concerning the potential for state-level integration through a spillover effect, exemplified by the past progressive South Korean leadership's Sunshine Policies aiming at economic cooperation with the North as groundwork for inter-Korean unity, Kim (2013, p.220) criticises that the neo-functionalist model—often applied to European integration—might not be fruitful for producing an appropriate scene for Korean reunification, especially when the rival states function under distinct political systems. This is because successful cooperation requires the involved governments to "[adhere] to similar political and ideological systems and [play] by similar institutional rules" (ibid). Moreover, Cha (1997) particularly points out that the two Korean states often consider the act of cooperation and ultimate reunification in zero-sum and relative gains terms, alluding to the stark and irreconcilable nature of the two Korean states' relationships and objectives.

Subsequently, Jeon (2009) and Kim (2014) delve into the "collapsist perspective" regarding Korean reunification, suggesting that the only route to state-level reunification is the collapse of one state, presumably the downfall of North Korea's authoritarian regime, since reunification must be followed by changing the current power balance. However, this perspective does not necessarily ensure a peaceful merger of the two Koreas either. For instance, further explaining the possible challenge followed by a North Korean regime collapse, Zang (2016) predicts that even in the case of the Kim dynasty's collapse in North Korea, peaceful reunification is ultimately up to the explicit and implicit consent of the North Koreans who should decide to break the status quo of the Korean division; however, considering that North Koreans have a pro-China tendency, the outcome of such a regime collapse may not automatically lead to the ultimate reunification a Korean nation, but instead perpetuate the current division (Chung, 2011). Moreover, even in the case of North Korea's regime collapse and absorption into South Korea, the financial implications of merging with North Korea, which has a significantly weaker economy and infrastructure, could be burdensome for South Korea and its people, thus potentially garnering public resistance in South Korea as well (Hong, 2011). These discussions strengthen the previously explored importance of studying people's attitudes and perceptions, which diverges from a traditional state-centric vision of Korean reunification.

Notwithstanding the challenges rooted in divergent state dynamics and characteristics, the drive of the South Korean government to reunify has been steadfast. In contrast, as discussed in the introduction, it is significant to notice that the South Koreans' desire for a united Korea appears to have remarkably waned. In this regard, Lee (2020, p.52) argues that shaping reunification policies must be followed by "a finer appraisal and understanding of the conflicting strands of South Koreans' attitudes, perceptions, and preferences concerning inter-Korean ties and, ultimately, reunification," instead of expecting people's automatic cooperation with the state's official reunification agenda. Moreover, Lee (2020, p.466) similarly proposes the need to investigate why people's support for reunification is decreasing as he states that "people's consciousness, emotions, values, [and] attitudes…[are] the determinant of the persistence and validity of political, economic and institutional unification". Lee and Kang (2017, p.3) similarly highlight that "any proposal that fails to gain the empathy of its members cannot have democratic legitimacy, regardless of its logical validity".

These arguments foreground the notion that dilemmas and prospects of reunification and integration transcend mere political and economic considerations. Instead, it is also deeply entrenched in individual attitudes and the challenges spawned by individual convictions and feelings. This perspective prompts the current study to probe the previously studied reasons behind South Koreans' growing reluctance to reunify with their Northern counterparts. To better navigate the reunification policies, it is crucial to investigate the root causes pushing them towards preserving the status quo, a trend that is evident today.

2.1.3) Factors Influencing Public Attitudes Towards Reunification

Before delving further, it is essential to understand what people's "reunification attitudes" conceptually entail. At its core, South Koreans' reunification attitude encompasses people's "thoughts, notions, and emotions about reunification, as well as the will and desire for it," as argued by Jeong (2013, p.75). Expanding on this, Jeong (2017) further depicts the concept as intricately intertwined "attitudes towards…North Korea, policies towards the North, relations with neighbouring countries surrounding the Korean Peninsula, and perceptions and attitudes towards North Korean defectors". Essentially, the concept of "reunification attitude" serves as an umbrella term, capturing the diverse sentiments, beliefs, and views people harbour towards the subject of

Korean reunification. For the purposes of this study, the concept is streamlined to represent South Korean individuals' positive (favourable) or negative (unfavourable) perceptions of the idea of Korean reunification, embodying their willingness to change the status quo.

In this regard, previous scholarship has explored various factors impacting South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification, including socio-demographic elements like occupation, gender, age, and level of education (Woo, 2017; Kim, 2018); influences of domestic and international political climates (Kim, 2015); individual political ideologies (Han, 2016); anticipated benefits of reunification (Lee, 2015; Son, Ryu and Eom, 2022); individual assessments of the current economy (Jung, 2017); degree of respect and acknowledgement for human rights (Jo and Cha, 2019); the state of inter-Korean relations (Park, Cho, and Park, 2016; Kim, 2022); perceived image of North Korea (Ahn, 2009); ambivalent views of North Koreans as the same nation and "enemies" (Jang and Kim, 2015); multicultural acceptance (Han, 2017); the perceived societal cost of reunification (Yang, 2019); and the previous experiences of interacting with North Korean defectors (Kim, 2021).

Acknowledging a myriad of different factors impacting the public reunification sentiments, Lee (2014) conducted a comparative empirical analysis to investigate the validity and explanatory strength of his four analytical models, including distinctive factors such as demographic variables, political orientation (ideologies), ethnic and emotional bonds with North Korea, and the anticipated benefits of reunification. Notably, the emotional bond with North Korea and anticipated benefits emerged to possess the most significant explanatory powers (ibid). Essentially, the more emotional connection South Koreans have with North Koreans, and the greater the perceived benefits of reunification, the more positive their attitudes towards reunification become. Conversely, it can be interpreted that individuals who feel disconnected from North Korea and/or North Koreans or view reunification as potentially disadvantageous can be expected to harbour relatively negative opinions on the matter of reunification.

Building on this foundation, the subsequent section will further explore the prior academic debate on the socially constructed concepts of “us” versus “them” and the perceived advantages or drawbacks stemming from intergroup interactions to set the tone for Korean intergroup dynamics at the micro level. Moreover, it also probes the social constructivist perspective of intergroup peace and conflict, which argues that individual viewpoints and identities exist as a core importance to peace construction and the navigation of conflictual relationships (Howe, 2020).

2.2) The Role of Identity in Intergroup Relations

2.2.1) Implications of Identity for Attitudes Toward In/Out-groups

Howe (ibid, pp.116, 123) argues that perceptions are a “social construction of truth,” which can influence the rationality of decision-making processes through the “perception of the other”. In this regard, within a constructivist paradigm, the concept of “identity” has been frequently used to explain state actions vis-à-vis other states. There is no definitive interpretation of the concept of “identity.” However, many scholars have attempted to elucidate the essence of “identity,” referring to that of states,’ in their interpretation of international relations. For instance, in regard to state identities, Wendt (1999, p.224) claims that “[identity is] a property of international actors that generate motivational and dispositions […] rooted in an actor’s self-understanding,” and those identities indicate the “self” vis-à-vis the “other”. Furthering the idea, Jepperson, Wendt and Katzenstein (1996, ch 2) assert that “national security interests depend on a particular construction of self-identity in relation to the conceived identity of others,” indicating that the nexus of “who we are” versus “who they are” matters in creating security interests within states. In a similar vein, Risse, Ropp and

Sikkink (1999, p. 9) assert that “identities… define the range of interests of [state] actors considered as both possible and appropriate…[and] provide a measure of inclusion and exclusion by defining a social ‘we’ and delineating the boundaries against the ‘others’”. The common theme is that identity allows, regardless of the type of an actor, to categorise “us” and “them,” which in turn influence the actors’ opinions. The concept of state identity can be analogously applied to understanding individual or collective identity among people.

Focusing specifically on social aspects of individual identities, Hogg and Abrams (1988) define the concept of “social identity” as an individual’s (socially constructed) perception of belonging to a particular social category or group, apart from the other social groups, which in turn arouses a sense of “us” versus “them”. Choi, Lee and Kim (2003, p.2) further elaborate that social identity helps individuals “perceive themselves as members of a specific social group, shaping their social roles according to the socially defined group values or cultural values concerning a particular group”. Lapwoch and Amone-P’Olak (2016) indicate that social identity is a multifaceted concept that comprises a broad spectrum of attributes, including but not limited to ethnicity, religion, political affiliations, regional origins, physical characteristics, gender, cultural background, and socio-economic status. The present review will primarily focus on the ethnic and national facets of social identity, given that the main research objective centres around understanding the intergroup dynamics between South and North ethnic Koreans within the broader context of reunification—a process aimed at achieving national unity.

Brubaker (1992) characterises national identity as a form of social identity, which influences how individuals view themselves in relation to a nation, or an “imagined community,” as termed by (Anderson, 1983). This sense of belonging to a specific nation, described by Gaber (2006, p.37) as a “cognitive and emotional attachment,” demarcates “us” or “our nationals” from “them” or “other nations”. Yoon and Song (2011) suggest that this perception can, in turn, spur exclusionary attitudes towards non-nationals, such as foreigners and immigrants. Lee (2018) expounds that individuals often elevate their “imagined community” as a superior “we-group,” giving it positive attributes whilst viewing outsiders as threats, especially when prejudiced attitudes and stereotypical perceptions are strengthened. Consequently, in-group differences are embraced, whilst differences portrayed by out-groups are viewed sceptically and negatively. In essence, national identity entails individuals’ sense of belonging to their specific nation, underpinned by collective sentiments and beliefs, and differentiation of “us” from the “others”.

Previous research on people’s national identity has primarily concentrated on two different conceptualisations of nationhood, which respectively emphasise distinctive elements of what binds people to a nation: the ethnic-genealogical (“ethnic” for short) and the civic-territorial (“civic” for short) (Smith, 1991; Zubrzycki, 2002; Yang, 2014). The latter revolves around statutory rights, institutional obligations, citizenship, and territorial residence, irrespective of ethnic or cultural background, whereas the former emphasises ancestral and ethnic connections and shared language and cultural facets to form a basis of nationhood (Park and Kim, 2019). Hjerm (1998) suggests that these distinctive characteristics can influence attitudes towards outsiders, depending on whether the perception of national identity leans towards an exclusive focus on ethnic uniformity or a more inclusive civic and legal standpoint. For instance, the bloodline-centred national identity integrates its citizens by equating the political community of the nation with the ethnic-cultural community, emphasising exclusive ascriptive homogeneity, whilst a civic-oriented national identity is more inclusive of diversity (Smith 1991; Maddens, Billiet and Beerten, 2000). However, Campbell (2015) warns that such a diversity can also be exclusive and not inclusive of all differences.

2.2.2) Significance of Group Identity in Intergroup Peace and Conflict

The role of identity in propelling not only intergroup cooperation, integration, and national unification, but also conflict, has been a focal academic interest for numerous scholars. For instance, Brewer and Brown (1998) elucidate the potency of superordinate social identity shared by different social groups in reducing intergroup bias and bolstering cooperation and societal cohesion. Studies by Bar-Tal (2007) and Lowe and Muldoon (2012) similarly examine the role of shared group identities in facilitating reconciliation and conflict resolution, as their research suggests that effective intergroup reconciliation often necessitates forging a collective "us" sentiment to promote a sense of belonging within a cooperative, perceived "community".

Further exploring this idea, Delanty (2005)'s research on European integration underscores the emergence of a "cosmopolitan" European identity, a shared identity that has been instrumental in the genesis of supranational structures, enhancing cooperation between member states and catalysing societal integration processes. Building on this theme, Lapwoch and Amone-P'Olak (2016), using Uganda as a case study, prescribe the development of an interconnected "spirit of togetherness" as a remedy for recurring regional conflicts not only in Uganda but also in other parts of Africa. Reinforcing this argument, Kim (2013, p.218) cites the "divided-nation approach" posited by Henderson, Lebrow, and Stoessinger (1974), emphasising the role of a shared, overarching identity in not only reducing intergroup conflict but also driving intergroup unification processes.

However, the role of identity can be a double-edged sword when it is utilised to highlight differences, rather than similarities among different groups. For instance, Muldoon et al. (2016) shed light on how social identities can become the psychological bedrock for political conflict, impeding intergroup reconciliation. Their studies show that the “us” versus “them” divide can intensify intergroup conflicts, heightening perceptions of threats from other groups, which in turn poses challenges to peaceful resolutions. In a similar vein, Nir and Halperin (2019) note that in situations of prolonged conflict between groups, members of the involved groups tend to form negative biases and views about the opposing group/group members. This is often a defence mechanism to maintain their own well-being and positive self-perception, and such a mindset consequently creates “mental barriers,” that can burden peaceful solutions for conflict resolution at an individual level (ibid).

In fact, such an idea has been applied to the conflict on the Korean Peninsula as North and South Korea have grappled with deep-seated tensions due to their political and ideological divides over seven decades. In this regard, scholars such as Park and Kim (2019), Kwon and Park (2019), Nir and Halperin (2019), and Gudgeon, 2022 label the incessant inter-Korean conflict as an “intractable conflict”— a long-standing conflict, seemingly resistant to resolution. Nir and Halperin (ibid) contend that the unique nature of the “intractable” Korean conflict, stems not only from mere state-centric differences but also from the indistinct boundaries of in-group and out-group perceptions. Yet, while groups involved in intractable conflicts typically paint the out-groups in a negative light, the conventional belief of shared ethnicity and the persistent dream of a united Korean nation among South Koreans seem to have tempered South Koreans’ views of North Koreans as “others”. Instead of seeing them strictly as an out-group, there is thought to be an inherent feeling of unity or a sense of “us” vis-à-vis North Koreans amongst South Koreans (ibid). For example, a recent study by Choi et al. (2021) highlights the profound influence of South Koreans’ “Han” (ethnic Korean) identity, which is shared with North Koreans, in driving people’s motivation to overcome the division and aim for peace even in the face of longstanding “intractable” conflict.

Therefore, as both Koreas consider reunification—a process demanding a resolution to the enduring intergroup conflict—it is believed that peaceful reconciliation between groups is more feasible when such "mental barriers" toward an out-group are dismantled. In this context, national identity will likely play a pivotal role in defining the boundaries of "us" and "them," in the context of Korean reunification, which requires a national unity. This distinction can also influence both the path to Korean reunification and the subsequent societal integration process. Choi, Lee and Jung (2019) advocate that perceiving conflicting groups under a shared ethnic umbrella can alleviate the adverse ramifications of social identity on intergroup reconciliation. From this viewpoint, the stronger the association with Korean ethnicity or the perception of North Korea as "us," the more likely it is for the two Korean groups to come together peacefully. This shared identity can create a favourable atmosphere for reconciliation and harmonious efforts towards reunification. Having outlined the critical role of identity in intergroup relations, conflict and reconciliation, it becomes essential to explore previous literature that delves into the traditional and contemporary understanding of "us" vis-à-vis North Koreans amongst South Koreans. The subsequent sub-chapter provides a comprehensive review of academic sources that trace the historical trajectory of South Koreans' identity construct, examining its inception, its manifestations, and its evolution over time.

2.3) Koreans as a Unified "We" Group and the Quest for Reunification

During the period of Japan's colonisation, the rhetoric of a single Korean bloodline, as known as *danilminjok*, gained prominence on the Korean Peninsula as a means to defend Korean identity and statehood against the Japanese imperialistic colonists, who propagated a racial hierarchy that deemed Koreans as inferior to White and Japanese people (Shin 2006; Song, 2021). Consequently, this historical context strongly fostered a collective identity as one Korean nation, reinforcing a sense of solidarity amongst people of the same Korean ethnicity on the Korean Peninsula (Yong and Eun, 2017).

The drive to shield and uphold their esteemed Korean ethnic identity from foreign incursions led to the emergence of ethnonationalism in the Korean Peninsula. This sentiment enabled the Korean people to ensure a deep-seated unity among ethnic members and to strive for the creation of a nation-state rooted in ethnic cohesion (Choo, 2007). This ethnonationalistic sentiment consequently both justifies and propels the ambition for Korean reunification (ibid). As a nation is defined in terms of ethnicity, Yang and Lee (2016, p.79) assert that Koreans harbour a strong sense of ethnic identity, a "sense of belonging that Koreans feel towards the Korean ethnic group", and therefore, Koreans typically conceptualise their nation-states through the lens of ethnic boundaries, inclusive of both South and North Koreans. In other words, South Koreans have traditionally viewed South and North Koreans as part of the "we" group, due to a strong notion of ethnic homogeneity (Hwang and Song, 2019; Kim, Y., 2020).

Consequently, it is especially noteworthy that past inter-Korean agreements heavily emphasise the idea of a unified "us," strengthened by the "one nation" rhetoric. For example, the 2018 Panmunjom Declaration's Article 1 articulates the commitment to restoring the "blood relations of the nation" and progressing towards a "co-prosperity and independent reunification led by Koreans" (Republic of Korea Minisitry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). This example accentuates the centrality of ethnic kinship in the two Korean states' reunification dialogues. The June 15th North-South Joint Declaration further echoes this sentiment by recognising the collective yearning of the Korean people for peaceful reunification and emphasising reunification through *Uriminzokkiri,* meaning "our (Korean) nation together as one," as it describes Korean reunification as "the noble will of the entire people" (Republic of Korea Ministry of Unification, 2000). The past peace declarations demonstrate that the prevailing notion of Koreans' one-ness and the narrative of bringing back together the same-blooded people have formed a foundational justification for Korean reunification.

Analysing such an emphasis on the Korean nation in the discourse of Korean reunification, Kim (2004) and Yoon (2017) highlight the unique Korean perception of a nation as an inseparable "family," denoting intimate solidarity with the nation under the narrative of Korean mono-ethnicity. Such a sense of ethnic homogeneity thus constitutes a core motivation for returning the Korean state to what it was before the division (Kim, 2004, p.9). The Korean ethnic group's cohesion can be further explained by frequently used terms like *unmyeong-gongdongche* for South and North Korea, which means "a community destined for a shared fate" (Jeon, 2007). Scholarly consensus indicates that the impetus for reunification is deeply rooted in the Koreas' shared ethnic identity, which encapsulates all Koreans as part of the "we-group". Park et al. (2012) contend that absent this ethnonationalism, finding a rationale for merging the two Koreas would be daunting.

Heo (2020, p.11) articulates that Koreans take the homogeneity of the Korean nation as an objective truth, thus harbouring a closely intertwined South Korean and ethnic Korean identity (Kang and Lee, 2011; Lee et al., 2015). This sentiment often blurs the lines between ethnic and national (pertaining to the South Korean state) identities. For instance, Kim (2004, p.9) discovered, through a content analysis of South Korean *Morals* textbooks, an emphasis on fostering a proud ethnic community grounded in "biological, cultural [and] historical homogeneity." These textbooks have historically taught South Korean national and ethnic Korean identities as indistinguishable and identical concepts. Even today, reunification education in schools resonates emotionally with students, emphasising ethnic homogeneity as a justification for reunification and overcoming the current division (Lee, 2022; Han, 2007).

Byeon (2016) further underscores that such education instils in students the dual responsibility of reunification from both ethnic and ethical perspectives, urging them to recognise the hardships faced by Northern brethren and advocate reunification as a remedy for the national division-driven “pain”. Kim, Y. (2020) notes that whilst the nature of reunification education has varied, influenced by South Korea’s evolving policies towards North Korea, the bedrock of this education remains the shared identity of one Korean nation. This highlights the persistent influence of ethnonationalism and the “one-nation” narrative in reunification debates. It ingrains and normalises the idea and longing for reunification, shaping the perceptions of South Koreans from an early age. Kim (2019) notes that this notion of a unified, one-blooded Korean nation remained robust among South Koreans despite the prolonged division, lasting at least until the early 1990s. In summary, the notion of a unified Korean identity, based on the concept of “one Korean blood,” serves as a driving force motivating the pursuit of reunification. This common identity facilitates the coming together of the two groups, even in the face of growing differences and escalating tensions on the Korean Peninsula.

2.4) The Evolving Concept of “Us” and “Them”: Otherisation of North Koreans

2.4.1) The Emergence of North Koreans as the "Other"

The nuances differentiating the aforementioned “one-Korean” ethnic identity from South Korean identity were long overlooked in the past due to the traditionally strong sense of ethnic homogeneity. However, a considerable number of scholars have directed their focus towards South Korean individuals shifting away from the conventionally strong ethnic identity, which encapsulates Koreans as a “we” group. A significant volume of literature has highlighted a transformation in the national identity of South Koreans, accompanied by a growing recognition of heterogeneity between North and South Koreans (Yoon and Song, 2011; Kim et al., 2015; Jeong 2017; Yoon 2017; Park and Kim, 2019).

In fact, such an observation is not a recent phenomenon. For instance, Choi's (2007, pp.157-158) research identifies the decline of South Koreans' identification with "one blood" ethnicity nearly two decades ago, presenting results that the criteria of "South Korean-ness" are not solely based on ancestral lineage, but dependent on "feeling South Korean" and "having South Korean nationality. Similarly, Kang (2006), Campbell (2016), and Hwang and Yun (2019) demonstrate that South Koreans increasingly embrace a national identity deeply rooted in the distinct characteristics of the Republic of Korea. Furthermore, Moon (2014, p.222) claims that the ethnic identity of South Koreans as the same *minjok* (the "Han" Korean nation) is losing power, whilst the civic identity of Koreans as *gukmin*, which represents members of the South Korean state, is growing. Echoing this phenomenon in a real-world context, Kim's (2014) research illustrates that South Koreans view North Korean refugees not as counterparts within an ethno-nationalistic lens, but as alien outsiders distinct from the "we" group. Ha and Jang (2016, p.116) bolster the argument that the more than seventy-decade-long division has made South Koreans recognise North Koreans as entities who are "not much distinguishable from other non-coethnic immigrants in South Korea". Moreover, Cools' (2016) examination of the public opinion data from the Centre for Strategic International Studies (CSIS) highlights a growing sense of distinctive identification among South Koreans, particularly among the younger generation in their 20s, who no longer perceive North Koreans solely as members of the same bloodline but as belonging to a different nation.

Alluding to a possible generational shift in views, Baek and Ahn (2016) contend that in today's age of globalisation and multiculturalism, the longstanding sense of a shared political fate and unity as one Korean nation-state is waning, particularly among South Korean youths. This could account for the pronounced decline in reunification support observed in younger age groups observed previously. Moreover, Einhorn and Rich (2021) state that the lack of physical experiences of the Korean War and reduced exposure to shared experiences between North and South Korea may have led younger South Koreans to view their "South Korean-ness" through a more geographical or civic lens, rather than solely adhering to the quixotic and mythical monoethnic ideology of one pure blood nation.

Elaborating on this change, Moon (2015) outlines that South Koreans are in the midst of a transformative phase regarding their national identity. Their identity is transitioning from the conventional "ethnic-genealogical" model, which has its root in the belief of a singular, pure Korean ethnicity, to the "civic-territorial" model, which tends to embrace cultural diversity (ibid). However, scholars like Campbell (2015) warns that acceptance of diversity can be a selective process. The scholar (ibid, p.499) observes that South Koreans' recognition of cultural diversity is not necessarily receptive to all forms of it, as she makes the following argument: "new South Korean nationalism, notionally open for membership to all, is…[in fact] selective of whom it accepts as new members," favouring those who align closely with their notion of "us". Interestingly, studies have also revealed that the younger generation tends to have a more exclusive attitude towards foreign immigrants. For instance, the proportion of respondents in their 20s and 30s who perceive children of foreign immigrants and international marriages as "others" was much higher than those in their 50s and 60s, according to Hwang and Yun (2019, p.134).

Additionally, Jeong (2017) challenges prior research for presuming, particularly in analyses of South Koreans' national identity and its effect on reunification sentiments, that South Koreans naturally possess an ethnic identity that considers North Koreans as an essential component of "us". The author (ibid) claims that South Korean society has a growing tendency to view North and South

Korea as separate nations, not only in terms of national identity but also in terms of ethnic identity. This perspective views the two Koreas as distinct ethnic groups and perceives the Korean division not as a temporary issue to overcome but as “the new normal,” showing a passive attitude towards intergroup reconciliation via reunification (ibid). For example, according to the latest data from Lee, Jeong, and Lee (2023), the perception of “two nations, two states” concerning inter-Korean characteristics is becoming increasingly prevalent, especially among respondents in their 20s and 30s. This indicates a growing inclination among people to see the two Koreas not only as separate states but also as distinct ethnic groups, thus weakening the justification for reunification as a tool for national unity. Einhorn and Rich (2021) defends the arguent that South Koreans informally are redefining ethnic identity limited only to South Koreans.

2.4.2) In/Out-Group Division Strengthened by Stereotypes and Perceptions of Superiority

In addition to the burgeoning distinction of “us” and “them” regarding North Koreans, a deeply embedded sense of hierarchy and superiority in South Koreans’ psyche is worth noting. Kim (2007) contends that the reinforcement of South Korean national identity within South Korean society was bolstered by pivotal events such as the pro-democracy movement in 1987, the hosting of the Olympics in 1988, the successful navigation of the financial crisis in 1997, and the hosting of the World Cup in 2002, during which South Koreans experienced a profound sense of pride in being South Korean, which consequently helped them distinguish themselves from North Koreans. Several researchers, such as Moon (2010) and Jeong (2017), contend that South Koreans’ sense of relative superiority stemming from economic success, global integration, and diversification has led to the development of a unique South Korean national identity. This identity moves away from the conventional mono-ethnic concept and, in turn, strengthens a dichotomous view of “us” (South Koreans) vis-à-vis “others” (North Koreans).

Barrett and Oppenheimer (2011) assert that school curricula and textbooks often display biases, portraying the students’ own nation in a more favourable manner compared to other nations, thus fostering a particular perception of the “other” nations. In the case of South Korea, Kim, Y.’s (2020, p.1112) research underscores the “mythical sense of authorisation and inferiorization in the discourse on North Korea” embedded in the South Korean textbooks’ teaching of North Korea and reunification. Kim, Y. (ibid) points to the polarised portrayal of South and North Korea(ns) in textbooks, which is often demonstrated in binary terms such as “economically developed vs. poor”, “free vs. oppressed”, and “democratic vs. tyrannical,” inadvertently creating and internalising a hierarchical and stereotypical distance between South and North Koreans. Furthermore, such an observation is further supported by survey findings by Park et al. (2019), who discovered that South Koreans associate positive qualities like “passion, hope, joy, optimism, and love” with South Koreans, whilst attributing negative traits like “suffering, gloominess, fear, anguish, and anger” to North Koreans.

Moreover, Song (2021, p.37) points out that a growing number of South Koreans see North Korea as a “barbaric state that has not entered the modern developed world” as compared to South Korea; therefore,“unless North Korea follows South Korea's steps and joins the liberal international order” to become like “us”, reunification may not be desired. Seol and Seo (2014, p.202) interestingly unveil that South Koreans establish a perceptional hierarchy among all ethnic Koreans, such as North Korean refugees, Korean Chinese, Koreans from the former Soviet Union, Korean Japanese, and Korean Americans, based on their origin and socioeconomic status; consequently, Korean Americans with greater affluence tend to be more readily accepted in South Korean society compared to North Korean defectors or the Korean Chinese. Bolstering the observation, Millard (2018) claims that "[South] Koreans are willing to respect outsiders if they are wealthy, educated and 'live well'...yet if an outsider comes from a less developed country then they are almost immediately seen as inferior".

In the past, the distinction between being Korean and being South Korean was negligible (Kim, 2004; Hwang, 2010; Chung and Lee, 2011); however, with the rise of South Korean pride and a sense of superiority in their South Korean-ness, stereotypes and prejudices against the perceived "lesser" groups, including North Koreans, have intensified (Park, 2020). This is evident in Lee and Kim's (2011, pp. 68,83) study of attitudes towards North Korean defectors in South Korea, which observes that South Koreans often view North Korean defectors as "egoists, communists or national traitors," who are "heterogenous" and "inferior" to them. Kertzer (2018) further delves into this notion, discovering pronounced dehumanisation tendencies observed especially among younger South Koreans, who not only regard their Northern counterparts as less competent but also view them mechanistically as devoid of distinct human attributes.

In regard to integration with North Koreans, Kim (2014) and Jung and Yu (2020) argue that whilst the South Korean government legally recognises North Koreans as automatic South Korean citizens, perpetuating the notion of "us" at state-level, South Koreans tend to see North Korean defectors as "others" on par with foreign immigrants. Furthermore, out-group stereotypes persist strongly as a result, as it has been empirically studied that South Koreans perceive North Korean defectors as less open, lacking in kindness, and not sufficiently genuine, indicating that they feel a greater distance from defectors compared to other migrant workers (Yoon and Chae, 2010). Historically, the rationale for Korean reunification was anchored in ethnonationalism, encompassing both South and North Koreans under the same ethnic umbrella, with the intent of reuniting "us." Yet, the deepening "us" vs. "them" divide might have gradually diminished the urgency of reunification in the eyes of South Koreans. It is clear that North

Koreans are increasingly seen as “others,” how can it prove that such an evolving identity has impacted people’s perceptions?

2.4.3) Previous Quantitative Studies on South Koreans’ Attitudes Towards Reunification

In light of such observations, numerous scholars have previously conducted quantitative studies to empirically examine the relationship between South Koreans’ perceived identity and their attitudes towards reunification. Numerous studies have empirically delved into the interplay between South Koreans’ identity and their sentiments on reunification, often focusing on how a mutual sense of identity with North Koreans augments positive feelings towards reunification. For instance, Lee (2014) empirically tested that a heightened sense of ethnic kinship with North Korea closely correlates with an enhanced desirability and perceived justification of Korean reunification. Similarly, Lee et al. (2015) found a direct relationship between South Koreans’ emotional bond with North Koreans, viewing them as part of a singular Korean entity, and their positive attitudes towards North Korea and its people. Echoing these findings, research from Jung, Hogg, and Choi (2016), as well as Park and Kim (2019), showcased a direct correlation between ethnic self-identification—the emotional connection to Korean ethnicity—and favourable sentiments towards reunification. These studies revealed that South Koreans’ ethnic self-identification positively correlates with attitudes towards reunification.

The prevailing empirical evidence strongly suggests that ethnic self-identification is pivotal in moulding South Koreans’ endorsement of reunification. Building on this, Kwon’s (2011) research emphasised that South Koreans’ shared ethnic identity with North Koreans markedly enhances their openness and familiarity with North Korean defectors. Such findings also suggest that South Koreans with a pronounced ethnic bond may be more inclined towards reunification, which would entail individual-level integration between the two Koreas. In a similar vein, Jung and Yu (2020) found that an ethnic identity, anchored in a common Korean heritage and a feeling of kinship with North Koreans, profoundly influences South Koreans' positive perceptions of North Korean defectors. However, whilst existing empirical research has touched upon these relationships, there is a lack of deeper exploration into the nuanced reasons behind the diminishing fervour for reunification, as previous studies are often merely confined to the overarching notion of "identity" and not delving into the more intricate relationship between identity and attitude toward reunification.

For instance, Park et al. (2023) criticise that there are limitations in explaining the weakening of reunification support and the origins of division support by solely focusing on the weakening of ethnic identity. They (ibid) argue that the waning motivation for reunification is not solely based on one's notion of North Koreans as "others." Moreover, Park (2019) similarly reveals that national identity itself did not have a direct effect on the multicultural acceptance of South Koreans. In the case of seeing North Koreans as "others" and equivalent to other foreigners, Park's (ibid) findings reveal that national identity may not be the only reason affecting the public's willingness or opposition for acceptance of differences.

In summary, even though it has been empirically and thoroughly studied that one's feeling of attachment or detachment from North Korea and North Koreans as an out-group impacts people's attitude toward reunification, *how* such a relationship prevails is still an unanswered question, which needs to be further delved into. What can explain such a relationship? In this context, the significance of intergroup threats emerges prominently within in and out-group dynamics, as suggested by Stephan and Stephan (2000). It is imperative to recognise the foundational research that underscores threat perceptions, and potentially human insecurities, stemming from the "us" versus "them" paradigm in intergroup interactions — a dynamic that can critically shape attitudes towards reunification. Against this backdrop, there is a need to explore additional literature on how these perceptions of threats from "others" can influence people's views on intergroup integration or reunification. While the notion of "otherness" forms the socio-psychological underpinning for how groups differentiate themselves, it also serves as a precursor for perceptions of threat, a critical factor that could significantly influence attitudes toward reunification.

2.5) Threat Perceptions and Human Insecurities

2.5.1) Intergroup Threat Perception and Psychological Human Security

According to the previous literature review, the prevailing sentiments of superiority and the profoundly ingrained dynamics of "us" versus "them" within South Korean society undeniably influence the public's stance on reunification. Building on these insights, the following section delves into the literature delineating the relationship between the perception of an out-group and perceived threats. Social identity theory posits that the process of "othering" amplifies the differences between in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel and Turner, 1997); in turn, such a perception has been predicted to lead to heightened feelings of mistrust, fear, and apprehension, causing intergroup "threat," as proposed by Stephan and Stephan (2000)'s integrated group theory.

For instance, within the context of an international crisis, in which states experience conflict with each other, Cohen (1978, p.93) argues that "when threat is not perceived, even in the face of objective evidence, there can be no mobilisation of defensive resources…[;] conversely, the threat may be perceived, and countermeasures are taken, even when the opponent possesses no malicious intent". In other words, it can be regarded that "threat" in the eye of the beholder, and such subjective perceptions of threat, whether actual or perceived, can be heightened or diminished depending on the social construct of "otherness".

Regardless of whether a threat is objectively real or subjectively perceived, individual interpretations of such threats play a critical role in shaping their overall sense of security. According to Hodgetts et al. (2023, p.180) the concept of human security transcends physical and material aspects to crucially incorporate psychological well-being. In the context of Korean reunification, understanding the psychological sense of (in-)security becomes pivotal, particularly in evaluating the extent to which perceptions of threat influence public attitudes toward unification and potentially give rise to human security issues. Furthermore, psychological security wields considerable influence over individual decision-making processes, rendering it essential for gauging public sentiment towards the reunification of Korea. The relationship between psychological security, affected by threat perceptions, and public opinion becomes increasingly relevant as South Koreans gradually perceive their Northern counterparts more as "others," a phenomenon that is thought to increase intergroup threat perceptions.

Despite its importance, this nexus between perceived threats and attitudes towards reunification remains under-researched, thus necessitating further academic inquiry. Consequently, this section of the literature review will closely examine two types of perceived threats, that seem to be shaped by identities and also affect people's willingness to either support or oppose unification with the North.

2.5.2) Threat Perceptions Regarding North Korea's Nuclear Capabilities

Scholars have previously insinuated the potential link between the idea of North Korea as a part of the in-group, or "us", and the perception of threat coming from them. For instance, a report published by the Korea Society Opinion Institute (Korea Society Opinion Institute, 2010), found that even after the Yeonpyeong Island shelling incident in November 2010, a majority of the public

(55.2%) still expressed a preference for the government to pursue a direction of enhancing reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea, compared to 42.7% of the people who supported the adoption of a tough approach in the South Korean government's North Korea policy. Similarly, Kim (2011, p.68) asserts that despite the military conflict incidents like the sinking of the Cheonan warship and the Yeonpyeong Island attack, the vast majority of South Korean citizens still maintained a perception of the North as part of a unified "us" group, allowing South Koreans to reduce their negative reactions towards the military attack. These observations forecast a potential link between the perception of North Korea as "us" and the perception of threat coming from them.

On the other hand, identifying a significant factor contributing to this heightened anxiety among South Koreans, Kim et al. (2015) reported that North Korea's nuclear programme is a major threat perceived by South Koreans, echoing concerns expressed by many South Koreans about its potential impact on undermining peaceful reunification prospects on the Korean Peninsula (Kim, 2009, p.19). Despite this recognition, little research has been done about the extent to which such a threat perception can influence their attitudes towards reunification.

Youn (2007) explains that North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006 presented a realistic military threat, causing shock and conflict within South Korean society, leading to doubts about the feasibility of peaceful reunification. In this regard, Lee (2020, p.25) predicts that "one proxy indicator of how South Koreans perceive North Korea and the prospects for unification is how they feel about the prospects for denuclearisation". Dotto, Lendon, and Yeung (2022) also draw attention to the contemporary rise in awareness concerning North Korea's security threats, noting that over 25% of the more than 270 missile launches and nuclear tests conducted by North Korea since 1984 occurred in 2022, with over 75% taking place under Kim Jong Un's regime, as reported by the Centre for

Strategic and International Studies' Missile Defence Project. As such, the level of personal insecurity arising from North Korea’s actions may strongly impact people’s support for reunification. Comparing such a trend with a decreased trend of people’s decreased support for reunification, there might be a potential link between such a threat perception coming from North Korea and people’s attitudes towards reunification.

However, there are varying discussions on this topic. For instance, anticipating a potential link between perceived security threats and attitudes towards reunification, Kim, Kim, and Kang (2018) propose that individuals with higher threat perceptions might be more inclined to support reunification as they may view it as a beneficial peace solution to reconcile the nation. In other words, despite the presence of a greater security threat from the North, one may see reunification to achieve peace and therefore express stronger support for the reunification process. On the other hand, Lee et al.’s (2015) empirical study reveals that the respondents who perceive the security situation as stable, or those with a lower sense of security anxiety or threat perception, tend to support reunification more, whilst respondents with a high sense of security anxiety, there is a tendency to either believe reunification is not necessary or to be indifferent towards it.

Further research has indicated that this heightened perception of threat from the North Korean state is a significant factor contributing to a decline in support for reunification among the South Korean public (Kim et al., 2022). However, the relationship between threat perception from North Korea is underexplored, especially in an empirical setting. Summarising it, scholars have recently observed a heightened sense of threat perception among South Koreans, especially regarding the actions of the North Korean state, particularly its nuclear programme. Despite varying predictions on how one’s security threat perception may impact their attitude towards reunification, it is generally expected that there exists a relationship between the two.

However, interestingly, Park and Seo (2020, p. 396)’s research finds that the stronger the perception that North Korean nuclear threats are not threatening, the lower the interest in reunification. The assumed relationship requires statistical verification due to the divergent findings in previous studies. Therefore, a more rigorous analysis of the connection between perceived fear from North Korea, including nuclear threats, and people's attitudes towards reunification is warranted.

Summarising it, scholars have extensively studied the heightened sense of threat perception among South Koreans, especially regarding the actions of the North Korean state, particularly its nuclear programme. However, there are varying predictions on how one’s security threat perception may impact one's attitude towards reunification, yet such a relationship has not been put to the test. Therefore, a more rigorous analysis of the connection between perceived fear towards North Korea, especially its nuclear threats, and people’s attitudes towards unification is warranted.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the existing studies have primarily focused on the security issues posed by the North Korean state, but they have not fully considered security concerns related to their own well-being in the face of potential reunification with North Korea. Understanding people’s own security issues arising from interactions with North Koreans, not just the North Korean state, can provide additional insights into the complexities of the relationship between different types of threat perception and attitudes towards the idea of reunification, which may entail anticipated challenges and fears tied to potential reunification.

2.4.3) Threat Perceptions Towards Intergroup Interaction in the Case of Reunification

Analysing the previous scholarship on Americans', Canadians' and Europeans' attitude towards immigration, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) observes that attitudes toward immigration correlate closely with respondents' perceptions about immigration's economic and cultural impacts on the nation or the society. In other words, perceiving immigration-related changes and issues as threats, can in turn, affect individuals' multicultural acceptance. Such a concept may shed light on South Koreans' attitudes towards North Koreans and reunification, as Jung, Cho, and Kim (2022) argue, based on their recent empirical research, that there is a growing need to analyse the perception of reunification in the context of attitudes towards immigration, an act that requires an acceptance of "differences". The scholars (ibid) also suggest that the prevailing perception of reunification in South Korean society can be better understood through the lens of an "anti-immigration" sentiment rather the sole notion of identity.

In the context of South Korea, Kim (2021) proposes that the human security dilemma, specifically regarding the fear of societal disturbance after reunification, could potentially impact people's attitudes towards reunification, especially regarding the social integration process of reunification. In general terms, Lee (2018) predicts that threat perception determines the level of exclusive and intolerant attitudes, discrimination, and prejudice towards immigrants. Moreover, it is significant to question whether South Koreans view North Koreans as "lesser others", and if that in turn can impact whether South Koreans would willingly accept the inevitable "burdens" of reunification arising from their differences.

Regarding the decreased reunification support indicated in national polls, Rozman and Kim (2012, p.155) write, "Striving for a unified state is not worth the potential costs and damage that might be inflicted on the state they already have.

Koreans may be bound by blood, but South Koreans are also bound by the success of their state…”. In this regard, Lüders et al. (2016, p.44) state that a situation that is overtaxing would be perceived as a *threat*, and therefore if reunification seems to burden the society, then it can be seen as a threat. There are several studies that delve into the perceived threats by South Koreans from integrating with North Korean defectors.

Won (2011) identifies that South Koreans in general, display discriminatory attitudes towards foreigners in South Korea due to perceived socio-economic and cultural threats. Such behaviour is mirrored in their treatment of North Koreans in a quasi-reunification situation in which South Koreans coexist with North Korean defectors. Yu and Lee (2014) conducted a study on the perceptions of residents in the Incheon area towards North Korean defectors; the researchers revealed that North Korean defectors were perceived as lazy, aggressive, and intimidating by the respondents, who, in turn, expressed their reluctance about their children mingling or studying with the children of North Korean defectors. Furthermore, specifically regarding reunification, Cho and Han (2014) also point out that the younger generation in South Korea harbours an increasing threat perception that reunification would bring about practical confusion and burdens.

There has been no empirical study unveiling the predicted relationship between South Koreans’ threat perception from a future integration and their attitudes towards reunification; however, Lim and Park (2012)’s study may be able to shed light on a relationship between threat perception and policy inclination regarding reunification, as it empirically demonstrates that South Koreans’ perception of social threat from foreigners, or the “others”, has a positive influence on policies favouring discrimination and exclusion and a negative influence on policies favouring multiculturalism.

Their work also insinutates a potential relationship between South Koreans' perception of North Korea(ns) as an out-group and threat perception, as it reveals that that the more South Koreans perceive North Koreans as different from "us," the more they may feel that the resources, power, benefits, and interests they previously held are being threatened or infringed upon, leading to feelings of anxiety and hostility. There also exists prior research investigating the correlation between anxiety felt by South Koreans and their multicultural acceptance (Baek and Ahn, 2013), which concludes that as the anxiety of the societal mainstream group increases, the likelihood of reduced multicultural acceptance grows, suggesting a close relationship between the threat perceived by the in-group from out-groups, such as immigrants, and their level of multicultural acceptance. However, there is a lack of empirical findings regarding South Koreans' threat perceptions of post-reunification life with North Koreans and their attitudes towards reunification.

Addressing these concerns is essential to diagnosing South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification and for future implications regarding the social integration process and coexistence in a unified Korea after reunification. Comprehensive empirical research, is therefore, needed to examine the relationship between people's threat perceptions towards reunification and their attitudes towards reunification.

2.6) Summary and Research Gap

There is a growing consensus among researchers that the traditional state-centric approach to diagnosing the challenges and prospects of Korean reunification needs to be replaced with a more human-centric lens that accounts for the social challenges of reunification to cultivate positive peace in the case of Korean reunification. A plethora of literature has been produced on the observation of South Korean's national identity based on ethnicity and how it has evolved to make a strong classification between “us” (South Koreans), and them “(North Koreans)”. Furthermore, a significant quantity of empirical research has been conducted on examining the link between South Koreans’ identity vis-à-vis the “one Korean national identity” and their attitudes towards reunification, especially in their attempt to examine what drives people’s support for reunification. However, the previous literature lacks its exploration into factors that may decrease people’s support for reunification, a worrisome trend that can be clearly observed nowadays.

Furthermore, although there is a wealth of scholarship on the growing sense of threat, such as anxiety among South Koreans at the thought of reunification (Kim et al., 2020), scant research empirically investigates the link between threat perceptions and attitudes towards division and reunification. For instance, Yang's 2019 research offers some insights into how the perception of social burden influences attitudes toward reunification. However, the study's methodological approach is limited, as it relies solely on a single survey question to gauge the complexities of such perceptions, thus constraining its ability to fully capture the nuanced nature of this issue.

Therefore, it is crucial to explore the intricate dimensions of the growing “us versus them” mentality and how it shapes public opinions on Korean reunification, transcending a mere surface-level analysis of identity’s role in shaping attitudes toward reunification. The objective of this study is to rigorously explore the relationship between perceptions of potential threats linked to North Korea and reunification, the perception of North Koreans as an out-group and their subsequent influence on public opinions regarding Korean reunification. The following section will delineate the theoretical framework of this study, which is used as a basis for a consequent empirical examination of the relationships between identity, threat perceptions and attitudes towards reunification, which indicates an acceptance of and integration with the out-group. Moreover, as the previous literature lacks its focus on generational differences regarding how such identity is in relation with reunification attitudes, this current study additionally delves into the potential generational differences arising from the relationships between different social constructs, or perceptions.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework hopes to illuminate the predictable relationships between different constructs to suggest hypotheses for the consequent quantitative analysis. The present study approaches the matter of South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification within the framework of social identity theory (SIT) by Tajfel and Turner (1979) and integrated threat theory (ITT) by Stephan and Stephan (2000). Specifically, this study aims to investigate the interplay between identity, intergroup threats and South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification.

3.1) Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (SIT) posits that individuals construct their social identities in relation to "other" social groups, which serve to safeguard and reinforce their self-concept (Islam, 2014). As a result, SIT presents a presence of two different types of groups, defined as "in-group" (us) and "out-group" (them) and goes on to state that it is common for a person to have a much more positive view of their ingroup compared to that of the outgroup, a phenomenon that is often referred to as ingroup favouritism (Tajfel and Turner, 1997, Turner et al., 1979). In detail, the desire to belong to a specific group drives individuals to view one's ingroup as greater or superior to an outgroup, resulting in negative feelings towards the outgroup and further leading to outward prejudice and discrimination, often based on the subjective perception of the "others" (Harwood, 2020). Moreover, Turner, Brown and Tajfel (1979) argue that such discrimination can happen merely by the ingroup's awareness of the presence of the outgroup. For this reason, such a theory's emphasis on self-identity has been used to shed light on intergroup relations, especially in the context of intergroup conflict and cooperation (Hogg, 2016). Consequently, despite SIT having its roots in sociopsychology, it has been frequently applied to peace and conflict studies since it can give insights into why peaceful intergroup integration is hampered (Barentsen, 2017). For instance, SIT has been vastly applied to understand public opinions and phenomena such as "integration, assimilation, segregation and marginalisation" arising from mass migration and to address conflicts between in and out-groups (ibid).

Moreover, social identity theory has been frequently applied to set up a quantitative, empirical examination of how such an identity impacts people's attitudes towards out-groups. For instance, Hamidou-Schmidt and Mayer (2020) utilised social identity theory as a framework to empirically test the extent to which identities related to nation, ethnicity and religion are related to outgroup hostilities towards the majority of the German population, immigrant groups and Syrian refugees in Germany. They yielded results that confirm that identity does, in fact, have a relation with outgroup hostilities (ibid). Moreover, Mangum and Block (2018) similarly test how identity impacts Americans' attitudes towards immigration policies in the context of the United States' immigration dilemma and find that those who deem immigrants as "others" who do not possess qualities to embody an "American" identity, oppose integration with those "others". In other words, one's identity and how one perceives the "others" can shed light on public opinion towards immigration, which necessitates intergroup integration.

In this regard, Mangum and Block (2018) highlight that "national identity is about establishing boundaries between insiders and outsiders". Such an idea can be applied to South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification. The previous scholarship concurs that the "one-Korean nation" identity has been a strong motivator for Korean reunification. However, the perpetuated division on the Korean Peninsula has inevitably eventually led to a distinct national categorisation as “South Korean” and “North Korean,” despite the long-standing belief in ethnic homogeneity and the traditionally prominent sense of “us” regarding North Koreans (Yoon and Song, 2011; Kim et al., 2015; Jeong 2017; Yoon 2017; Park and Kim, 2019). In other words, the sense of in-group with North Koreans can be expected to have shifted towards the recognition of them as more of an out-group distinct from South Koreans. Therefore, in the case of Korean reunification, if South Koreans do not see North Koreans within such a boundary of their nationhood and see them as outsiders of the national boundary, then the justification for reunification, a “national unity,” diminishes. For instance, if North Koreans are seen as “other” nationals, then Korean reunification can be deemed as a massive influx of people with “outgroup” qualities gushing into the perceived national boundary, which can, in turn, make South Koreans (in-group members) have a negative stance towards it. As such, Jung, Cho, and Kim (2022) have advised that national sentiment towards reunification should be evaluated within the frame of “anti-immigration” attitudes.

Consequently, a stronger sense of cognitive distance from North Koreans—viewing them more distinctly as an "out-group"—may correspond to a decreased enthusiasm for reunification among South Koreans. Further theories can provide a more comprehensive insight into how these social constructs interact and influence attitudes.

3.2) Integrated Threat Theory

Another theory that focuses on the factors that influence intergroup attitudes and behaviours is the Integrated Threat Theory (ITT), developed by Stephan and Stephan (2000). ITT can be seen as a more recent theoretical advancement in this area of social psychology and provides a key framework to comprehend prejudice and negative feelings directed from ingroups towards outgroups. ITT argues that intergroup conflict and negative perceptions arise when groups perceive single or multiple threats from out-groups (Scheibner and Morrison, 2009). The ITT model suggests certain variables that significantly impact prejudice between different groups in society, primarily through the concept of threats in intergroup relations. Four such threats have been identified as being significant variables within the theory: “realistic threats”, “symbolic threats”, “intergroup anxiety”, and “negative stereotypes” (Corenblum and Stephan, 2001). The current study focuses explicitly on realistic threats and intergroup anxiety. The ITT model considers realistic threats as types of threats that pose any threat to the welfare of the members of the ingroup, or ingroup as a whole, from the outgroup. The examples include harm to the economic and political power of the group, threats to the members of the group’s health or possessions, or even threats to the group’s very existence (Stephan and Stephan, 2000). It should also be noted that within ITT, not all realistic threats are “realistic”, as even the perceived idea or feeling of a threat towards a certain group, regardless of whether “real” or not, can be significantly caused by prejudice towards the “others” (ibid). The realistic threats are then deemed a root cause of feelings of insecurity and disturbance (Stephan and Mealy, 2011).

Another intergroup threat mentioned by ITT is intergroup anxiety. Scholars have found that intergroup anxiety encourages in-group members to avoid coming into contact with out-group members (Plant and Devine, 2003). More specifically, Stephan et al. (2002, as cited in Riek, Mania, and Gaertner, 2006) find that realistic threat and intergroup anxiety (threat perceptions) explain the relationship between in-group’s negative perceptions towards the out-group and attitudes towards out-groups. In other words, threat perceptions mediate the relationship between out-group bias and attitudes towards the out-group.

Moreover, Riek et al. (2010) similarly find in their study that intergroup threat acts as a mediator, a mechanism that explains the relationship between identity and out-group attitudes. Their study specifically finds that a common identity decreases intergroup threat and, therefore, more positive out-group attitudes. Similarly, Park (2019) discovered that the perception of threat fully mediated the relationship between national identity and multicultural receptivity in South Korea, which indicates an attitude towards the out-group. Building on these studies, the present research predicts that threat perceptions not only directly impact out-group attitudes, in this case, attitudes towards reunification, but similarly acts a mechanism that explains the relationship between identity and attitudes towards reunification. Consequently, a hypothesis can be made for this study that threat perceptions towards North Korea's nuclear capabilities and reunification burden can act as mediators between national identity and attitudes towards reunification.

Based on the theory, it can be predicted that those who feel "detached" from the "others" can be more prone to express heightened threat perception, which can then impact the individuals' attitudes towards the out-group, as in their attitudes towards reunification which necessitates integration with the out-group. For example, the more individuals deem a certain group in a negative light, the stronger they feel about a threat posed by the other group, such as another group's nuclear capabilities, which can then increase their tendency to avoid interacting with the group. Moreover, it can be predicted that the stronger individuals feel negatively biased about an out-group, the stronger their threat perception from a perceived interaction with out-groups, thus leading to a tendency to avoid interaction with the out-group and resistance to integration.

3.3) Merged Theories, Previous Applications, and Hypotheses

When examining both the Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Intergroup Threat Theory (ITT), it is clear that the two theories are deeply interrelated, providing complementary perspectives on intergroup relations. Based on the theories, it can be expected that a South Korean identity, that marginalises North Koreans, is closely related to perceptions of threat and attitudes toward reunification. Specifically, the more pronounced an individual's out-group bias is, the more they may perceive threats from that out-group and the less positive their willingness to interact may be, indicating less favourable views on reunification.

However, based on the previous scholarship's criticism that identity cannot merely explain South Koreans' attitudes towards reunification (Park et al. (2023), this study also questions that it is not just one's identity that impacts people's attitudes towards reunification but threat perceptions that mediate such a relationship. For instance, Caricati (2018) sets up hypotheses based on the merger of SIT and ITT to see if the relationship between national identification and support for irregular immigrant exclusion is mediated by ingroup threat. The scholar's (ibid, p.47) results from samples of citizens from 33 nations revealed that threat perception, in fact, had an effect of partial mediation, proving "ITT's view that group identification is an antecedent of perceived threat…as well as the SIT's and ITT's idea that highly identified individuals, being more likely to perceive threats to the ingroup's interests, are also more likely to show anti-outgroup (i.e. immigrant) attitudes". For this reason, applying the same model to the study of people's attitudes towards reunification, this study sets up threat perceptions as a mediator in its research design.

Drawing from an analysis of existing theories of SIT and ITT and prior empirical findings concerning the variables in question, the subsequent hypotheses are formulated for this research study, followed by a visual research model (Figure 4):

H1: The perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans will have a positive (+) significant effect on the threat perception of reunification.

H2: The perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans will have a positive (+) significant effect on threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession.

H3: The perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans will have a negative (-) significant effect on the attitude towards reunification.

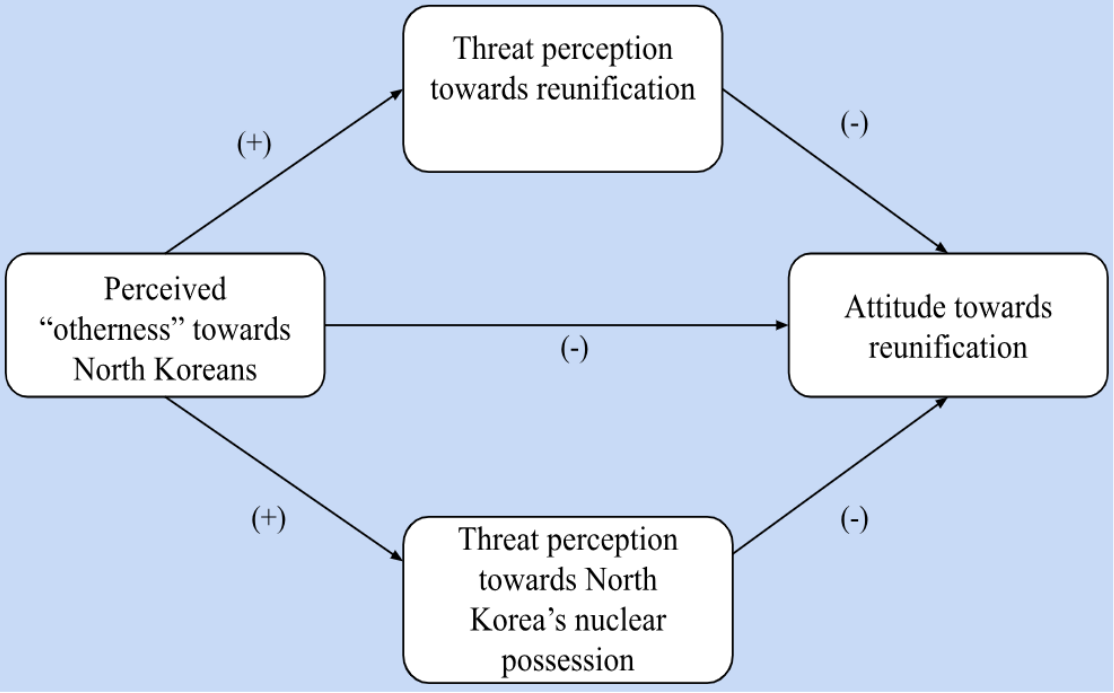
H4: The threat perception towards reunification will have a negative (-) significant effect on the attitude towards reunification.

H5: The threat perception of North Korea's nuclear weapons possession will have a negative (-) significant effect on the attitude towards reunification.

H6: In the relationship between the perceived distance towards North Korea and the attitude towards reunification, there will be a mediating effect of the threat perception towards reunification.

H7: In the relationship between the perceived distance towards North Korea and the attitude towards reunification, there will be a mediating effect of the threat perception of North Korea's nuclear possession.

Figure 4: Research Model


Threat perception towards reunification
(+)
(-)
Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans
(-)
Attitude towards reunification
(+)
(-)
Threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear possession

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1) Explanation and Justification of Research Methods

This research aims to answer the question: To what extent does perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans influence attitudes towards reunification, and how do different types of threat perceptions mediate this relationship? Grounded in the theoretical tenets of Social Identity Theory and Integrated Threat Theory, this study aims to empirically verify the proposed relationships as indicated in the research model (Figure 4) above. In adopting a post-positivist approach to quantitative research, this research attempts to make objective measurements, yet, it simultaneously acknowledges that there are inherent limitations in human understanding of reality, influenced by inevitable subjective perspectives leading to potential researcher biases, especially in the use of secondary data (Panhwar, Ansari, and Shah, 2017).

The current study acknowledges that social-constructivist concepts, such as perceptions, in the context of intergroup relations are deeply rooted in qualitative traditions. However, despite such a traditional method, this research uniquely aims to enable the operationalisation of complex and nuanced constructs by transforming them into measurable variables suitable for statistical analysis. By doing so, insights drawn from an analysis of a large sample size dataset can lead to broader generalisability of findings. This study aims to provide objective clarity regarding the complex interplay of different socially constructed variables, such as the perception of “others,” threat perceptions and attitudes towards reunification, and offer an opportunity to recognise overarching patterns and relationships within the social constructs. In summary, this research aims to identify trends and generalise results to a broader population whilst keeping in mind the complexities and nuanced nature of reality.

4.2) Research Data

To understand the views of South Korean citizens on reunification, the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies (IPUS) from Seoul National University, the Korea Institute for National Unification, and the KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) Public Media Institute conduct annual surveys on South Koreans’ consciousness, attitudes, and other related aspects of reunification.

KBS dataset lacks a wide variety of testable items and the KINU dataset has not been updated and made accesible to the public since 2020. For this reason, this study specifically borrows secondary raw data from the “2022 IPUS Unification Consciousness Survey”, conducted by by Kim et al. (2023). The dataset is open to the public and available on the IPUS website. The following excerpt from the survey report explains the data collection process and its quality (ibid):

> The 2022 Unification Consciousness survey was carried out from the 1st of July to the 25th of July, 2022. The survey targeted adults aged 19 to 74 living in 17 different provinces and cities in South Korea. The sample size is 1,200 people, with a margin of error of ±2.8% at the 95% confidence level. The sample extraction used multi-stage stratified systematic sampling. Based on the regional distribution of the population, the interviewers conducted surveys targeting residents within the survey site, considering gender and age group allocations. Since some areas with smaller populations (i.e. Gangwon and Jeju) had undersampling or omissions, making it challenging for nationwide analysis, a method of primary allocation followed by proportional distribution was adopted to increase the statistical significance of regional analysis. This method took into account the post-stratification weights during the overall analysis because the distribution of the population and the sampling distribution are different. The survey was commissioned to the Korea Gallup Research Institute and utilised a one-on-one individual interview method using a structured questionnaire.

This dataset does not contain any personal identifying information, thus enabling anonymity and discarding ethical concerns. After accounting for non-responses, the final sample size was reduced to 1,193. Employing a secondary dataset from a nationwide survey for quantitative analysis, this study aims to identify broad trends and patterns from a representative sample.

4.3) Variable Measurements

To measure the internal consistency of the respondents' answers in the group of questions (scale) chosen for this study of latent variables, a reliability analysis was conducted to get Cronbach's alpha values. The acceptable threshold for reliability is based on a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 or higher, as suggested by George and Mallery (2003).

4.3.1) Dependent Variable: Attitude towards Reunification

For the sake of the research, this dissertation will define reunification attitude as the opinion holders' (the Korean public)'s negative (unfavourable) or positive (favourable) stance towards the target, Korean reunification. Previous studies have often solely incorporated a single question item asking to detect people's attitudes towards reunification (Kim, 2021). However, a single question may not fully capture the various dimensions of the concept. Consequently, South Korean scholars have expressed varied opinions on the scale for measuring attitudes towards reunification. For instance, Choi (2021) argued that to grasp attitudes towards reunification, it should not merely stop at understanding whether one is for or against North-South reunification. For this reason, this research incorporates a mixture of close-ended survey items to measure people's attitudes towards reunification: "How necessary do you think the reunification of North and South Korea is?"; "Which of the following best describes your thoughts on the reunification of North and South Korea?"; "How much do you think reunification will benefit South Korea?" and "How much do you think reunification will benefit you personally?"

In summary, the attitude towards reunification was measured by combining questions assessing the necessity of reunification between North and South Korea, views on reunification, perceived benefits of reunification to South Korea, and personal benefits from reunification. Originally, lower scores indicated a stronger preference for reunification. For this study, the scores were reverse-coded, making higher scores indicate a more favourable attitude towards reunification. The reliability of the measure was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.750, suggesting acceptable internal consistency.

4.3.2) Independent Variable: Perceived "Otherness" Towards North Koreans

Jung and Yu (2020) emphasise the importance of accurately measuring South Koreans' perceptions of national/ethnic identity when examining the relationship between identity and attitudes towards reunification. Whilst earlier studies predominantly focused on variables like "monoethnic identity" or "South Korean identity," this research shifts the lens towards a deeper exploration of in-group/out-group dynamics. Specifically, it assesses how South Koreans perceive their social "distance" from North Koreans. Giles and Evans (1990) note that Bogardus' concept of "social distance," which was developed to analyse intergroup conflict, can allow scholars to gauge feelings of "closeness" or "distance" towards out-groups. They further propose that greater outgroup social distance readings can indicate stronger ingroup identification, suggesting that individuals with a robust ingroup association may feel more distanced from outgroups (ibid).

For this reason, this study's independent variable, "perceived 'otherness' towards North Koreans" is gauged by an evaluation of people's perceived distance towards North Korean defectors within various social roles. It uses the survey question "How do you feel about forming a relationship with North Korean defectors?" as 1) neighbours, 2) work colleagues, 3) business partners, 4) marriage partners, 5)school teachers, and 6) local representatitves (i.e. memebrs of the National Assembly or district heads). The question was answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Very reluctant," to "Somewhat reluctant", to "Neutral/average", to "Not really reluctant", and to "Not reluctant at all".

Even though this survey question does not ask about North Koreans in general, Park et al. (2016) defend that in a situation where contact with North Korean residents is extremely limited, people's perceptions of North Korean defectors can serve as a proxy for understanding their general attitudes towards the North Korean population. For this reason, the chosen survey items are valuable in measuring perceived social distance from the out-group (North Koreans)

Moreover, originally lower scores indicated a higher sense of social distance; however, for this analysis, the scores were reverse-coded so that higher scores indicate a greater sense of "otherness". The internal consistency of these items was verified using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a value of 0.837, confirming the acceptable reliability of the measure.

4.3.3) Mediator Variable 1: Threat Perceptions Towards Reunification

The threat perception towards reunification is measured with questions predicting the extent of societal problem improvements post-reunification to indicate threat perception about the *furutre* social integration in the case of Korean reunification. The specific survey questions used was the following: "How much do you think the following social issues will improve after reunification compared to before reunification?" regarding 1) economic inequality, 2) property speculation, 3) unemployment, 4) crime issues, 5) regional conflict and 6) ideological conflict. The questions were answered on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "significantly improved," "slightly improved," "no difference," "slightly worsened" and "significantly worsened. Originally, higher scores indicated an expectation of more significant social improvements post-reunification. However, for the purpose of this analysis and to ensure that higher scores reflect increased anticipation of a deteriorating social environment and, thus heightened threat perceptions, scores from the 5-point Likert scale were reverse-coded. The internal consistency of these items was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha test, which produced a value of 0.831, indicating the measure's acceptable reliability.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans	6	0.837
Threat perception towards reunification	6	0.831
Attitudes towards reunification	4	0.750

4.3.3) Mediator Variable 2: Threat Perceptions Towards North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Possession

The perception of nuclear weapon threats was assessed using a single-item on a 4-point Likert scale. The survey item incorporated was "How threatened do you feel about North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons?" Respondents could select from the following options: "very threatened," "somewhat threatened," "not very threatened," or "not threatened at all." Since the item is directly asking about the respondents' sense of threat from the North's nuclear capabilities, and addresses the construct this research is interested in, a single-item measure was deemed appropriate. Originally, lower scores indicated a greater fear towards nuclear weapons. For this study, scores were reverse-coded so that higher scores correspond to higher levels of North Korea's nuclear threat perception. Since the variable is measured by a single item, an internal consistency aseeessment is not necessary.

4.3.4) Socio-demographic Variables

To investigate distinctive sociodemographic characteristics, this study analysed variables such as gender, age, region, marital status, education level, and income level. Gender was coded as 1 for male and 2 for female. Age was reclassified, starting from 19-29 years, followed by 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s and above. For the region, variables originally classified as “large cities”, “small-to-medium cities”, and “rural areas” were recoded as 1 for urban areas (large cities and medium-to-small cities) and 0 for rural areas. For the marital status variable, since the response rates for “divorced/separated” and “widowed” were very low, it was coded as 1 for having a spouse (married) and 0 for not having a spouse (unmarried). The educational level is divided into middle school graduates, high school graduates, and university students or higher. Lastly, income level was surveyed using a 5-point Likert scale based on the individuals’ subjective perception of their relative income level.

4.4) Data Analysis Methods

This study is conducted to investigate the mediating effects of the two mediators– threat perception towards reunification and threat perception towards North Korea’s nuclear weapons possession – within the relationship between perceived “otherness” towards North Koreans and attitudes towards reunification. The following steps will be carried out for statistical analyses by using SPSS and Hayes PROCESS Macro:

1) A frequency analysis is conducted to identify the sociodemographic characteristics of the survey respondents.

2) A descriptive statistical analysis is conducted to check the characteristics and normal distribution of the main variables.
3) Independent samples t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA) are performed to examine the differences in attitudes towards reunification based on different sociodemographic characteristics.
4) Pearson's correlation coefficient is used to investigate the associations between the main variables.
5) Hayes PROCESS Macro (Model 4) was used to test the research hypotheses for the mediating effect, and the significance of the mediating effect was confirmed through a bootstrapping test.

4.5) Limitations

This study relies on empirical methods. While the approach is thorough, there are limits to consider. One limitation is using secondary data from the 2022 IPUS Unification Consciousness Survey, as it confines the research to the original survey's scope, possibly missing other relevant aspects that could benefit the current research. Secondly, by focusing on a specific year of 2022, this cross-sectional study might overlook changes or subtle shifts over time, since it does not account for changes in perceptions possibly caused by short-term political, economic, or social events. The inherent non-experimental, correlational design of this research also prevents the determination of causality between variables. Relying solely on quantitative data might overlook nuanced individual experiences and feelings. Lastly, given the politically, historically and ethically sensitive nature of the Korean reunification topic, there exists the potential for response bias, as participants might gravitate towards providing socially desirable answers, masking their genuine sentiments due to perceived expectations. Despite its constraints, though, this comprehensive dataset offers the opportunity to discern significant associations among the variables, shedding light on potential hurdles and considerations for the journey towards Korean reunification.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1) Frequency Analysis of Socio-Demographic Variables

The results of the frequency analysis conducted to identify the general characteristics of the survey respondents are as follows: Out of the total, 51.0% were male, and 49.0% were female. In terms of age distribution, 17.9% were between 19-29 years, 17.4% were between 30-39 years, 20.2% were between 40-49 years, 21.4% were between 50-59 years, and 23.2% were 60 years and above. Regarding urban and rural distinctions, 10.1% were from rural areas, whereas 89.9% were from urban areas. Concerning marital status, 30.5% did not have a spouse, whilst 69.5% had a spouse. For educational levels, 7.5% had an education level of middle school or below, 42.4% were high school graduates, and 50.0% had a university education or higher. Finally, in terms of income level, 6.5% reported a very low income, 34.5% reported a low income, 52.4% had an average income, 6.4% had a high income, and 0.3% reported a very high income. The summary of frequency analysis is indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 2: Summary of Frequency Analysis (N=1193)

Demographic Variable	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	608	51.0
	Female	585	49.0
Age	19-29	213	17.9
	30-39	207	17.4
	40-49	241	20.2

	50-59	255	21.4
	60+	277	23.2
Rural Urban Classification	Rural	121	10.1
	Urban	1072	89.9
Marital Status	Unmarried	364	30.5
	Married	829	69.5
Education Level	Middle school and below	90	7.5
	High school	506	42.4
	University and higher	597	50.0
Income Level	Very low	78	6.5
	Low	411	34.5
	Average	625	52.4
	High	76	6.4
	Very high	3	0.3
Total		1193	100.0

5.2) Descriptive Statistics for Main Variables

To explore the characteristics of the main variables, a descriptive statistical analysis was conducted, and the results are presented in Table 3 below. The mean of perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans was 3.16 (SD=0.70), indicating that there is, on average, a slightly more distant sentiment amongst the South Korean respondents towards North Koreans. The average perception of threat regarding reunification was 3.78 (SD=0.74), suggesting that respondents generally possess apprehension about post-reunification societal issues. The average perception of nuclear threat was 3.05 (SD=0.70), indicating that respondents perceive a threat from North Korea's nuclear capabilities on average.

Table 3: Summary Statistics of Variables of Interest

Variable Name	Min.	Max.	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans	1.00	5.00	3.16	0.70	-0.024	0.158
Threat perception towards Reunification	1.00	5.00	3.78	0.74	-0.603	0.493
Threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession	1.00	4.00	3.05	0.70	-0.324	-0.183
Attitudes towards Reunification	1.00	4.50	2.69	0.67	-0.018	-0.346

Considering the relative position of each mean of the threat perception variables within its respective scale, there is a stronger inclination for threat perception towards reunification than threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession. Lastly, the average attitude towards reunification was 2.69 (SD=0.67), indicating that the overall responses lean slightly more negative than neutral about their attitudes towards reunification. Additionally, to check the normality of each variable and test whether the distribution of the data follows a normal distribution, skewness and kurtosis were examined. The absolute values of all skewness and kurtosis were less than 3 (< |3.00|) and 10 (< |10.00|), respectively, thus confirming that they followed a normal distribution (Kline, 2005).

5.2.1) Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Gender

To examine the difference in reunification attitude scores by gender, an independent samples t-test was conducted. In order for the result to be statistically significant, a p-value has to be less than 0.05. The analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in reunification attitude scores between the two genders (t=3.129, p=.002), with males showing a higher mean score than females. This suggests that males are more inclined towards reunification than females.

Table 4: Differences in Reunification Attitude Scores by Gender

Variable	**Category**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**t-value**	**p-value**
Attitudes towards reunification	Male	2.75	0.69	3.129^{**}	0.002
	Female	2.63	0.65		

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

5.2.2) Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Age Group

To investigate the differences in reunification attitude scores based on age, a one-way analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA) was conducted, which is a statistical method used to compare the means of three or more groups. This analysis helps to determine if there are any statistically significant differences between the means of these groups. Additionally, a Scheffé post-hoc test was carried out, since the number of age groups not being consistent. The analysis results showed that there was a significant difference in the reunification attitude scores based on age (F=14.391, p=.000). Post-hoc tests revealed that the mean score for the 40-49 age group was higher than that of the 19-29 age group.

Additionally, the average scores for the 50-59 and 60 and above age groups were higher than those of the 19-29 and 30-39 age groups. This shows that older generations, in general, harbour a more positive outlook on Korean reunification.

Table 5: Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Age Group

Variable	Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	F	p (Scheffé)
Age	Age 19~29[a]	2.46	0.66	14.391***	0.000 (a<c, ab<de)
	Age 30~39[b]	2.57	0.62		
	Age 40~49[c]	2.69	0.67		
	Age 50~59[d]	2.81	0.67		
	Age 60+[e]	2.84	0.66		

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

5.2.3) Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Rural/Urban Classification

To investigate the difference in attitudes towards reunification based on the distinction between residing in urban and rural areas, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The results revealed that there was a significant difference in the attitudes towards reunification between the two groups (t= -2.036, p=.042). Specifically, the average reunification attitude score of rural residents was higher than that of urban residents. This suggests that those living in rural areas have a stronger desire for reunification.

Table 6: Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Rural/Urban

Variable	Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Attitudes towards reunification	Urban	2.68	0.68	-2.036^{*}	0.042
	Rural	2.81	0.60		

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

5.2.4) Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Marital Status

To confirm the difference in reunification attitude scores based on marital status, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the means of the two groups. The analysis revealed a significant difference in reunification attitude scores according to marital status (t=4.472, p=.000), with those who are married showing a higher mean score than those who are not. This suggests that individuals with spouses tend to have a stronger desire for reunification.

Table 7: Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Marital Status

Variable	Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Attitudes towards reunification	Married	2.75	0.65	4.472^{***}	0.000
	Unmarried	2.56	0.71		

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

5.2.5) Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Education Level

To examine the difference in reunification attitude scores based on educational level, a One-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the means of the three groups. The results indicated a significant difference in reunification attitude scores based on educational level (F=5.644, p=.004). Specifically, the mean score for those with a middle school education or lower was higher than for those with a college degree or higher. This suggests that individuals who received a relatively lower level of education tend to have a stronger desire for reunification.

Table 8: Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Education Level

Variable	**Category**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**F**	**p (Scheffé)**
Education level	Middle school and below[a]	2.89	0.75	5.644^{**}	0.004 (a>c)
	High school[b]	2.71	0.66		
	University and higher[c]	2.64	0.66		

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

5.2.6) Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Income Level

To investigate the difference in reunification attitude scores based on income level, a One-way Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA) was conducted to compare the means of three or more groups. However, the analysis did not reveal any statistically significant differences based on income level.

Table 9: Difference in Reunification Attitude Scores by Income Level

Variable	**Category**	**Mean**	**Standard Deviation**	**F**	**p (Scheffé)**
Income level	Very low[a]	2.82	0.75	1.525	0.192
	Low[b]	2.72	0.67		
	Average[c]	2.65	0.67		
	High[d]	2.70	0.64		
	Very high[e]	2.83	0.14		

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* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

5.3) Correlation Analysis

To understand the correlation among the main variables in this study, the Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to observe the relationships between variables: 1) perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans, 2) threat perceptions towards reunification, 3) threat perceptions towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession, and 4) attitudes towards reunification. According to the analysis, all variables were significantly correlated at the level of .001. The correlation coefficient and significance probability (p-value) for each set of variables are presented in Table 10.

The perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans showed a statistically significant positive correlation (+) with the threat perception towards reunification (r=.181, p<.001) and threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession (r=.119, p<.001). In other words, as the sense of "otherness" or difference from North Koreans increases, there is also an increase in the threat perceptions towards reunification and North Korea's possession of nuclear arms. It can be interpreted that as individuals increasingly perceive North Koreans as an out-group, the tendency to view reunification and North Korea's nuclear capabilities as more threatening also increases. On the other hand, the perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans shows a significant negative correlation (-) with the attitude towards reunification (r= -.170, p<.001). Essentially, individuals who feel more distant or different from North Koreans are less favourable towards the idea of reunification. Furthermore, the threat perception towards reunification showed a statistically significant negative (-) relationship with the attitude towards reunification (r= -.397, p<.001), whilst threat perceptions towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession did not show any significant relationship with people's attitudes towards reunification. In other words, individuals who perceive reunification as more threatening tend to have a more negative attitude towards reunification. However, the perception of the threat from North Korea's nuclear weapons may not have a significant elationship with attitudes towards reunification.

Moreover, the two threat perception (mediating) variables do not show significant correlation. The result indicates that mediators represent two distinct mechanisms and, therefore, might have a unique influence on the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. In other words, the effect of each mediator can be examined separately without the interference or influence of the other mediator. Lastly, it is interesting to note that the attitudes toward reunification and threat perceptions towards reunification display the strongest correlation out of all the variables tested. This observation insinuates that how individuals feel about reunification (whether they view it positively or negatively) is closely tied to the degree to which they perceive reunification as a threat.

Table 10: The Correlation Coefficient for Each Set of Variables (N=1993)

	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans	1			
2.Threat perceptions towards reunification	$.181^{***}$	1		
3.Threat perceptions towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession	$.119^{***}$	0.055	1	
4.Attitudes towards reunification	$-.170^{***}$	$-.397^{***}$	-0.045	1

* p<.05 ** p<.01 *** p<.001

5.4) Mediation Analysis

To test the hypotheses of this study and verify the direct and indirect (mediated) effect of perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans and reunification attitudes via threat perceptions, a mediation analysis was conducted using the Hayes PROCESS macro model 4. Considering previous studies which concur that attitudes towards reunification differ according to age, especially when comparing the younger and older generations, the mediation analysis was carried out in the order of total respondents, younger generation (age below 40), and older generation (age 40 and above) to investigate generational differences.

The age range for the young generation group is selected as 19-39 years old, based on the definition of the "young generation" group by the now-abolished South Korea's "Presidential Committee on Young Generation". For clarity, Mediator 1 and Mediator 2 indicate threat perception variables, "Threat Perception towards Reunification" and "Threat Perception Towards North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Possession," respectively.

The analysis was conducted in the order of **Model 1**, which examines the influence of the independent variable on mediator 1; **Model 2**, which examines the influence of the independent variable on mediator 2; **Model 3**, which examines the influence of the independent variable, mediator1, and mediator2 on the dependent variable; and **Model 4**, which examines the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Before the analysis, the p-values of the F-statistic for all models were checked, and all showed values lower than 0.001, confirming that there were no unfit models. The summary of the results can be found in Table 11.

When **all participants** are considered, the perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans significantly and positively influenced the threat perceptions towards reunification ($\beta = .18$, $p < .001$) and threat perceptions towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$). It also significantly and negatively influenced the dependent variable (attitude towards reunification), both when alone (β= -.16, p< .001) and when included with the mediators (β= -.09, p< .01). In other words, the stronger one feels a perception of “otherness” towards North Koreans, the higher the tendency to harbour threat perception regarding North Korea's nuclear weapons possession and reunification, and the more negative attitude towards reunification. This analysis was able to statistically verify the previously presented hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3) that the perception of “otherness” towards North Koreans has a positive (+) relationship with both threat perceptions (mediators) and a negative (-) relationship with South Koreans' attitude towards reunification.

Furthermore, the first mediator, threat perception towards reunification, had a significant negative relationship with the attitude towards reunification (β= -.37, p< .001), validating the presented hypothesis, H4. The results thus far indicate the partial mediation effect of threat perception towards reunification when all age groups are considered, validating H6. In other words, there is not only a direct relationship between the perceived “otherness” and attitudes towards reunification but also their indirect relationship through the mediator (threat perception towards reunification). However, when all age groups are considered, the second mediator, threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession, does not indicate a significant relationship with people's attitudes towards reunification, and therefore H5 and H7 are not supported.

In summary, when the entire age groups are considered, perceived “otherness” not only shows a direct relationship with attitudes towards reunification but also indicates an indirect relationship with attitudes towards reunification via mediator (threat perception towards reunification, only). Since both the direct and indirect relationships between the independent and dependent variables are significant, the result suggests that there is “partial mediation,” by which a mediator only accounts for part of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Further implications will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

When the analysis was conducted by dividing the age cohorts into younger and older generation groups, the results for the younger generation group were consistent with the overall sample. However, for the older generation group, in contrast to the results from the overall sample and the younger generation group, the perceived "otherness" towards North Korea did not have a significant relationship with the attitude towards reunification when mediators were added, as indicated in the model (3) of Table 11, Instead, it was uniquely observed that, within the older generation group, unlike the younger generation group, both the heightened threat perceptions towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession and reunification corresponded to a more negative attitude towards Korean reunification. In other words, a full mediation effect happened when the mediators were added. Given that the paths to attitudes towards reunification vary by age, as the results highlight, it is important to consider age-specific interventions. Such implications will be discussed further in the subsequent chapter.

Additionally, a Bootstrapping test was carried out to verify the significance of the indirect effect, and a bias-corrected 95% confidence interval was calculated using 5,000 bootstrapping samples. The results are summarised in Table 11. In this case, if the lower limit confidence level (LLCI) and the upper confidence limit (UCLI) do not include 0, then the mediation effect is considered statistically significant (Kim, 2021). As Table 12 indicates below, only the mediation effect of the threat perception regarding reunification was significant for the overall respondents and, specifically the younger generation group under the age of 40, validating hypothesis H6 about threat perception towards reunification's mediating effect, and rejecting hypothesis H7 about threat perception towards North Korean nuclear capabilities' mediating role.

For those 40 years and older (the "older generation"), both mediation effects of the threat perception towards reunification and threat perception were significant, validating both hypotheses H6 and H7. They also showed a full mediation, In other words, for the overall respondents and specifically those under 40 (younger generation), a higher feeling of distance from North Korea is positively correlated with the heightened threat perception about reunification and decreased the reunification attitude. For those 40 and older (older generation), uniquely, a greater feeling of distance from North Korea led to both increased threat perceptions about reunification and North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons, decreasing the attitude towards reunification, and both mediators took the form of full mediation, unlike only the threat perception of Korean reunification taking a partial mediation in the overall/younger generation group.

Table 11: Mediation Analysis

Model	DV	IV	Total		Younger generation (40 >Age)		Older generation (Age≥ 40)	
			β	p	β	p	β	p
1	Threat perception towards reunification	Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans	0.18	0.000	0.24	0.000	0.16	0.000
2	Threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession	Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans	0.12	0.000	0.13	0.008	0.11	0.002

3	Attitudes towards reunification	Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans	-0.09	0.001	-0.16	0.001	-0.05	0.147
		Threat perception towards reunification	-0.37	0.000	-0.40	0.000	-0.36	0.000
		Threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession	-0.03	0.298	0.06	0.176	-0.07	0.033
4	Attitudes towards reunification	Perceived "otherness" towards North Koreans	-0.16	0.000	-0.25	0.000	-0.11	0.002

* p<.05, *** p<.001

Table 12: Bootstrapping for Mediation Test

	Mediator Variable	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Total respondents	Threat perception towards reunification	-0.0637	0.0120	-0.0867	-0.0408
	Threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear weapons possession	-0.0031	0.0033	-0.0101	0.0031
Younger generation	Threat perception towards reunification	-0.0889	0.0203	-0.1300	-0.0506

(40 >Age)	Threat perception towards North Korea’s nuclear weapons possession	0.0073	0.0072	-0.0044	0.0240
Older Generation (Age≥ 40)	Threat perception towards reunification	-0.0532	0.0144	-0.0814	-0.0247
	Threat perception towards North Korea’s nuclear weapons possession	-0.0077	0.0048	-0.0186	-0.0001

Chapter 6: Discussions

6.1) Compatibility of Correlation Analysis Results with Established Theories and Existing Literature

This study sought to explore whether the perception of threat acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between people’s sense of “otherness” towards North Koreans and their attitudes toward reunification. Additionally, the research aimed to examine if there are generational differences in these patterns. Before diving into a detailed analysis and discussing the implications of the findings, it is crucial to assess how well these results align with existing academic literature and studied theories. Specific hypotheses related to mediation effects will be discussed later in this chapter.

The first and second hypotheses about the positive (+) relationship between perceived “otherness” towards reunification and threat perception are supported as the direct paths between “otherness” towards reunification and both threat perceptions (threat perception about North Korea’s nuclear capabilities and the threat perception towards social issues after reunification) came out to be statistically significant. The results reveal that the relationship between the variables is a verification of the ITT, which states that the more people feel distant from the out-group, the heightened perception of threat from the out-group or the integration with them.

The third hypothesis about the negative (-) relationship between perceived “otherness” towards reunification and the attitude towards reunification is supported as the direct path between them is statistically significant. It is consistent with existing research, which shows that stronger South Korean identification, which strengthened distance towards an out-group, is correlated to people’s negative reaction to the idea of Korean reunification (Park and Kim, 2019; Jeong, 2017). Moreover, this result is in line with Mangum and Block’s (2018) that those who have a heightened perceived “difference” or “distance” may regard the act of intergroup interaction in a negative light. In other words, they are more likely to think of reunification as something disadvantageous to themselves and their in-group.

The fourth hypothesis about the negative (-) relationship between threat perceptions towards reunification and attitudes towards reunification is supported as the direct path between those two variables is statistically significant. This is in line with the previous literature (Plant and Devine, 2003) that the heightened threat perception about interacting with the “out-groups” hamper intergroup integration with them.

However, interestingly, the fifth hypothesis about the negative (-) relationship between threat perceptions towards North Korea’s nuclear capabilities and attitudes towards reunification is not supported as the results do not show a significant relationship between the two variables. Such a result is in contrast with Kim et al. (2022)’s argument that heightened threat perception from North Korea is an indicator of South Korean people’s declined support for reunification. One implication this result may insinuate is that the impact of perceived threats coming from the other (state-level) out-group is distinguishable from the perceived threats coming from the notion of (social-level) out-group involving people regarding social integration in the context of reunification. This finding necessitates further research.

6.2) Socio-Demographic Implications

Before exploring the results of the mediation analysis, the report will briefly investigate sociodemographic differences in attitudes toward reunification and interpret their implications.

First, upon analysing how attitudes toward reunification vary by age, the results show that older individuals generally have a more positive attitude toward reunification. This is consistent with the prior findings from Kim (2021) and Kim et al. (2023).

Moreover, when looking at gender, men scored higher in attitudes toward reunification compared to women. This aligns with prior research indicating that women tend to be more pessimistic about reunification (Kim, 2021). According to a study by Lee et al. (2021), women are more likely to think that being of the same ethnicity does not necessarily mean that the North and South must reunite under a single state. Moreover, the same study finds that women tend to prefer peaceful coexistence over reunification (ibid). Lee (2014) also argued that women tend to have a more negative attitude toward reunification, especially regarding the “instability” it may bring, indicating their heightened reunification anxiety. Further research is warranted to explore why such anxiety toward reunification differs by gender.

When observing reunification attitudes, aggregated by places of residence, individuals living in rural areas showed a more positive attitude toward reunification compared to those living in cities. Statistical data from Statistics Korea’s 2022 Agricultural, Forestry and Fisheries Census indicates that rural areas in South Korea have a significantly higher proportion of elderly residents

(Kim, 2023). Therefore, this finding aligns with the result that the older the age group, the more positive the attitude toward reunification

Moreover, individuals with spouses displayed more positive attitudes toward reunification than those without. This is also consistent with Lee et al.'s (2021) speculation that those who have not reached a "settled" stage in life may be more sensitive to the potential burdens that reunification could entail.

This study also found that lower educational levels correlated with more positive attitudes toward reunification. However, this contradicts prior studies suggesting that higher education levels result in more favourable attitudes toward reunification (Kim, 2021). Further, this contrasts with research by Kim et al. (2022), which found that people with lower educational levels are more likely to reject accepting defectors. Therefore, generalizing the current study's results is not recommended.

Lastly, this study also found no statistically significant income-related differences in attitudes toward reunification. However, previous studies have suggested that those with lower incomes may feel more burdened by the cost of reunification, thus displaying more negative attitudes (Kim et al., 2022). On the other hand, a study by Cho and Han (2014) revealed that high-income earners benefiting from the divided state had a higher tendency to maintain the status quo. For this reason, such a result also warrants further in-depth research.

In summary, attitudes toward reunification vary based on different sociodemographic factors. Older age appears to have a positive influence on attitudes toward reunification, while instability, perceived burdens, and a high degree of anxiety seem to exert a negative impact. However, given that the results do not fully align with existing literature, caution should be exercised in generalising these findings.

6.3) Generational Differences

Against the backdrop of previous research showing that attitudes toward reunification differ between the younger and older generations, the entire sample was divided into two different age groups, the younger generation (19-39 year-olds) and the older generation (40-60+ year-olds), for the analysis of mediating variable effects. Interestingly, significant differences in the roles of mediating variables could be observed between the two groups.

6.3.1) Younger Generation

Among the younger generation, both the direct effect (the effect of the perceived "otherness" on the attitudes towards reunification without a mediator) and the indirect effect (the effect of the perceived "otherness" on the attitudes towards reunification via mediator) were significant. This indicates that the mediator variable explains only part of the relationship between the perceived "otherness" and attitudes towards reunification, but not all of it. This result suggests that in the younger generation cohort, the perceived "otherness" plays a larger role in shaping attitudes toward reunification compared to other mediator variables. In other words, the younger generations' decreased support for reunification can be best explained, at least within this research model, by their heightened perception of North Koreans as "others". This result can also imply how a state appeal for Korean reunification as a Korean national unity as one Korean blood may not work effectively on the younger public.

Moreover, no mediation effect of threat perception towards North Korea's nuclear capabilities was found in the analysis. In other words, how South Koreans perceive North Koreans as "the other" has a significant impact on their attitudes towards reunification without the need for nuclear threat perceptions to mediate this relationship. It can also be inferred that younger generations may not be considering military threats in shaping their attitudes towards reunification. This result contradicts Lee et al.'s (2015) prediction that younger Korean generations are sensitive to security threats from North Korea, and such concerns about security threats from North Korea would, in turn, act as a factor for growing reluctance towards the idea of reunification. This may suggest that social and cultural factors, such as the perception of North Koreans as the other social group, are the primary concern for the younger generations in their shaping of reunification attitudes, not nuclear, or possibly any other military threats from North Korea.

Furtheremore, in the younger generation group, a partial mediation of threat perception towards reunification was observed in the relationship between perceived “otherness” and “attitude towards reunification”. In other words, the mediating variable does play a role, but it is not the only factor influencing the relationship between the perceived “otherness” and attitudes towards reunification. From the findings, it can be construed that whilst both threat perceptions do not fully mediate the relationship between individuals’ otherisation of North Koreans and their attitudes towards reunification, threat perceptions towards reunification still play a part in the sequence of how attitudes are shaped, and therefore, reducing such a threat perception would still be significant in cultivating a reunification consensus. Moreover, the fact that only the threat perception towards reunification had a partial mediation effect suggests that other mediating variables may also exist; therefore, future research should look into what things might be.

6.3.2) Older Generation

Interestingly, in the older generation cohort, the perceived “otherness” towards North Korea did not have a significant direct relationship with the attitude towards reunification, unlike the younger generations. Instead, it only had an indirect relationship with attitudes towards reunification through the mediators, which are threat perceptions towards North Korea’s nuclear weapons possession and reunification. These results indicate that the mediators (threat perceptions) play a crucial role in shaping older generations' attitudes towards reunification, as the results indicate that it is not the mere perception of North Koreans as "other" that directly shapes their attitudes towards reunification but rather the level of threat they feel due to this "otherness". Unlike in the younger cohort, where the direct effect of perceived "otherness" also mattered, the older generation's attitudes towards reunification are primarily influenced by the mediating variables. Such findings point to a generational divide in how reunification is perceived by individuals.

Interpreting the findings, this study speculates that the older generation might have complex, ingrained attitudes that are less directly influenced by immediate perceptions of North Koreans as "others," as they might maintain a traditionally strong sense of ethnic homogeneity. Additionally, the older generation's personal experiences or anecdotal accounts of war and military hostilities could have made them more inclined to focus on issues like security risks, including nuclear threats and the logistical difficulties of reunification, rather than on cultural or social disparities. Lastly, it can be predicted the older generation, the priority is national security rather than the reunification of North and South Korea under the existing conditions. For this reason, for this specific cohort, addressing their threat perceptions regarding North Korea's nuclear capabilities and threat perceptions towards reunification could be more impactful in increasing positive perceptions of Korean reunification.

6.4) Strategies for Reunification

Understanding these nuances can aid in forming domestic reunification strategies that foster more comprehensive societal cohesion, helping to ensure that public opinion is more unified and thereby making it easier to achieve the goal of peaceful reunification. Therefore, based on the findings, a few strategies for cultivating the appropriate social scene for reunification to happen will be presented. Moreover, as the results suggest a significant difference in the way younger and older generations shape their reunification attitudes, age-specific strategies must be tailored.

The study's observation indicates a potential misalignment between what policymakers prioritise on a state level regarding Korean reunification and what actually influences public opinion on reunification. Whilst the South Korean state focuses on denuclearisation as a crucial step towards peaceful reunification, just as how the current South Korean administration prioritises denuclearisation as a prerequisite for Korean reconciliation, this study's results suggest that, despite its state-level significance, eliminating the threat of nuclear weapons may not necessarily make the public more receptive to the idea of reunification, especially for younger generations. Instead, for the younger generation, interventions or public messages aimed at changing attitudes toward reunification may need to focus on addressing the perceptions of "otherness" rather than focusing on altering perceptions related to nuclear threats.

Moreover, just a mere emphasis on the historical Korean mono-ethnicity as a justification for "national unity" may not hugely impact younger generations' attitudes towards reunification. If an initiative aims to alter attitudes towards reunification within the younger generation, the fact that the perception of "otherness" exerts both direct and indirect influences necessitates a multi-faceted approach. More specifically, interventions, such as education, could target bridging the emotional and perceived social distance that South Koreans feel vis-à-vis North Koreans and the threat perceptions towards reunification for the younger generations. Given that younger people will gradually become the majority stakeholders in society, their less-threat-based and more "otherness"-centred views may start to dominate public opinion over time. This could require a long-term strategy adjustment. Furthermore, as Campbell (2015) previously indicated, South Koreans can be selective in their receptivity, opening their arms wide to those who are "similar" or equal to their subjective status. Therefore, there is a dire need for policies that enable people to genuinely embrace multiculturalism and overcome "otherness".

On the other hand, the role of perceived otherness in shaping attitudes is not universal across all demographic groups. Whilst it is significant for younger individuals, it is not the primary factor driving the opinions of older individuals regarding reunification, according to the research results. Instead, to increase the older generations' positive outlook on Korean reunification, efforts aimed at mitigating threat perceptions would work best. Moreover, for both generations, it is important not just to emphasise the positive benefits of reunification but also to instill confidence in the ability to manage the negative consequences that reunification may bring, since the both cohorts' reunification attitudes are either in relation to their threat perceptions towards reunification.

Lastly, upon reviewing the results, it is evident that not both types of threat perceptions are correlated with attitudes toward reunification. However, given the result that the sense of threat regarding reunification negatively affects people's attitudes, it can be inferred that people feel psychological insecurity about reunification. To decrease such insecurity, there is a need to bridge the perceived differences between North and South Koreans. Scholars have previously argued that the notion of one Korean nation is diminishing, and South Koreans have taken a path to develop their own proud identity that ostracises their Northern counterparts. However, for peaceful societal integration to happen and to strengthen the consensus on Korean reunification, a new overarching identity should be pursued.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This research was carried out in the context of earlier studies that highlighted waning support for reunification, aiming to explore the reasons for this shift in sentiment. The study concentrated on exploring how the perception of North Korea/North Koreans as an "out-group," along with the associated threat perceptions, plays in shaping attitudes towards reunification. The dissertation was designed to fulfil overarching objectives: 1) To deepen the comprehension of the relationship between identity and public attitudes towards Korean reunification, thus offering a more sophisticated understanding of public sentiment on this vital subject; 2) To scrutinise the mediating influence of intergroup threat perception in the relationship between identity and attitudes toward reunification and diagnose potential insecurities; 3) To quantitatively investigate how attitudes towards reunification may vary across different generational cohorts, shaped by unique social constructs; and 4) provide interpretations for quantitative findings and present a new strategic direction for increasing people's consensus on Korean reunification.

The dissertation transitioned the focus from state-centric viewpoints prevalent in Korean reunification studies to an analysis centred around the people. The review discussed the role of a monoethnic Korean identity as a historical driver for reunification, whilst also scrutinising how a distinct South Korean identity has surfaced, progressively relegating North Koreans as an "out-group" and, at times, depicting them in a hierarchical, negative manner. Recognising the link between in-group/out-group dynamics and threat perceptions, the literature review also probed past studies on the types of threats that South Koreans associate with North Korea, such as nuclear capabilities and potential societal burdens from reunification and their possible relation to people's attitudes towards reunification. Subsequent to this review, this study crafted hypotheses rooted in social identity theory and integrated threat theory to examine the interrelationships among identity, perceived intergroup threats, and attitudes towards reunification. Methodological strategies for validating these hypotheses were outlined, encompassing the metrics employed to gauge attitudes towards out-groups, threat perceptions, and attitudes towards reunification. Data from the IPUS 2020 Unification Consciousness Survey was scrutinised to test the hypotheses, and the implications of these findings were deliberated.

This research results deliver meaningful implications, especially when previous scholars have pointed out that attitudes towards reunification are not merely explained by one's weakened ethnic identification. The perception of difference and distance towards North Koreans did affect people's attitudes towards reunification; however, this study finds that threat perceptions play a significant role in people's assessment of the idea of reunification, especially within the older generation.

Moreover, it is important to note that attitudes towards reunification vary by generation, uniquely influenced by their perceptions of threat and distance towards the other side. For the younger generation, reducing the psychological distance between South and North Korea is crucial, whilst for the older generation, alleviating concerns about military security, particularly nuclear threats, is important for increasing a positive outlook on Korean reunification. Additionally, across all age groups, perceived ramifications of Korean reunification correlate with a decreased positive attitude towards reunification. These findings suggest that when formulating policies and strategies for reunification, the "human" dimension of security issues must also be adequately addressed. Whilst the concept of reunification implies overcoming the pain of division to move towards a peaceful community, the results indicated that perceived and abstract threats related to reunification had a greater impact on people's attitudes towards reunification than current military threats, such as nuclear capabilities. This suggests that Korean reunification may embody people’s security concerns.

However, as it was proven that such heightened threat perceptions were significantly related to the perception of North Koreans as an out-group, creating a sense of shared identity, therefore, can be considered an initial step towards fostering a mindset conducive to unity among groups with conflicting interests. This common identification can serve as a foundation for reconciliation, making it easier to bridge gaps and find common ground. Moreover, this study would like to emphasise that creating a sense of shared identity does not necessarily need to be rooted in the outdated concept of a "one-blood" Korean nationhood. Instead, this collective identity could be built around a modern, more inclusive idea, such as the pursuit of “peace.” By focusing on a shared commitment to peace, a new, encompassing identity could be formed that makes room for diverse perspectives and histories whilst uniting people around a common, forward-looking goal. By nurturing a collective, peaceful identity for all Koreans, the perception of North Koreans could shift from that of the “other” to a more inclusive “significant other.” Such a perceptual transformation could pave the way for a more conducive atmosphere for peaceful reunification or, at the very least, enhance intergroup relations between North and South Koreans.

This dissertation comes with several limitations that must be considered. Firstly, the data employed is cross-sectional, offering only a snapshot in time and precluding the ability to establish causality or track evolving attitudes over extended periods; this highlights the lack of longitudinal data. Secondly, the methodology, centred around regression analysis, predominantly quantifies relationships, and may overlook qualitative aspects like emotional sentiments or cultural nuances. Finally, the study focuses exclusively on human factors, such as identity and perception, without accounting for other significant influences like economic considerations or political structures, thereby narrowing the scope of insights that can be drawn about attitudes toward Korean reunification.

For further research in this area, several recommendations can be made. Firstly, longitudinal studies could be invaluable for tracking the evolving dynamics of public attitudes towards reunification over time, capturing changes that a cross-sectional approach may miss. Second, incorporating qualitative methodologies, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide richer context and a more nuanced understanding of the complex factors that shape opinions on reunification. For instance, a qualitative study on how people's "insecurity" regarding Korean reunification would be fruitful. Third, expanding the scope to include economic, political, and geopolitical factors would offer a more comprehensive view of the myriad influences on public sentiment. Fourth, comparative studies involving other divided nations could offer broader insights and potentially generalisable findings, enriching the existing body of knowledge on reunification processes. Lastly, it would be invaluable to include the perspectives of North Koreans in future studies. Capturing their sentiments and attitudes towards reunification would provide a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing peaceful Korean reunification.

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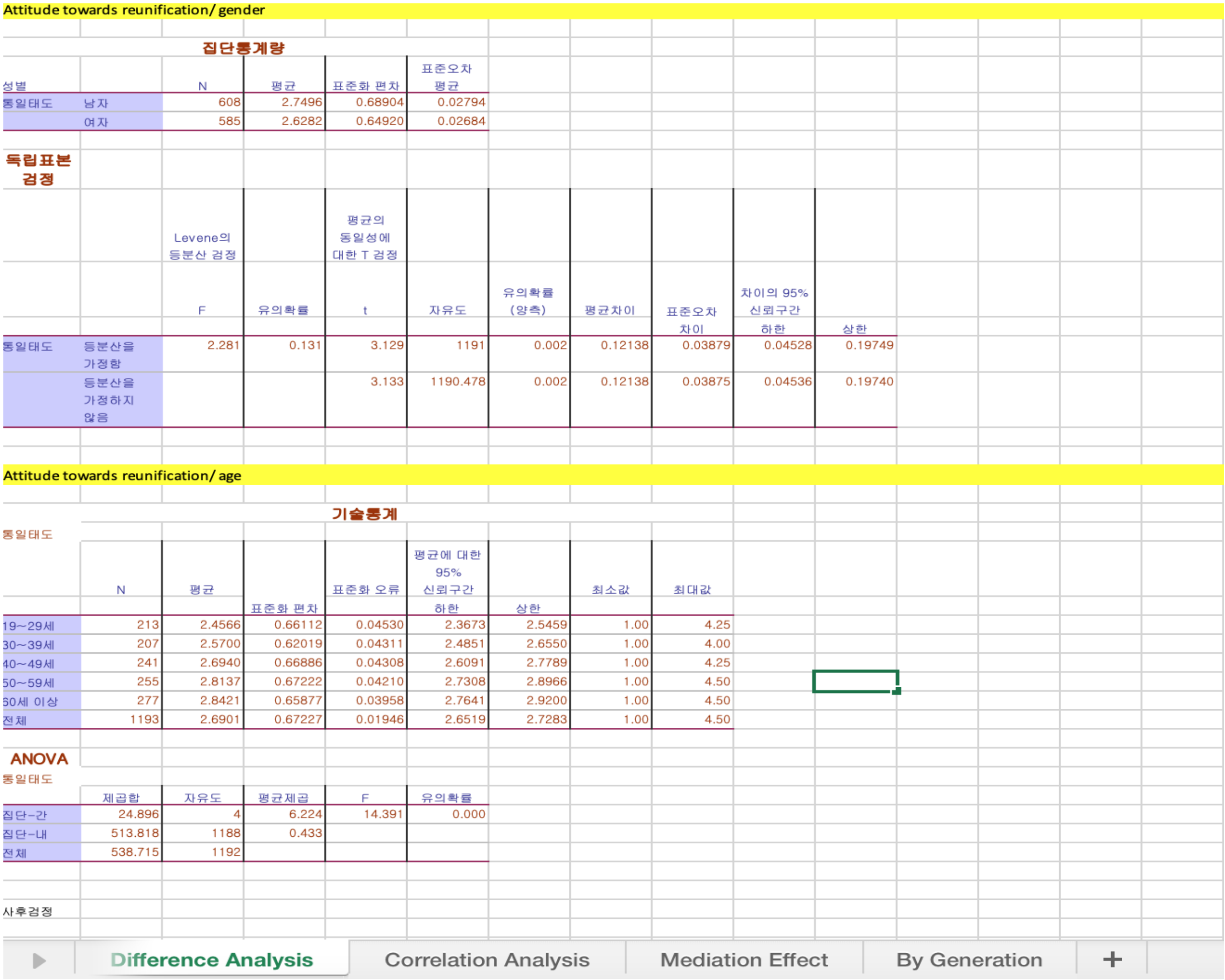
Appendix A: Data Analysis Examples



Attitude towards reunification/ gender

집단통계량

성별		N	평균	표준화 편차	표준오차 평균
통일태도	남자	608	2.7496	0.68904	0.02794
	여자	585	2.6282	0.64920	0.02684

독립표본 검정

		Levene의 등분산 검정		평균의 동일성에 대한 T 검정						
		F	유의확률	t	자유도	유의확률 (양측)	평균차이	표준오차 차이	차이의 95% 신뢰구간 하한	상한
통일태도	등분산을 가정함	2.281	0.131	3.129	1191	0.002	0.12138	0.03879	0.04528	0.19749
	등분산을 가정하지 않음			3.133	1190.478	0.002	0.12138	0.03875	0.04536	0.19740

Attitude towards reunification/ age

기술통계

통일태도

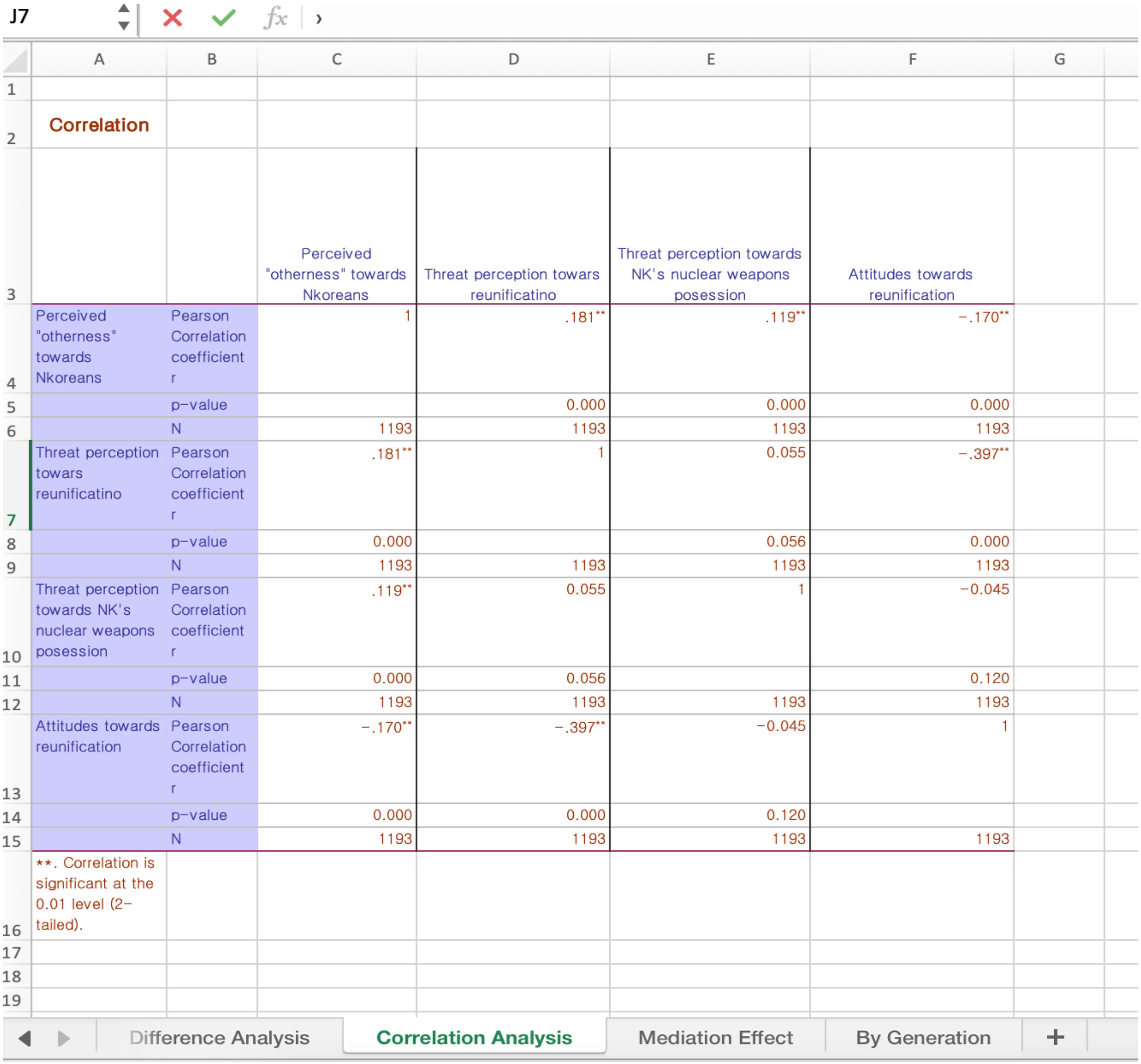
	N	평균	표준화 편차	표준화 오류	평균에 대한 95% 신뢰구간 하한	상한	최소값	최대값
19~29세	213	2.4566	0.66112	0.04530	2.3673	2.5459	1.00	4.25
30~39세	207	2.5700	0.62019	0.04311	2.4851	2.6550	1.00	4.00
40~49세	241	2.6940	0.66886	0.04308	2.6091	2.7789	1.00	4.25
50~59세	255	2.8137	0.67222	0.04210	2.7308	2.8966	1.00	4.50
60세 이상	277	2.8421	0.65877	0.03958	2.7641	2.9200	1.00	4.50
전체	1193	2.6901	0.67227	0.01946	2.6519	2.7283	1.00	4.50

ANOVA

통일태도

	제곱합	자유도	평균제곱	F	유의확률
집단-간	24.896	4	6.224	14.391	0.000
집단-내	513.818	1188	0.433		
전체	538.715	1192			

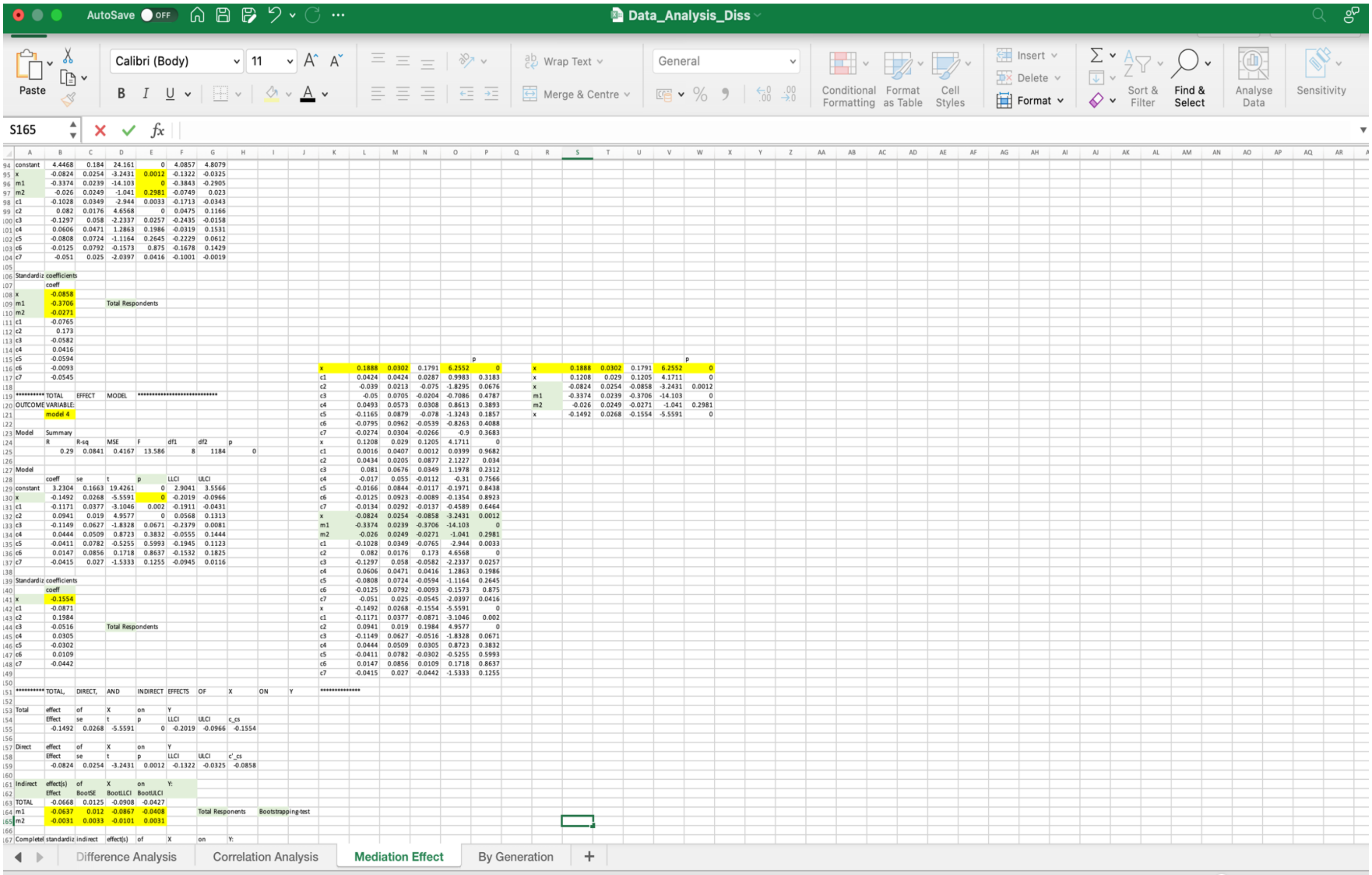
사후검정



Correlation

		Perceived "otherness" towards Nkoreans	Threat perception towars reunificatino	Threat perception towards NK's nuclear weapons posession	Attitudes towards reunification
Perceived "otherness" towards Nkoreans	Pearson Correlation coefficient r	1	.181**	.119**	−.170**
	p−value		0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	1193	1193	1193	1193
Threat perception towars reunificatino	Pearson Correlation coefficient r	.181**	1	0.055	−.397**
	p−value	0.000		0.056	0.000
	N	1193	1193	1193	1193
Threat perception towards NK's nuclear weapons posession	Pearson Correlation coefficient r	.119**	0.055	1	−0.045
	p−value	0.000	0.056		0.120
	N	1193	1193	1193	1193
Attitudes towards reunification	Pearson Correlation coefficient r	−.170**	−.397**	−0.045	1
	p−value	0.000	0.000	0.120	
	N	1193	1193	1193	1193

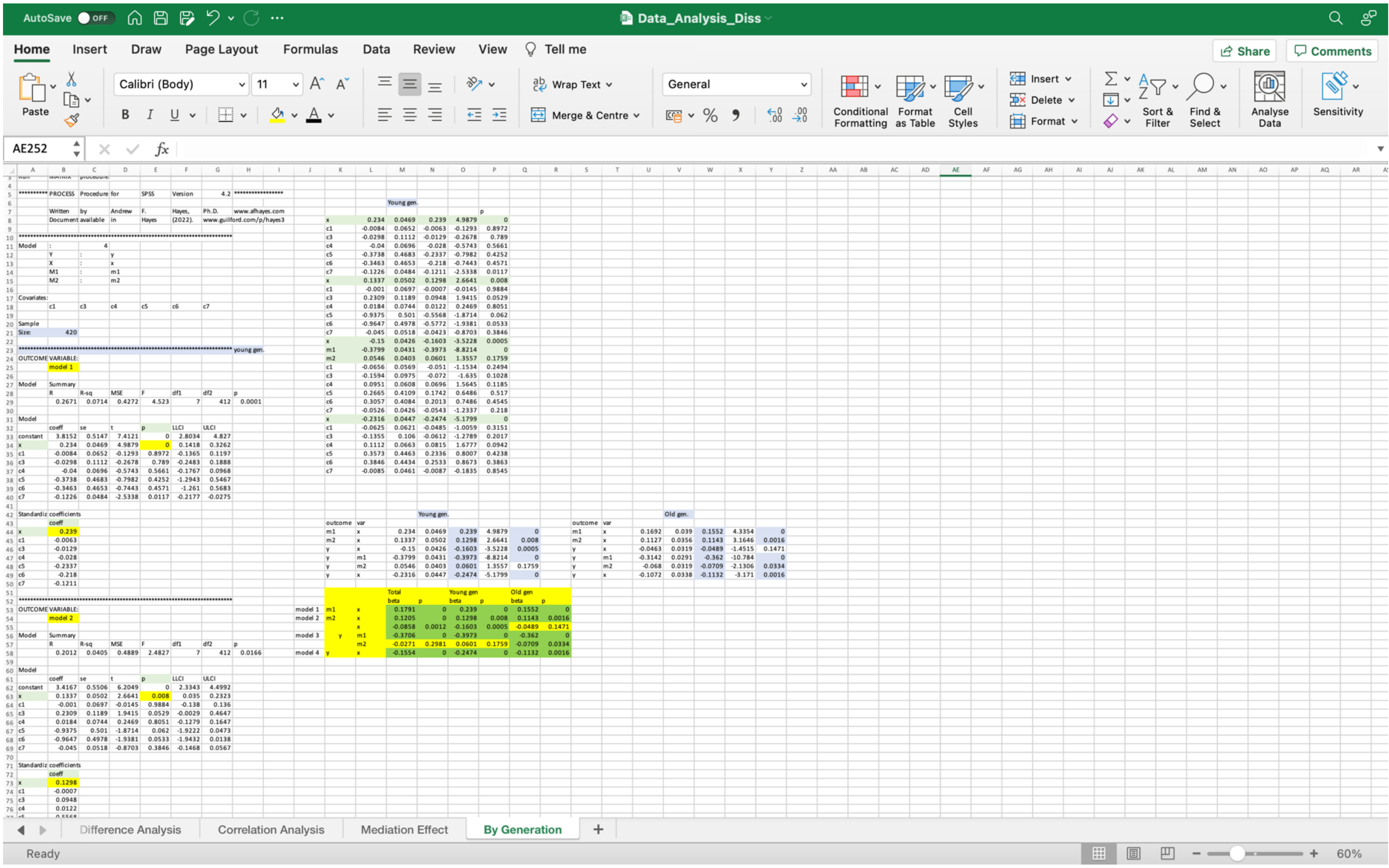
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2−tailed).



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
94	constant	4.4468	0.184	24.161	0	4.0857	4.8079			
95	x	-0.0824	0.0254	-3.2431	0.0012	-0.1322	-0.0325			
96	m1	-0.3374	0.0239	-14.103	0	-0.3843	-0.2905			
97	m2	-0.026	0.0249	-1.041	0.2981	-0.0749	0.023			
98	c1	-0.1028	0.0349	-2.944	0.0033	-0.1713	-0.0343			
99	c2	0.082	0.0176	4.6568	0	0.0475	0.1166			
100	c3	-0.1297	0.058	-2.2337	0.0257	-0.2435	-0.0158			
101	c4	0.0606	0.0471	1.2863	0.1986	-0.0319	0.1531			
102	c5	-0.0808	0.0724	-1.1164	0.2645	-0.2229	0.0612			
103	c6	-0.0125	0.0792	-0.1573	0.875	-0.1678	0.1429			
104	c7	-0.051	0.025	-2.0397	0.0416	-0.1001	-0.0019			
105										
106	Standardiz	coefficients								
107		coeff								
108	x	-0.0858								
109	m1	-0.3706		Total Respondents						
110	m2	-0.0271								
111	c1	-0.0765								
112	c2	0.173								
113	c3	-0.0582								
114	c4	0.0416								
115	c5	-0.0594								
116	c6	-0.0093								
117	c7	-0.0545								
118										
119	**********	TOTAL	EFFECT	MODEL	***************************					
120	OUTCOME	VARIABLE:								
121		model 4								
122										
123	Model	Summary								
124		R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p		
125		0.29	0.0841	0.4167	13.586	8	1184	0		
126										
127	Model									
128		coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI			
129	constant	3.2304	0.1663	19.4261	0	2.9041	3.5566			
130	x	-0.1492	0.0268	-5.5591	0	-0.2019	-0.0966			
131	c1	-0.1171	0.0377	-3.1046	0.002	-0.1911	-0.0431			
132	c2	0.0941	0.019	4.9577	0	0.0568	0.1313			
133	c3	-0.1149	0.0627	-1.8328	0.0671	-0.2379	0.0081			
134	c4	0.0444	0.0509	0.8723	0.3832	-0.0555	0.1444			
135	c5	-0.0411	0.0782	-0.5255	0.5993	-0.1945	0.1123			
136	c6	0.0147	0.0856	0.1718	0.8637	-0.1532	0.1825			
137	c7	-0.0415	0.027	-1.5333	0.1255	-0.0945	0.0116			
138										
139	Standardiz	coefficients								
140		coeff								
141	x	-0.1554								
142	c1	-0.0871								
143	c2	0.1984								
144	c3	-0.0516		Total Respondents						
145	c4	0.0305								
146	c5	-0.0302								
147	c6	0.0109								
148	c7	-0.0442								
149										
150										
151	**********	TOTAL,	DIRECT,	AND	INDIRECT	EFFECTS	OF	X	ON	Y
152										
153	Total	effect	of	X	on	Y				
154		Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c_cs		
155		-0.1492	0.0268	-5.5591	0	-0.2019	-0.0966	-0.1554		
156										
157	Direct	effect	of	X	on	Y				
158		Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	c'_cs		
159		-0.0824	0.0254	-3.2431	0.0012	-0.1322	-0.0325	-0.0858		
160										
161	Indirect	effect(s)	of	X	on	Y:				
162		Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI					
163	TOTAL	-0.0668	0.0125	-0.0908	-0.0427					
164	m1	-0.0637	0.012	-0.0867	-0.0408		Total Reponents		Bootstrapping-test	
165	m2	-0.0031	0.0033	-0.0101	0.0031					
166										
167	Completel	standardiz	indirect	effect(s)	of	X	on	Y:		

	K	L	M	N	O	P
115						p
116	x	0.1888	0.0302	0.1791	6.2552	0
117	c1	0.0424	0.0424	0.0287	0.9983	0.3183
118	c2	-0.039	0.0213	-0.075	-1.8295	0.0676
119	c3	-0.05	0.0705	-0.0204	-0.7086	0.4787
120	c4	0.0493	0.0573	0.0308	0.8613	0.3893
121	c5	-0.1165	0.0879	-0.078	-1.3243	0.1857
122	c6	-0.0795	0.0962	-0.0539	-0.8263	0.4088
123	c7	-0.0274	0.0304	-0.0266	-0.9	0.3683
124	x	0.1208	0.029	0.1205	4.1711	0
125	c1	0.0016	0.0407	0.0012	0.0399	0.9682
126	c2	0.0434	0.0205	0.0877	2.1227	0.034
127	c3	0.081	0.0676	0.0349	1.1978	0.2312
128	c4	-0.017	0.055	-0.0112	-0.31	0.7566
129	c5	-0.0166	0.0844	-0.0117	-0.1971	0.8438
130	c6	-0.0125	0.0923	-0.0089	-0.1354	0.8923
131	c7	-0.0134	0.0292	-0.0137	-0.4589	0.6464
132	x	-0.0824	0.0254	-0.0858	-3.2431	0.0012
133	m1	-0.3374	0.0239	-0.3706	-14.103	0
134	m2	-0.026	0.0249	-0.0271	-1.041	0.2981
135	c1	-0.1028	0.0349	-0.0765	-2.944	0.0033
136	c2	0.082	0.0176	0.173	4.6568	0
137	c3	-0.1297	0.058	-0.0582	-2.2337	0.0257
138	c4	0.0606	0.0471	0.0416	1.2863	0.1986
139	c5	-0.0808	0.0724	-0.0594	-1.1164	0.2645
140	c6	-0.0125	0.0792	-0.0093	-0.1573	0.875
141	c7	-0.051	0.025	-0.0545	-2.0397	0.0416
142	x	-0.1492	0.0268	-0.1554	-5.5591	0
143	c1	-0.1171	0.0377	-0.0871	-3.1046	0.002
144	c2	0.0941	0.019	0.1984	4.9577	0
145	c3	-0.1149	0.0627	-0.0516	-1.8328	0.0671
146	c4	0.0444	0.0509	0.0305	0.8723	0.3832
147	c5	-0.0411	0.0782	-0.0302	-0.5255	0.5993
148	c6	0.0147	0.0856	0.0109	0.1718	0.8637
149	c7	-0.0415	0.027	-0.0442	-1.5333	0.1255
150						
151	**************					

	R	S	T	U	V	W
115						p
116	x	0.1888	0.0302	0.1791	6.2552	0
117	x	0.1208	0.029	0.1205	4.1711	0
118	x	-0.0824	0.0254	-0.0858	-3.2431	0.0012
119	m1	-0.3374	0.0239	-0.3706	-14.103	0
120	m2	-0.026	0.0249	-0.0271	-1.041	0.2981
121	x	-0.1492	0.0268	-0.1554	-5.5591	0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********** PROCESS Procedure for SPSS Version 4.2 *****************

Written by Andrew F. Hayes, Ph.D. www.afhayes.com

Document available in Hayes (2022). www.guilford.com/p/hayes3

****

Model : 4

Y : y

X : x

M1 : m1

M2 : m2

Covariates:

c1 c3 c4 c5 c6 c7

Sample Size: 420

** young gen.

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

model 1

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.2671	0.0714	0.4272	4.523	7	412	0.0001

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.8152	0.5147	7.4121	0	2.8034	4.827
x	0.234	0.0469	4.9879	0	0.1418	0.3262
c1	-0.0084	0.0652	-0.1293	0.8972	-0.1365	0.1197
c3	-0.0298	0.1112	-0.2678	0.789	-0.2483	0.1888
c4	-0.04	0.0696	-0.5743	0.5661	-0.1767	0.0968
c5	-0.3738	0.4683	-0.7982	0.4252	-1.2943	0.5467
c6	-0.3463	0.4653	-0.7443	0.4571	-1.261	0.5683
c7	-0.1226	0.0484	-2.5338	0.0117	-0.2177	-0.0275

Standardiz coefficients

	coeff
x	0.239
c1	-0.0063
c3	-0.0129
c4	-0.028
c5	-0.2337
c6	-0.218
c7	-0.1211

****

OUTCOME VARIABLE:

model 2

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.2012	0.0405	0.4889	2.4827	7	412	0.0166

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.4167	0.5506	6.2049	0	2.3343	4.4992
x	0.1337	0.0502	2.6641	0.008	0.035	0.2323
c1	-0.001	0.0697	-0.0145	0.9884	-0.138	0.136
c3	0.2309	0.1189	1.9415	0.0529	-0.0029	0.4647
c4	0.0184	0.0744	0.2469	0.8051	-0.1279	0.1647
c5	-0.9375	0.501	-1.8714	0.062	-1.9222	0.0473
c6	-0.9647	0.4978	-1.9381	0.0533	-1.9432	0.0138
c7	-0.045	0.0518	-0.8703	0.3846	-0.1468	0.0567

Standardiz coefficients

	coeff
x	0.1298
c1	-0.0007
c3	0.0948
c4	0.0122

Young gen.

					p
x	0.234	0.0469	0.239	4.9879	0
c1	-0.0084	0.0652	-0.0063	-0.1293	0.8972
c3	-0.0298	0.1112	-0.0129	-0.2678	0.789
c4	-0.04	0.0696	-0.028	-0.5743	0.5661
c5	-0.3738	0.4683	-0.2337	-0.7982	0.4252
c6	-0.3463	0.4653	-0.218	-0.7443	0.4571
c7	-0.1226	0.0484	-0.1211	-2.5338	0.0117
x	0.1337	0.0502	0.1298	2.6641	0.008
c1	-0.001	0.0697	-0.0007	-0.0145	0.9884
c3	0.2309	0.1189	0.0948	1.9415	0.0529
c4	0.0184	0.0744	0.0122	0.2469	0.8051
c5	-0.9375	0.501	-0.5568	-1.8714	0.062
c6	-0.9647	0.4978	-0.5772	-1.9381	0.0533
c7	-0.045	0.0518	-0.0423	-0.8703	0.3846
x	-0.15	0.0426	-0.1603	-3.5228	0.0005
m1	-0.3799	0.0431	-0.3973	-8.8214	0
m2	0.0546	0.0403	0.0601	1.3557	0.1759
c1	-0.0656	0.0569	-0.051	-1.1534	0.2494
c3	-0.1594	0.0975	-0.072	-1.635	0.1028
c4	0.0951	0.0608	0.0696	1.5645	0.1185
c5	0.2665	0.4109	0.1742	0.6486	0.517
c6	0.3057	0.4084	0.2013	0.7486	0.4545
c7	-0.0526	0.0426	-0.0543	-1.2337	0.218
x	-0.2316	0.0447	-0.2474	-5.1799	0
c1	-0.0625	0.0621	-0.0485	-1.0059	0.3151
c3	-0.1355	0.106	-0.0612	-1.2789	0.2017
c4	0.1112	0.0663	0.0815	1.6777	0.0942
c5	0.3573	0.4463	0.2336	0.8007	0.4238
c6	0.3846	0.4434	0.2533	0.8673	0.3863
c7	-0.0085	0.0461	-0.0087	-0.1835	0.8545

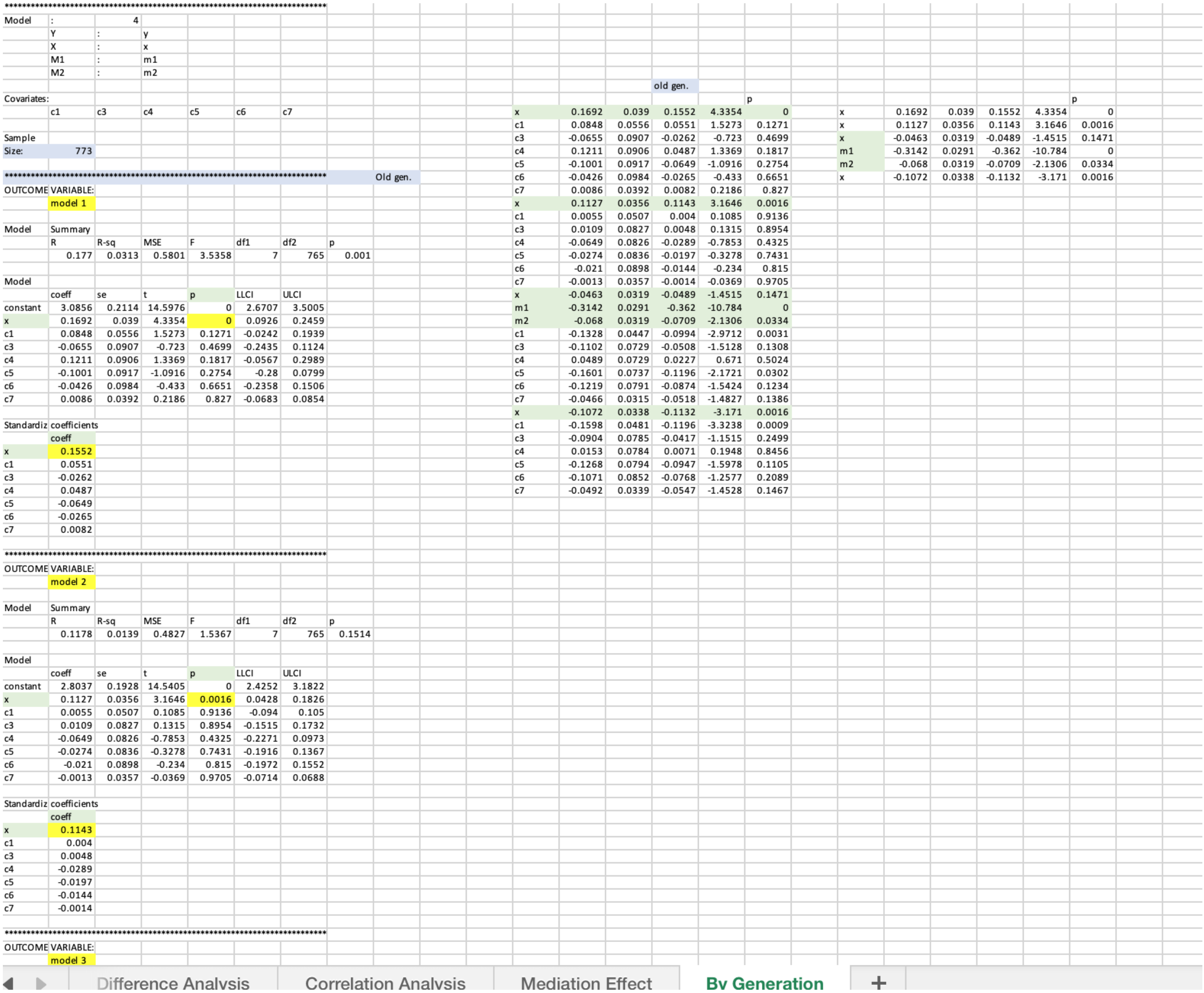
Young gen.

outcome	var					
m1	x	0.234	0.0469	0.239	4.9879	0
m2	x	0.1337	0.0502	0.1298	2.6641	0.008
y	x	-0.15	0.0426	-0.1603	-3.5228	0.0005
y	m1	-0.3799	0.0431	-0.3973	-8.8214	0
y	m2	0.0546	0.0403	0.0601	1.3557	0.1759
y	x	-0.2316	0.0447	-0.2474	-5.1799	0

Old gen.

outcome	var					
m1	x	0.1692	0.039	0.1552	4.3354	0
m2	x	0.1127	0.0356	0.1143	3.1646	0.0016
y	x	-0.0463	0.0319	-0.0489	-1.4515	0.1471
y	m1	-0.3142	0.0291	-0.362	-10.784	0
y	m2	-0.068	0.0319	-0.0709	-2.1306	0.0334
y	x	-0.1072	0.0338	-0.1132	-3.171	0.0016

			Total		Young gen		Old gen	
			beta	p	beta	p	beta	p
model 1	m1	x	0.1791	0	0.239	0	0.1552	0
model 2	m2	x	0.1205	0	0.1298	0.008	0.1143	0.0016
		x	-0.0858	0.0012	-0.1603	0.0005	-0.0489	0.1471
model 3	y	m1	-0.3706	0	-0.3973	0	-0.362	0
		m2	-0.0271	0.2981	0.0601	0.1759	-0.0709	0.0334
model 4	y	x	-0.1554	0	-0.2474	0	-0.1132	0.0016



`*****************************************************************************`

Model	:	4
	Y	:	y
	X	:	x
	M1	:	m1
	M2	:	m2

Covariates:

c1	c3	c4	c5	c6	c7

Sample Size: 773

`*****************************************************************************` Old gen.

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
model 1

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.177	0.0313	0.5801	3.5358	7	765	0.001

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	3.0856	0.2114	14.5976	0	2.6707	3.5005
x	0.1692	0.039	4.3354	0	0.0926	0.2459
c1	0.0848	0.0556	1.5273	0.1271	-0.0242	0.1939
c3	-0.0655	0.0907	-0.723	0.4699	-0.2435	0.1124
c4	0.1211	0.0906	1.3369	0.1817	-0.0567	0.2989
c5	-0.1001	0.0917	-1.0916	0.2754	-0.28	0.0799
c6	-0.0426	0.0984	-0.433	0.6651	-0.2358	0.1506
c7	0.0086	0.0392	0.2186	0.827	-0.0683	0.0854

Standardiz coefficients

	coeff
x	0.1552
c1	0.0551
c3	-0.0262
c4	0.0487
c5	-0.0649
c6	-0.0265
c7	0.0082

`*****************************************************************************`

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
model 2

Model Summary

R	R-sq	MSE	F	df1	df2	p
0.1178	0.0139	0.4827	1.5367	7	765	0.1514

Model

	coeff	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
constant	2.8037	0.1928	14.5405	0	2.4252	3.1822
x	0.1127	0.0356	3.1646	0.0016	0.0428	0.1826
c1	0.0055	0.0507	0.1085	0.9136	-0.094	0.105
c3	0.0109	0.0827	0.1315	0.8954	-0.1515	0.1732
c4	-0.0649	0.0826	-0.7853	0.4325	-0.2271	0.0973
c5	-0.0274	0.0836	-0.3278	0.7431	-0.1916	0.1367
c6	-0.021	0.0898	-0.234	0.815	-0.1972	0.1552
c7	-0.0013	0.0357	-0.0369	0.9705	-0.0714	0.0688

Standardiz coefficients

	coeff
x	0.1143
c1	0.004
c3	0.0048
c4	-0.0289
c5	-0.0197
c6	-0.0144
c7	-0.0014

`*****************************************************************************`

OUTCOME VARIABLE:
model 3

old gen.

					p
x	0.1692	0.039	0.1552	4.3354	0
c1	0.0848	0.0556	0.0551	1.5273	0.1271
c3	-0.0655	0.0907	-0.0262	-0.723	0.4699
c4	0.1211	0.0906	0.0487	1.3369	0.1817
c5	-0.1001	0.0917	-0.0649	-1.0916	0.2754
c6	-0.0426	0.0984	-0.0265	-0.433	0.6651
c7	0.0086	0.0392	0.0082	0.2186	0.827
x	0.1127	0.0356	0.1143	3.1646	0.0016
c1	0.0055	0.0507	0.004	0.1085	0.9136
c3	0.0109	0.0827	0.0048	0.1315	0.8954
c4	-0.0649	0.0826	-0.0289	-0.7853	0.4325
c5	-0.0274	0.0836	-0.0197	-0.3278	0.7431
c6	-0.021	0.0898	-0.0144	-0.234	0.815
c7	-0.0013	0.0357	-0.0014	-0.0369	0.9705
x	-0.0463	0.0319	-0.0489	-1.4515	0.1471
m1	-0.3142	0.0291	-0.362	-10.784	0
m2	-0.068	0.0319	-0.0709	-2.1306	0.0334
c1	-0.1328	0.0447	-0.0994	-2.9712	0.0031
c3	-0.1102	0.0729	-0.0508	-1.5128	0.1308
c4	0.0489	0.0729	0.0227	0.671	0.5024
c5	-0.1601	0.0737	-0.1196	-2.1721	0.0302
c6	-0.1219	0.0791	-0.0874	-1.5424	0.1234
c7	-0.0466	0.0315	-0.0518	-1.4827	0.1386
x	-0.1072	0.0338	-0.1132	-3.171	0.0016
c1	-0.1598	0.0481	-0.1196	-3.3238	0.0009
c3	-0.0904	0.0785	-0.0417	-1.1515	0.2499
c4	0.0153	0.0784	0.0071	0.1948	0.8456
c5	-0.1268	0.0794	-0.0947	-1.5978	0.1105
c6	-0.1071	0.0852	-0.0768	-1.2577	0.2089
c7	-0.0492	0.0339	-0.0547	-1.4528	0.1467

					p
x	0.1692	0.039	0.1552	4.3354	0
x	0.1127	0.0356	0.1143	3.1646	0.0016
x	-0.0463	0.0319	-0.0489	-1.4515	0.1471
m1	-0.3142	0.0291	-0.362	-10.784	0
m2	-0.068	0.0319	-0.0709	-2.1306	0.0334
x	-0.1072	0.0338	-0.1132	-3.171	0.0016