



---IFTA Research E-Forum---

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IFTA 2016 World Family Therapy Congress Presenter Spotlight: Takeshi Tamura

Dr. Takeshi Tamura is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and a marriage and family therapist in private practice in Tokyo, Japan. He is the chief of the international committee for the Asian Academy of Family Therapy and serves on the board of the Japan Association of Family Therapy. From 1992 to 2011, Dr. Tamura was also a professor of education at Tokyo Gakugei University. Dr. Tamura's research interests focus on matters of connectedness and separateness in Asian families, especially the role of the father and social withdrawal in teenagers (known as *hikikomori* in Japanese).



We recently caught up with Dr. Tamura to ask him more about the phenomenon of hikikomori in East Asian families, which he will be presenting on at the IFTA World Family Therapy Congress this coming spring in Kona, Hawaii.

Research E-Forum (REF): How would you describe hikikomori syndrome?

Takeshi Tamura (TT): Hikikomori is a Japanese word for "to withdraw." It starts from teenagers, 20s and sometimes up to 30s and 40s. They confine themselves to home, afraid of any social contact other than family members. They have no job, no training, and remain home for long periods of time, sometimes for years. It is similar to a child who is afraid of going to school, but the age group is different. Hikikomori can happen in adolescence or adulthood, but not so much in childhood. It is not a disorder like depression, ADHD, or developmental disorders such as Aspergers.

Research E-Forum (REF): Why do you believe hikikomori has become so prevalent in East Asia?

Takeshi Tamura (TT): There are many reasons such as enmeshed family relationships especially between mother and child, traditional gender roles, absent fathers who work outside the home as the breadwinner. Lifestyle in East Asia is much modernized and "Westernized," but we still carry our traditional values in our hearts and are a very education- and achievement-oriented society.

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On Second Thought...

With Emily Renee Verseveldt, BA

Q&A

With Dr. Davide Dettore

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, *Gay and Lesbian Couples in Italy: Comparisons with Heterosexual Couples*, is written by Paolo Antonelli and Davide Dettore, from the department of health sciences at the University of Florence, Italy; Irene Lasagni, who works at The Miller Institute in Florence; Douglas K. Snyder, professor of psychology at Texas A&M University in the United States; and Christina Balderrama-Durbin, a former graduate student in clinical psychology at Texas A&M University in the United States.

The objective of this study was to examine the adaptability of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (a self-report measure of couple relationship functioning; MSI-R), for use with both heterosexual and same-sex Italian couples. Specifically, this study compared gay male and lesbian Italian couples to their heterosexual cohabiting or married Italian counterparts and then compared these findings to other previously obtained findings related to similar subgroups in the United States (i.e., heterosexual married or cohabiting, gay or lesbian couples).

Because no developed measures for the study of relationship functioning among cross-cultural and same-sex couples have previously existed, one of the contributions of this study is that it has demonstrated the internal consistency of the MSI-R as applied to Italian hetero- and homosexual couples. Another interesting finding from the study was that even though the majority of Italians reported being accepting of gay and lesbian lifestyles, many Italians also believed that gay and lesbian couples would be more accepted by the general population if they were “more discreet” in public and refrained from openly sharing their sexual orientation with others. However, despite or perhaps because of these attitudes, the results of the MSI-R revealed that same-sex Italian couples reported experiencing greater satisfaction within the domains of emotional, behavioral, and sexual intimacy than heterosexual couples in Italy or the United States. The study’s authors speculated that this finding might relate to the fact that same-sex couples have been found to manage conflict more appropriately than their heterosexual counterparts.

Although the researchers highlight some limitations to this study in terms of sample size and generalizability, it is nevertheless one of the first studies to validate a measure of couple relationship functioning for cross-cultural and same-sex couples. Antonelli and his colleagues hope that their work may lead to the development of more research related to nontraditional couple functioning and, in particular, how best to assess and intervene with these couples in clinical settings.

Why did you and your co-authors decide to undertake this study?

My co-authors and I decided to undertake this study first of all because in Italy we do have little scientific literature about gay and lesbian couples, especially comparing them with heterosexual ones, but the relevance is high, not only scientifically but also about the social and legal debates, thus we were, and are, interested to analyze, understand and explain the relationship dynamics, functioning and quality of such couples, within a variety of different areas of life, as measured by the *Marital Satisfaction Inventory - Revised* (MSI-R; Snyder, 1997), with a special link to the specific Italian socio-cultural context which is quite peculiar and different if compared to the other contexts of Western countries (in this study Italian results were compared to US results). Moreover, assessing couple relationships across diverse languages and cultures has important implications for both clinical intervention and prevention.

What most surprised you about the process of conducting your study and its subsequent findings?

It is interesting to point out that many gay and lesbian study participants were really enthusiastic to take part in the research because they believed these findings could be useful for making their voices heard in a country like Italy which is not often cozy and supportive, and also useful for helping in the future other couples with relationship troubles or difficulties: this is especially true for nontraditional relationships potentially subject to various expressions of negative societal evaluation or bias.

CITATION:

Antonelli, P., Dettore, D., Lasagni, I., Snyder, D. K., & Balderrama-Durbin, C. (2014). Gay and lesbian couples in Italy: comparisons with heterosexual couples. *Fam. Proc. Family Process*, 53, 702-716.



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→ *With Dr. Davide Dettore*

Q&A

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It is unique that our results for these same-sex couples were compared to data from heterosexual married and unmarried cohabiting couples from the same Italian geographical region, as well as to previously published data for gay, lesbian, and unmarried heterosexual couples from the United States.

What do you think is the most important piece of information for couple and family therapists to take away from this work?

Few empirically validated measures of relationship functioning have been developed for cross-cultural applications, and before this work none had been examined for their psychometric sufficiency for evaluating same-sex couples across different languages and cultures. The current study examined the psychometric properties of an Italian translation of the MSI-R, a 150-item 13-scale measure of couple relationship functioning, for its use in assessing the intimate relationships of gay and lesbian couples in Italy. Study findings suggest that, despite unique societal pressures confronting Italian same-sex couples, these relationships appear resilient and fare well both overall and in specific domains of functioning compared to heterosexual couples both in Italy and the United States.

Based on your findings, what approaches to treatment would you recommend to clinicians working with same sex couples in Italy (and elsewhere)?

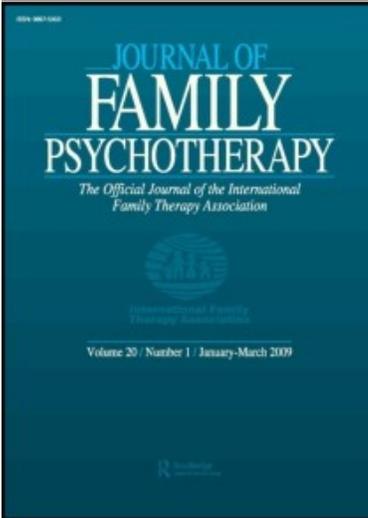
Based on our findings, also from other research, we recommend to clinicians working with same-sex couples in Italy and elsewhere, (but particularly in Italy for its complex and difficult socio-cultural situation towards gay men, lesbians and their relationships), an affirmative and integrative approach to treatment for their self-acceptance, self-realization and higher psycho-social wellbeing and quality of life, as individuals and within the couple relationship (especially based on cognitive-behavioral interventions). We also recommend to clinicians an approach to treatment to reduce the widespread and disabling stereotypes, prejudices, and different types and levels of discrimination against same-sex relationships.

Spotlight Continued from p.1...

Parents expect so much of their children, which creates enmeshed parent/child relationships. Another reason is that our society is group-oriented. Unlike the Western emphasis on independence and autonomy, Eastern societies value interdependence among the member of the group. Group members have to be intimate and understand to each other. Young people experiencing hikikomori have a fear of intimacy to the group commitment. Fear of intimacy not with the family, but with the social groups (e.g., school, workplace, etc.) to which one has to commit, participate in, be understood and accepted.

Research E-Forum (REF): What do you see as some of the major differences between "eastern" and "western" approaches to family therapy?

Takeshi Tamura (TT): Western approaches value intimacy in couple relationships, respecting generational boundaries, and the process of individuation—leaving home to create one's own nuclear family, differentiation, self-reliance. Eastern approaches value functional levels of intimacy in transgenerational generational boundaries, and the process of individuation—leaving home to create one's own nuclear family, differentiation, self-reliance. Eastern approaches value functional levels of intimacy in transgenerational relationships (e.g., grandparents/ parents/child), and respect mutual support in the family. They also value family interdependence, integration with and participation in the complicated web of human relationships, group reliance, and mutual support.



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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:
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The 24th World Family Therapy Congress brings professionals together from around the world to promote international cooperation and discussion of major issues facing families and therapists today. The 2016 theme is Interpersonal Interactions and Therapeutic Change focusing on interactional methodologies for working with families and how those changes impact the families with which therapists work.

To Register for the IFTA 2016 World Congress
 Visit: http://www.ifta-congress.org/registration_fees.php



IFTA 2016 Keynote Speaker Takeshi Tamura



IFTA 2016 Keynote Speaker Karl Tomm



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