On the eve of IFTA’s 30th anniversary in 2017, we recently asked William Hiebert (WJH), general secretary of IFTA, to sit down with us and answer some questions about IFTA’s history and his involvement with the organization.

**Research E-Forum (REF):** Can you give us a snapshot of how IFTA came into being?

**WJH:** IFTA began as an outgrowth of the East-West Bridging Congress conducted in Prague, Czechoslovakia (now known as the Czech Republic) in 1987. A psychiatrist in Prague, Petr Bosc, had heard about the developments of this new profession taking off in America called “family therapy” and contacted Donald Bloch at the Ackerman Institute in New York City to find out more. As a result of their collaboration, the East-West Bridging Congress took place, bringing together leading family therapists from across North America and Europe. The congress was such a success that many attendees expressed a desire for another international meeting. As such, a steering committee was formed to establish an International Family Therapy Association, and Florence Kaslow was elected as the first president of IFTA.

**REF:** What first drew you to become involved with IFTA?

**WJH:** I first became interested in IFTA through my time as the founding editor of the *Family Therapy News*, the official newsletter of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Toward the end of my tenure as editor, we covered the developments in family therapy in countries around the world. As a result of my involvement with both IFTA and my own experience in training family therapists in other parts of the world, I have gained a new appreciation for the steps a country needs to make to develop our field.

**REF:** How has your collaboration with family therapists from across the globe changed your perspective on the practice of marriage and family therapy?

**WJH:** From my vantage point as general secretary, I have had the opportunity to see family therapy in all of its stages, from its full development in North America and Europe to its infancy in Asia, and all of the stages in between. As a result of my involvement with both IFTA and my own experience in training family therapists in other parts of the world, I have gained a new appreciation for the steps a country needs to make to develop our field.

*Continued on Page 3*
On Second Thought…
With Emily Renee Verseveldt, BA

The purpose of this section is to highlight some of the international research that is being conducted in the field of marriage and family therapy. The article being highlighted for this issue, *Differentiation and Healthy Family Functioning of Koreans in South Korea, South Koreans in the United States and White Americans*, is written by Hye Jin Kim from the University of Oregon; Ann Prouty, Douglas Smith, and Mei-Ju Ko from Texas Tech University; Joseph Wetchler from Purdue University; and Jea-Eun Oh from Soongsil University in Seoul, South Korea.

Historically speaking, the vast majority of family therapy research has been conducted in the United States and then “globalized,” with the assumption that the concepts and constructs studied in the US will be applicable in other countries as well. However, as Kim and her colleagues (2015) point out, because of such “American psychological imperialism” (p. 73) family therapists in other parts of the world often struggle to apply the same concepts across the various cultural contexts in which they reside. Namely, Kim et al. note that the very famous family therapy concept of “differentiation of self” from Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST) may not be a relevant multi-cultural concept as we have little empirical research to show the effects in either direction. Therefore, in order to better understand how family therapy concepts translate cross-culturally, the aim of this study was to examine the effects of BFST, in particular differentiation of self, on healthy family functioning of South Koreans and white Americans in the USA versus South Koreans in South Korea.

In conducting this study, one of the main cultural considerations between South Koreans and Americans the authors took into account was the structure of the culture (i.e., “collectivism” versus “individualism” and whether this affects levels of differentiation leading to healthy family functioning). For example, among South Koreans the goal of the family is to maintain harmony, togetherness and a clear sense of hierarchy. Therefore, a South Korean’s definition of healthy family functioning could involve fusion and tension even though through a Western lens fusion and tension could be viewed as unhealthy family functioning. Thus, the main hypothesis of this study was that the researchers would find three different levels of differentiation across each of the three cultural groups, and that the individuals with higher levels of differentiation would also report higher levels of family satisfaction, communication, and overall healthier family functioning.

*CITATION:*


---

*With Dr. Hye Jin Kim*

**How did you become interested in studying Bowen's concept of differentiation of self as opposed to other family therapy concepts?**

Initially as a Korean, I was drawn to BFST because this therapy model emphasizes family-of-origin issues and intergenerational interactions, which are greatly valued by Korean families. Within the traditional Korean culture, individuals are not only closely connected with their extended families but viewed as products of all the generations of their families. Due to strong family unity, Koreans might be measured as having low levels of differentiation on a Western assessment scale. However, the culturally accepted family value, togetherness, could still permit them to maintain healthy family functioning. This question led me to this cross-cultural study examining the concept of differentiation of self with divergent cultural groups.

*Continued on Page 4*
On Second Thought Continued…

After testing the validity of the measures used to assess differentiation and family functioning across all cultural groups, the results of the authors’ research were favorable to their hypotheses. Levels of differentiation were, in fact, found to be associated with healthier family functioning across all three cultural groups, meaning that in all likelihood Bowen’s concept of differentiation, as well as family communication and family satisfaction (as correlated with family functioning) can be applied in better understanding families across cultures. However, the researchers also discovered that although higher levels of differentiation were associated with healthy family functioning, South Koreans (and other more collectivist cultures) may perceive healthy differentiation as something that is more closely associated with togetherness than individuality, as opposed to more Western views that see an optimal point of differentiation as a bit closer to the individuality end of the spectrum. That said, Kim and her colleagues also admit that this is an area of study requiring a great deal of further research.

History of IFTA Continued from page 1…

REF: As someone who has been involved in the leadership of IFTA for many years, how have you seen the organization evolve and change over time?

WJH: During the 1990s and early 2000s, IFTA was primarily composed of individuals from North America, Europe, and South America. Since 2006, the organization has continued to develop membership throughout the world, and more recently there has been increasing interest from Asian therapists. At the same time, during the last 15 years the European Family Therapy Association has grown. Thus, the primacy of Europe and the Americas as the core group in IFTA has shifted. One other way IFTA has changed over time is that years ago the IFTA world family therapy congresses were more member-based. Today, many people attend the congresses are not yet members of IFTA and are just getting their first taste of what the organization is all about.

REF: What are your hopes for the future of IFTA?

WJH: My hope is that the role of IFTA as a facilitator for the evolution of the practice of marriage and family therapy around the world will continue to grow. As part of that effort, IFTA has launched into several new directions. First, IFTA world congresses will continue to be held in various parts of the world, including places where an IFTA conference has not occurred, such as our congress last year in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Secondly, IFTA initiated a semi-autonomous entity called the International Accreditation Commission for Systemic Therapy Education (IACSTE). IACSTE accredits family therapy training and education programs from around the world and seeks to provide basic standards for the development for family therapy, particularly in countries in which family therapy is in its infancy. Third, to deal with the increasing globalization of our world and expansion of both the profession and the practice of family therapy, IFTA has developed a new Certified Family Therapist Program in order to provide a worldwide credential to people who will see their future and practice of family therapy as being one which takes place in several countries.

The International Family Therapy Association was an outgrowth of the East-West Bridging Congress conducted in Prague in 1987. The Honorary Conference Chair was Virginia Satir. The conference was organized by Dr. Donald Bloch, director of the Ackerman Institute in New York, and Petr Bosc, a Prague psychiatrist. Florence Kaslow was the first president of IFTA.
How did you decide on your three different comparison groups?

Most cross-cultural studies have compared only two cultural or racial groups in two different countries or within a country. However, the present study included three different comparison groups: (1) White Americans living in an individualistic culture of the U.S., (2) South Koreans living in a collectivistic Korean culture, and (3) South Koreans who moved from the collectivistic Korean culture to the individualistic American culture. These three groups allowed us to compare the level of differentiation of self not only between the collectivistic cultural group and individualistic cultural group but also between two collectivistic cultural groups of having different amounts of exposure to individualistic American culture. Indeed, this sample allowed us to examine the cultural validity of the concept of differentiation of self as well as the possible influence of the individualistic culture on the level of differentiation of self.

What did you find most noteworthy about the results of your study?

My study found that higher levels of differentiation were significantly associated with healthier family functioning, better family communication, and greater family satisfaction for Koreans in both South Korea and in the U.S. as well as for the Americans in the U.S. Another interesting finding was that although the sub-group of Koreans living in the U.S. showed lower levels of differentiation than the American group, the Koreans reported higher family satisfaction than Americans. That is, Koreans might have a different point of differentiation levels to attain family satisfaction. So ongoing assessment in the level of family satisfaction of Koreans might help therapists find ideal points of differentiation level to be accomplished for them. These results suggest that Bowen Family Systems Theory’s concept of differentiation of self can be used reliably by family researchers and therapists as culturally respectful indicators of healthy family functioning. Yet it is important to consider that individuals influenced by the collectivistic Korean culture, in which family unity and harmony are valued, might have a lower level of differentiation than Americans, and yet they can have high levels of family satisfaction.

Do you have any plans to expand upon this study with other related research in the future?

I have been continuing this cross-cultural research by expanding the study sample. The present study examined the effect of differentiation on family functioning with one collectivistic cultural group, Koreans. Yet the Korean group cannot represent all collectivistic cultures. Thus, I have expanded the sample with other Asian groups including Chinese living in mainland China and Taiwanese living in Taiwan. The expanded sample will help to demonstrate, more accurately, whether differentiation is an important factor contributing to healthy family functioning in both collectivistic and individualistic cultures. No matter how valuable and effective mental health theories and interventions are, they can lead us in a wrong direction if they are used for diverse cultural groups without proper cultural considerations. I hope that this study encourages family therapists and researchers around the world to be active in evaluating various family theories before applying them to people of different cultures.

What are the most relevant clinical implications to be drawn from your research?

The findings of my research have implications for how mental health professionals assist Korean families, and potentially for families from other collectivistic cultures. The results suggest that Koreans can achieve healthier family functioning as they increase their levels of differentiation. Yet therapists should be mindful of that Koreans can show strong togetherness needs and family unity in ways share their care and compassion in their family relationships. It may be that higher family functioning among Koreans may promote healthy differentiation among family members who retain important family ties. Also, when utilizing differentiation scales developed in the U.S., such as the DSI-R, using genograms can help to identify their differentiation levels more accurately and in a culturally informed way.

Dr. Hye Jin Kim
2016 Congress Info

- International Family Therapy Association’s 24th annual World Family Therapy Congress
- Waikoloa Village, Hawaii, USA
- March 30 – April 2, 2016
- 300 Congress Attendees
- 24 Countries Represented

Conference Program

July 10, 2016

Sheraton Harborside Hotel
Portsmouth, New Hampshire, U.S.A.

In conjunction with the Family Research Laboratory and International Family Violence and Child Victimization Research Conference

ADVIP, the Association of Domestic Violence Intervention Programs consists of mental health professionals, batterer intervention providers, and research scholars dedicated to evidence-based practice worldwide. ADVIP is an international organization, with members in 17 countries. Since 2013, members have networked with one another and shared research, news and clinical experiences on our organization’s website, www.battererintervention.org. This is our first general conference.

Scheduled for this first conference are panels presenting research on domestic violence perpetrator programs in North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa and Asia, as well as proposals for evidence-based batterer intervention standards from some of the world’s leading scholars.

Our conference is being held in cooperation with the International Family Violence and Child Victimization Research Conference, commencing immediately after our conference at the same location, and continuing through July 12. For more information, or to register for this conference, go to www.cola.unh.edu/ri/conference. Please note that registration for this larger conference must be done separately.
Nominate someone to be featured in a future issue!

This newsletter is designed to let you know what is going on with the IFTA and also to let you know what research is happening within the community. What research have you been working on? We want to know! Have you been involved in something noteworthy within the family therapy field? Tell us about it! If you want to be featured in one of our future newsletters, or if you know someone that should be featured in one of our future newsletters, please send information to: Dr. Jake Johnson jake.johnson@wheaton.edu

You are invited to join an international professional and cultural program to Shanghai, China. The goal of this exchange program is to explore issues relevant to counseling, psychology, marriage, and family life in China, including traditional and innovative methods of intervention. Our group will meet with our professional counterparts and fellow graduate students in Shanghai. We will also meet with participating hospitals, community counseling agencies, associations and professionals. During the trip we will share information, develop relationships, and foster a bilateral cultural exchange of ideas. We hope that you will be actively engaged as both a presenter, and a learner. Participants must apply and be approved for participation. Contact us by email for application materials. Space is limited. The program cost per participant is $2500 USD. Please contact Dr. John Miller (exchange leader) at jkmillertoo@gmail.com or jkmillertoo@yahoo.com.

SHANGHAI STUDENT EXCHANGE
In Family therapy, counseling & social work
August 8-20, 2016

SECRETARIAT:
William Hiebert
General Secretary, IFTA
WJHiebert@aol.com
Marriage & Family Counseling Service
Suite 512
Rock Island, IL 61201
USA
309-786-4491

Created by:
Emily Renee Verseveldt, BA
and Jake Johnson, PhD
MFT Program
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois, USA

Edited By:
Terry S. Trepper, Ph.D.

Restoring the Mind–Body Unity: A New Alliance Between Neurosciences and Psychotherapy By Luigi Onnis

Solution-Building, the Foundation of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: A Qualitative Delphi Study By Adam S. Froerer & Elliott E. Connie

Mentorship in Family Therapy Training Programs: Students’ and New Graduates’ Perspectives By Ann M. Prouty, Karen B. Helmeke, & Judith Fischer

Clinical Issues for Working With Patients and Family Members Dealing With Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis By Connie S. Cornwell

The Use of Humor in Family Therapy: Rationale and Applications By Lauren E. Fox

Externalizing Identities: An Integration of Narrative Therapy and Queer Theory By Sarah M. Steelman

Table of Contents
Volume 27(1)

The Journal of Family Psychotherapy
The Official Journal of the International Family Therapy Association
Volume 8 / Number 2 / April 2016

The Journal of Family Psychotherapy is now available online to IFTA members. For access, visit: www.tandf.co.uk/journals/WJFP

Created by:
Emily Renee Verseveldt, BA
and Jake Johnson, PhD
MFT Program
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois, USA