

Korean High School Students' Cultural Self-Construal and Gestalt Contact Boundary Disturbances

Inn Youn and Kibum Kim

Chung-Ang University

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between Korean high school students' cultural self-construal and the six Gestalt contact boundary disturbances of introjection, confluence, projection, retroflection, deflection, and desensitization. Caffaro's (1989) contact boundary disturbance scale and Singelis' (1994) self-construal scale were used. Data was collected from 192 Korean high school students. Students' independent self-construal (individualistic self-view) showed significant negative relations with confluence and retroflection, and non significant relations with the other four disturbances. On the other hand, their interdependent self-construal (collectivistic self-view) showed positive relations with introjection, confluence, and retroflection, and non significant relations with the rest three disturbances. Minor gender difference was found in the relationship pattern between the six disturbances and the two aspects of the self-construal. The results were compared with previous findings with Korean college students (Youn & Kim, 2003) and discussed from the standpoints of Korean cultures and individualistic cultural background of Gestalt therapy. The implication of the findings of this study for Korean counselor education and counseling practices was also addressed.

Key words : cultural self-construal, Gestalt contact boundary disturbances, independent self, interdependent self, counseling

I. Introduction

The cultural differences between Korea and the United States, especially the *collectivism-individualism* distinction, is so well known in Korea that nowadays the term turn out to be one of the most commonly used cliché even among the Korean general public as

well as Korean psychologists. The now famous Hofstede's (1991) empirical study showed contrasting cultural differences between the two countries in all the four cultural dimensions including *collectivism-individualism*. In spite of such widely recognized and fundamental cultural differences between the two countries, it is American counseling theories and

* 교신저자 : 윤인(분당 YMCA 아동청소년 상담실장, Email : gracepsy@chollian.net)

approaches, however, that is yet to be taught and practiced through Korean counselor education and training. American counseling theories and approaches embody the moral vision of *individualism* (Christopher, 1996). Specifically, Cognitive-Behavioral therapy, Reality therapy, and Behavior therapy embody the moral vision of *utilitarian individualism*. *Utilitarian individualism stresses instrumental rationality, human liberty, efficacy in achieving self-defined goals, and opposition to irrational authority or arbitrary privilege* (Christopher, 1996, p. 19). On the other hand, some humanistic approaches such as *Client-centered* and *Gestalt therapy* were drawn primarily from *expressive individualism* which grew out of the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment. *Expressive individualism holds that each person has a unique core of feeling and intuition that should unfold or be expressed if individuality is to be realized* (Christopher, 1996, p.19).

Realizing such prominent cultural differences between the two countries, significant research efforts considering Korean cultures have been made among Korean psychologists since 1980s. Some of those efforts were geared to the development of Korean indigenous counseling models such as *Buddhism* counseling (Yoon, 1999), *Shimcheong*(심정, 心情) counseling (Choi & Kim, 1999; Choi, 2000), and so on. Others examined the relationships between *individualism-collectivism* and several counseling related issues such as stress-coping process (Kim, 1994), help-seeking behaviors (Yoo, 2001), attitudes toward counselors and counseling processes (Park, 1991; Youn & Choi, 2001), etc. Thus, previous efforts focused either on the development of indigenous Korean counseling models or the analyses of the relations between the *individualism-collectivism* and some significant counseling related issues.

However, no research was conducted analyzing the nature of psychological concepts of any counseling theory from cross-cultural perspectives of *individualism-*

collectivism, until the previous research by Youn and Kim (2003). The previous study empirically verified individualistic nature of Gestalt contact boundary disturbances by analyzing the relation between the six Gestalt contact boundary disturbances (*introjection, projection, confluence, retroflection, deflection, and desensitization*) and the *individualism-collectivism*. The findings of the previous study showed Korean college students' individualistic self-view (the *independent self-construal, IDSC*) was negatively related with all the six Gestalt disturbances. On the other hand, their collectivistic self-view (*interdependent self-construal, ITSC*) was positively related with *introjection* and *confluence* and no significant relations with the other four disturbances.

In the previous research by Youn and Kim (2003), only Korean college students were included. In addition, the study was the first empirical analysis of the Gestalt contact boundary disturbances from the standpoints of *individualism-collectivism*. Thus the replication of the study involving other types of Korean populations is necessary before the generalized application of the previous findings can be possible. Korean society is undergoing a rapid and radical change in various aspects of everyday life. As a result, subcultural differences exist even among young generations. The aim of this study, therefore, is to replicate the previous study with a group of Korean high school students. The findings of this study would provide information that would allow better clarification of the nature of Gestalt therapy as well as the type of psychological difficulties of Korean high school students as explained by Gestalt therapy.

1. Gestalt therapy and culture

1) Gestalt therapy

The *Gestalt* is a German word meaning whole or configuration and the shape and the pattern, and it connotes the structural entity which is both different from and much more than the sum of its parts

(Clarkson, 1989, p. 1).

A basic assumption of Gestalt therapy is that individuals have *the capacity to self-regulate in their environment if they are fully aware of what is happening within and around them* (Corey, 2001, p. 196). Therapeutic goal of Gestalt therapy, therefore, is to provide an opportunity that supports and restores such awareness or contacting processes. Thus, instead of therapist's analyses or interpretation, Gestalt therapy aims at client's awareness and contact with one's external environment (e.g., other person) or internal field (e.g., parts of the self that are isolated).

Contact process of the Gestalt therapy is ordered by the principle of figure-ground. If you observe, for instance, a sunset in the Pacific, you may perceive the sinking sun as a figure standing out against the background of the color of the sky and the smell of the sea (Caffaro, 1989). Here the sun is emerged as a salient figure from its background not because it has intrinsic power or value but because it has meaning to you as a perceiver (Caffaro, 1989).

Thus, contact is an interaction between the individual and some aspect of his/her environment. And the nature of such interaction is both personal (or intrapsychic) and inter-relational (or intersubjective) (Simon, 1996, p. 110). The following story from the novel *David Copperfield* offers a fine illustration of such inter-relational nature of the interaction : *David is found by most of his family and acquaintances to be good humoured, generous, and flexible, and he behaves accordingly. But his stepfather and step-aunt repeatedly condemn him as sullen, withdrawn, bad, and mad. In these circumstances the young David does of course become extremely withdrawn and eventually runs away, undoubtedly convincing his stepfather (but not the reader) that he is indeed bad and mad. David eventually finds and lives with his aunt, Betsy Trotwood who adores him. In these circumstances he flourishes and comes to love her in return* (Mackewn, 1997, p. 22).

Gestalt approach focuses on actual immediate and direct, that is, *here and now* experiences instead of talking about the experiences, so called *aboutism* (Knights, 2002; Perls, 1973). That is, Gestalt therapy is an experiential (or action-oriented) approach emphasizing experiment aiming at the facilitation and heightening of clients awareness. And such experiential process allows people to experience and live their present life fully, and thereby lead them to be what they already are and what they potentially can become (Clarkson, 1989). According to Zinker (1977), *clear awareness, full energy, and the ability to express* are prerequisite for good contact, and Miriam Polster claimed that *contact entails zest, imagination, and creativity*, thus it is *the lifeblood of growth* (as cited in Corey, 2001 p. 200).

Gestalt therapy integrated various theoretical and philosophical approaches and contemporary Gestalt therapy is featured by the field theory, the existentialism, and dialogical relationship. Field theory emphasizes the interplay between organism and environment, thus Gestalt therapy looks at the individual in the context of his/her environment which is constantly changing (Caffaro, 1989). The Gestalt view of human nature is rooted in existential philosophy which emphasizes *awareness of and responsibility for the total field, for the self as well as the other, and these give meaning and pattern to the individual's life* (Perls, 1973, p. 49).

In Gestalt dialogic relationship, therapist meets the client without any preset agenda or desire to lead the therapy process in any chosen direction. Therapist also *understands that the essential nature of the individual's relationship with the environment is interdependence, not independence*, and such relationship *creates the ground for contact and experiments that are spontaneous and organic to the moment-to-moment experiences of the therapeutic engagement* (Corey, 2001, p. 196).

According to Clarkson (1989), there is also a close resemblance between the process of arriving at Gestalt awareness and that of *Zen Buddhism* enlightenment

(meditation process). Holism, which is one of significant theoretical grounds of the Gestalt approach, stresses the interrelation between body, mind, emotion, thoughts, sensations, and perceptions, that is the integration of right- and left-hemispheric functions of human brain (Clarkson, 1989).

2) Individualistic background of the Gestalt therapy

Gestalt therapy is thus an approach placing emphasis on down-to-earth or sense-based experiences and moment-to-moment interaction between the person and the environment as well as integrating the elements of both western and eastern philosophies. Main features of Gestalt therapy thus indicate universal applicability of the approach.

On the other hand, according to both Christopher (1996) and Saner (1989), Gestalt therapy is an individualistic approach. Especially, Saner severely criticized the Gestalt therapy in his paper titled as *Culture Bias of Gestalt Therapy : Made-in-U.S.A., as being influenced by culture values or fixed gestalten best described as individualism or individualistic neurosis... the contemporary form of Gestalt therapy made-in U.S.A. is not universally valid and needs theoretical and methodological revisions in order to be truly cross-culturally valid and meaningful* (Saner, 1989, p. 59).

As such while main features of Gestalt therapy suggest universal applicability of the approach, previous research claims associated with individualistic background of the Gestalt therapy indicated that Gestalt approach might need cross-cultural validation. Previous claim by Christopher (1996) or Saner (1989) was made, however, on a purely speculative basis. And no research findings empirically verifying such claims were available until the previous study by Youn and Kim (2003) which showed that Gestalt therapy does reflect individualistic cultural values as claimed by previous researchers.

2. Gestalt contact boundary disturbances

From a Gestalt perspective, psychologically healthy people are self-regulating individuals who can respond flexibly to continuously changing environment and can accept and support themselves. They can keep balance between taking care of their individual needs and those of others. They also take responsibility for the choices they make and are potentially aware of their environment as well as many aspects of themselves involving the mind and body. They continuously make creative adjustments at the contact boundary between themselves and the world around them (Mackewn, 1997).

Disturbance is the loss of such flexibility to adjust creatively to changing environment. Disturbance results when individuals chronically interrupt full contact with their current needs or interests in an unaware and habitual manner. If they can make full contact with their emerging needs, they will withdraw and be satisfied, thus the ebb and flow or the unfolding process of the awareness cycle (or gestalt formation and completion cycle) will proceed smoothly (Kim, 1995; Zinker, 1977).

For example, *when a need emerges, a figure is formed based on that need (e.g., hunger), the environment is scanned for possibilities to meet the need, and a choice is made as to the best way to fill the need. It is at this point that there is contact through action (e. g., if the figure is hunger, the individual might make dinner) and this action is focused on fulfilling the need while all else fades into ground in relation to that figure* (Simon, 1996, p. 111). If they are unable to make contact with whatever is attracting them for some reason, then the gestalt will be incomplete, and such unmet needs or unfinished business continuously call their attention for closure or completion.

Resistance to such contact has been referred to as contact boundary disturbance. Main disturbances include *introjection, projection, confluence, retroflection, deflection, desensitization, and egotism* (Caffaro, 1989; Clakson, 1989; Kim, 1995; Perls, 1973; Polster &

Polster, 1973). These disturbances are interlocking and functionally inter-related each other.

Such disturbances are seen as pathological only when the processes are used habitually and without awareness. When used with awareness, choice, and as temporary creative adaptations to the demands of continuously changing environment, they are considered to be not only normal but also even essential for healthy functioning, thus creative rather than neurotic or pathological (Caffaro, 1989; Polster & Polster, 1973). Among the above listed disturbances, *egotism* was not included for the analysis of this study, since empirically measurable items were not currently available.

1) *Introjection*

In Gestalt therapy, *introjection* is often explained as a negative contrast with assimilation (Simon, 1996). Physically, we grow by assimilation, by taking in food, chewing (destroying), digesting (changing food into chemical particles), and absorbing what is nurturing and which in turn is converted into our bone, muscles, and blood (Perls, 1973). Our psychological process of assimilation occurs in the same way. If *Concepts, facts, standards of behavior, morality, and ethical, esthetic or political values* (Perls, 1973, p. 33) are to become truly our own, or part of our personality, they need to be assimilated by being destroyed, analyzed, taken apart, and then put together or restructured in the form of most suitable to us.

If such psychological foods are simply swallowed whole or passively accepted without any discrimination or criticism, just because some authority figure says so or because its fashionable or traditional or dangerous, etc., they remain as undigested foreign bodies and interrupt the individual's personality development or the cultivation of his/her own values and attitudes (Perls, 1973). It also contributes to personality disintegration of internal split between the original impulse (e.g. *I want to cry. Or I want to play.*) and the introject (e.g.,

internalized should such as *It is silly to cry, so should not cry. Or You must always work hard.*) (Simon, 1996). Such internal conflict of neurotics makes a battle ground of their own personality, where neither side wins and thereby the personality is immobilized for any further growth and development (Perls, 1973).

The process of *introjection* does sometimes serve a useful purpose. A common example would be the student who crams the night before an examination in order to get a passing grade in a very boring subject (Perls, 1973). Introjective process of swallowing whole may occasionally be helpful as well in the initial phases of learning certain skills such as typing or modeling on one's own counselor (Clarkson, 1989).

Introjectors also tend to be impatient, lazy, and greedy (Polster & Polster, 1973). Why? Assimilation like digestion proceeds slowly, taking time, energy, effort, and patience. Clinical syndromes having connection with *introjection* include alcoholism, eating disorders, sexual promiscuity, and drug abuse (Caffaro, 1989).

2) *Projection*

Projection is the reverse of *introjection*. *Introjection* is to take responsibility for what belongs to the environment, while *projection* is to make the environment responsible for what originates in oneself (Perls, 1973). For example, the projector while unrecognized that he is rejecting others believes that others are rejecting him (Clarkson 1989). Projector can not recognize certain aspects of his total personality because he can not distinguish between the aspects of his true personality and those imposed on him from the outside (i.e. introject) (Perls, 1973). Projector accepts an introject (for example, *You should be nice to others*) as himself (*I should become a nice person*). Whereas he sees his real life experiences (being angry, irritated or hateful toward others) as being alien to himself and wants to get rid of them by projecting them to others, thus disowning some aspects of his personality.

Such real life feelings are experienced as being uncomfortable because they are inconsistent with the introjected self-image of being a nice person (Perls, 1973; Polster & Polster, 1973). Therefore projector puts such obnoxious unacceptable feelings unto others, and comes to suspect others as if *They are angry at me*, when in fact it is him that is angry with them. *This third person approach to contact with the environment means that such individuals are always looking outside themselves for the source of their problems* (Gilliland & James, 1998, p. 140). *The projector needs to experience ownership of his or her feelings and attitudes*, so that they can get out of such passively suffering victimizing roles (Caffaro, 1989; Gilliland & James, 1998, p. 140).

Thus by seeing in others the very qualities that they refuse to recognize in themselves, projectors avoid taking responsibility for their true feelings, attitudes, behavior, and the person who they are, and this keeps them remain powerless to initiate any change. The result is a split between ones' actual characteristics and what they are aware of about them (Polster & Polster, 1973). *The suspicion, for example, that another person resents him or is trying to seduce him is a fabrication based on the unaccepted fact that he wants to behave this way toward the other person* (Polster & Polster, 1973, p. 79). An extreme case of such neurotic projection is paranoia. The jealous lover and the prejudiced individual are examples of neurotic projection as well (Caffaro, 1989).

Projective identification is often observed in the process of people's choice of their spouse. For example, *a passive woman who cannot stand her spurts of aggression or anger marries a man who cannot stand his occasional feelings of passivity. He then becomes completely macho and adopts her aggression, while she becomes more passive, adopting his passivity* (Knights, 2002, p. 21). Thus they project unto each other a part of themselves that they cannot accept but the other partner feels comfortable with.

People project unto others not only their negative

aspects but also positive qualities such as humor, intelligence, personal power, etc. *Projection* has many useful and adaptive functions as well. Projection operates in various activities such as planning, trying to understand others by imagining their viewpoints (e.g. empathy), creative imagination or artistic creation (Caffaro, 1989). The novelist, for example, projects himself into his characters and becomes them while maintaining the sense of boundary between himself and his characters.

3) Confluence

Confluence is the absence of a boundary between self and others or the environment (Gilliland & James, 1998). Examples include the infant at birth and adult in a moment of ecstasy or extreme concentration (Perls, 1973). Neither is aware of him/herself as being separate from the environment. The *confluence* between the infant and the mother, whether it is emotional or physiological, is necessary and healthy process for the child's development (Clarkson, 1989). It serves a new born baby's survival needs.

As such, experiencing some *confluence* with others or our environment is occasionally significant. However, a permanent merging or enmeshment with others or environment leads to the loss of self, to lack of satisfactory contact and ultimately disintegration (Clarkson, 1989). For example, in the above mother and the infant case, *as long as mother remains in confluent with her newborn baby and attending to his needs, the sharpness of her sensory discrimination about her own needs will naturally be diminished. For a period this, of course, is necessary. Prolongation of this confluence may contribute to depression or subsequent difficulties in resuming an active sex life with her husband* (Clarkson, 1989, p. 57). People with pathological *confluence* thus cannot make good contact, nor can they withdraw (Gilliland & James, 1998). In contrast, in case of good contact, *even in the deepest of unions,*

individuals retain *the heightened and profound sense of the other with whom contact is being made* (Polster & Polster, 1973, p. 92).

Two people in confluent relationship behave as if they are one person. Any emphasis on boundaries or the idea of any conflict or disagreement is experienced as the threatening to the relationship if not the survival of the person (Clarkson, 1989). They are unwilling to discover the resources within themselves and unable to tolerate differences between themselves and others. So they demand likeness from others, and if someone does not conform, they tend to persecute the person. *The caretaking person often colludes with the apparent dependent one to avoid dealing with his own fears of dependency or abandonment* (Clarkson, 1989, p. 56). When confluent individuals say *we* you may hardly tell who they are talking about, whether it is themselves or the rest of the world (Perls, 1973).

An example of less extreme *confluence* is the parent who considers the child an extension of himself or herself (Perls, 1973). *The parent becomes so fused with the child that all contact boundaries are lost. The child must act, sleep, breathe, and do what the parent demands. At a minimum, the backstage mom or the grandstand dad both depict a confluent approach. Both are frustrated in missing out on their fantasy career goals and thus project them through their offspring* (Gilliland & James, 1998, p. 141).

This reminds one of the *Confucian* teaching that one's body is made and given by parents (身體髮膚 受之父母) and implicit in such teaching is the oneness of the child and the parents. Korean parents having been frustrated with their career dreams would try to achieve their lost dreams through the life of their children, and we usually call it *Hanpoori* (*Han* is similar to unfinished business and *poori* means resolving). Children used to accept such parental demands out of filial piety for parents, even though such submissive attitudes are disappearing now and young generation tends to become more

emotionally independent from their parents. Such parents showing *confluence* with their children do not appreciate or respect that their children are supposed to be unlike with them at least in some respects (Perls, 1973). *And if the children are not confluent, and do not identify with their parents' demands, they will meet with rejection and alienation : You are not my son. I don't love such a naughty child* (Perls, 1973, p. 39).

Because of their weak boundaries, confluent people tend to allow others hurt them repeatedly (Leary, 1997). As evident in the battered wife syndrome, they may complain but keep staying in the same hurtful relationships. Also because of their absence of the sense of self, they lack in the trust of themselves including their feelings and decisions. In an attempt to please others, they often lose touch with their own emotions especially the ones likely leading to conflict.

It is in their *caretaking* tendency that confluent people can be identified most readily. They tend to feel responsible for other's problems even when it's not their faults and are unable to get relaxed until the difficulties are resolved. They differ from altruistic people in that the confluent tends to put others before themselves. In altruism, the driven quality which is a symptom of *confluence* is missing (Leary, 1997). As such, in true altruism, we are indeed to *love our neighbors as we love ourselves* (Matt. 22 : 39), not *instead* of ourselves (Knights, 2002, p. 20).

Some *confluence* can be beneficial, however, for example, empathic understanding of a partner's bereavement. Also some *confluence* with the environment can be life-enriching. Such as being confluent with the mother nature may lead to sensitized attitudes toward environmental matters of the earth. Other examples would be found in *a meditational peak experience or in a certain forms of expressive art such as painting, the loss of self boundaries can be crucial to the full richness of the experience* (Clarkson, 1989, p. 56).

Healthy *confluence* can be observed also in many

group activities where team work or cooperation is important. Such as social and political activities, sports (including sports cheering, for instance, as observed from the World Cup held in Korea, June of 2002), and Korean *poomashi* which is labor exchange or cooperation in agricultural affairs of Korean traditional society. On the other hand, the unhealthy *confluence* is at the root of cults and mobs. The distinction between the two is that the reflective choice is involved in the former as compared to the mindless identification of the latter, thus the driven quality is involved here again (Leary, 1997).

Examples of extreme *confluence* are the *jealous spouse who becomes a batterer, spurned lover who becomes a stalker, and the borderline personality disorder* (Gilliland & James, 1998, p.141). Frequent feelings of guilt and resentment are the indication of unhealthy confluent relationships.

4) Retroflection

Retroflection is doing to ourselves what we would like to do to others (Perls, 1973; Polster & Polster, 1973). The retroflector, for instance, turns anger or rage inward rather than expressing it toward others. In the background of such *retrofelction* is the *introjection* that *You should not angry with others*. Reflectors may clench fists and hold down jaws or get tense their shoulders instead of getting angry to others (Caffaro, 1989).

According to Polster and Polster (1973), *inability to express or act on anger is often the hallmark of retroflection* (as cited in Caffaro, 1989, p. 22). As such, an extreme case of *retroflection* is the depressed client who turns ones anger inward instead of expressing it to others or the environment and decides to commit suicide as a way of dealing with one's repressed feelings of anger or rage (Gilliland & James, 1998). *Retroflection* is a disturbance that is most frequently resorted to by women (Polster, 1983).

Retroflection is also doing things for ourselves that we would like others to do for us (Gilliland & James, 1998). As in the following example, *instead of getting concern and support from others, we may comfort and pamper ourselves* (Caffaro, 1989, p. 21). *Barry often puts his hands inside his shirt to stroke his chest when he speaks about his loneliness. When he gives a voice to his hand, he hears himself consoling his inner child in the way that he had wanted his cold and distant father to have done for him. When this does not interfere with getting their genuine interpersonal needs met in the present, this can be an important form of self-support* (Clarkson, 1989, p. 54).

Thus, by redirecting one's behavior inward, the retroflector substitutes the self for the environment as a target of the expression of such behavior. By retroflecting habitually and chronically, the individual splits himself into both *doer* and *done to* (Polster & Polster, 1973). *The introjector does as other would like him to do, the projector does unto other what he accuses them of doing to him, the man in pathological confluence doesn't know who is doing what to whom, and the retroflector does to himself what he would like to do to others* (Perls, 1973, p. 40).

Obviously, nobody can freely express every one of his/her impulses whenever they arise. At least some of them need to be hold back and such restraint is often adaptive (Perls, 1973). An example of such adaptive use of *retroflection* is restraining yourself from crying inappropriately in a committee meeting. However, it becomes negative if you can never let yourself express your hurt or rage (Clarkson, 1989).

Thinking which is a way of talking to oneself is also a retroflective process. Even though thinking is disruptive because it substitutes for expression or action, it can be also valuable when you have to make complex decisions such as choosing a career, deciding to get married, etc. (Polster & Polster, 1973).

5) Deflection

Deflection is a subtle way of avoiding or distracting contact with others or environment. The deflector avoids intense emotions by the overuse of humor, abstract generalization and questions or by being polite or taking third-person perspective, and by avoiding physical contact or eye contact (Sharf, 1996). From a therapeutic perspective, the deflector is passive-aggressive (Gilliland & James, 1998). Deflectors may subtly change the subject matter. That is, if a woman asks, for instance, *Do you love me?* Then the man may answer *What do you mean by love?* (Clarkson, 1989, p. 51). Closing our eyes or averting our gaze while watching horror movie would be another common example of *deflection* (Polster & Polster, 1973).

The deflectors tend to be indirect, beats around the bush, never can say what they mean. That is, they feel as if they are in the neighborhood, but never quite reach home (Caffaro, 1989). *Deflection* is thus another alternative to the directional expression of the acting person *instead of holding the outgoing part in check (retrofelction), the deflector expresses it off-target* (Caffaro, 1989, p. 28).

Some people deflect by using a lot of words, a psychological smoke screens, where they express themselves unclearly and wind up feeling misunderstood and wronged. Still others qualify and reduce what they say with words like, probably, kind of, somewhat, and perhaps. Or they reduce what someone else says with yes, but. They may use jargon to achieve a quick but imprecise understanding (Polster & Polster, 1973, as cited in Caffaro, 1989, p. 28).

Deflection is usually self-limiting and harmful because it interrupts full and vivid contact. However, it can also be beneficial. For example, *if I call you dirty names in the apex of my rage, that does not necessarily characterize my continuing feelings about you. Trust, time, and intimate knowing of one another will bridge such moments, but under circumstances where these are*

not available, deflecting the rage may be wise and necessary (Polster & Polster, 1973, p. 90).

According to Miriam Polster (1983), *deflection* is a product of our times, that is, contemporary event. She thinks that we live in a period of increasing depersonalization. *And deflection is a depersonalized way of avoiding contact. Sometimes, given all the good intentions in the world, we don't even know who the target might be for a particular feeling, for a particular point of contact. And all we have left is the deflective possibility* (Polster & Polster, 1979, as cited in Caffaro, 1989, p. 29). As such the *deflection* is quite a recent event, so relatively less attention has been given to it compared with other disturbances discussed so far.

6) Desensitization

Desensitization is a way of diluting, disregarding or even neglecting one's feelings and sensations (Clarkson, 1989). That is, it's a way of losing touch with oneself as well as environment. Pain or discomfort is not felt, thus keeping from emerging as figure. *A mild example is lying in the sun too long. A more extreme example is disregard of bodily needs such as in the kind of people who take pride in how much they can drink, go without sleep and work under extreme stresses such as on the stock market* (Clarkson, 1989, p. 51).

As with other disturbance, *desensitization* is required sometimes to lead a healthy living. *For example, an athlete might ignore the irritation of a small blister in order to win a race, or someone may ignore the discomfort of a lumpy mattress to attain some sleep* (Clarkson, 1989, p. 51).

3. Individualism-Collectivism and the self-construct.

The central difference between *individualism* and *collectivism* is that *individualism* gives priority to personal goals over in-group goals, while *collectivism* places an emphasis on subordinating personal goals to those of the

in-group (Singelis, 1994). Gould and Kolb (1964) defined *individualism* as the belief that the individual is an end in himself, and as such ought to realize the self and cultivate his own judgment, notwithstanding the weight of pervasive social pressures in the direction of conformity (as cited in Triandis, 1994, p. 287).

According to Triandis (1994), *individualism* emphasizes individual autonomy, emotional independence, primacy of personal goals over in-group goals, and behavior regulated by personal choices based on pleasure principle and computation of personal profits and losses. These cultural emphases tend to lead people to see themselves in terms of autonomy and dispositional qualities (such as kindness, honesty, integrity, etc.) which are stable over time and context (Singelis, 1994). Such self-view, termed as the *independent self-construal* by Markus and Kitayama (1994), gives rise to such cultural emphasis as self-actualization, and expression of one's unique configuration of needs, rights, and capacities (Singelis, 1994). Individualism is a shared cultural value of most northern and western regions of Europe, North America, and Australia, and is particularly characteristics of White urban, male, middle-class, secularized, contemporary people (Markus & Kitayama, 1994, p. 97).

Collectivism emphasizes collective identity, emotional dependence, in-group cohesiveness and harmony, duties and obligations, behavior regulated by in-group norms, and strong in-group-and-out-group distinction. People from collectivistic cultures such as those of Korea, China, Japan, South-east Asia, etc. tend to see themselves in terms of specific relationships with others and social context, rather than in terms of autonomy and one's unique dispositional qualities. Markus and Kitayama (1994) termed such self-view as the *interdependent self-construal*.

From this perspective, the self is differently instantiated within each specific social context, therefore, sometimes elusive and unreliable, as well as

flexible and malleable (Singelis, 1994). It does not mean, however, that the *interdependent self-construal* does not possess and express internal attributes such as abilities, opinions, and idiosyncratic personality characteristics. Rather it means that an individual's internal attributes tend to take a secondary role in many aspects of his/her social life - they must instead be constantly under an individual's voluntary control and regulation to come to terms with the primary task of the interdependence. And such voluntary control of the inner attributes comprises a central core of the cultural ideal of maturity (Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Cho (1999) analyzed the characteristics of mature personality from the standpoints of Eastern classics (Mencius' or Confucius' teachings, etc.) and suggested that mature persons tend to go beyond *self-actualization*. That is, for them *self-actualization* is not an end itself but only a process leading to the final stage of *mutual-actualization*. Thus mature personality has been explained as a process of pursuing *mutual-actualization* via *self-actualization*.

Researchers (Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1994) suggest that the two aspects of the self-construal coexist within an individual, and he/she may refer to the interdependent aspect or the independent to the degrees of the developmental level of the respective aspects and the demands of the surrounding environment. In some culture, more situations are interpreted *interdependently*, and in other cultures, more *independently* (Triandis, 1994). Within a specific culture, however, individuals may vary in the degrees of exhibiting the dominant tendency of that specific culture. The proposition by Markus and Kitayama that the *independent self-construal* tends to be predominant in individualistic cultures, while the *interdependent self-construal* is dominant in collectivistic cultures has been empirically verified through previous research (Youn, 2000; Youn and Yang, 1998).

4. The Research Questions

1) What are the relations between the six Gestalt contact boundary disturbances and the two aspects of the self-construct, the *independent self-construct* and the *interdependent self-construct*.

2) Do the relationship patterns between the six disturbances and the two aspects of the self-construct vary according to gender? If so, how do they differ?

3) Are there any differences between the results of this study with Korean high

school students and those of the previous study (Youn & Kim, 2003) with Korean college students? If so, what are the differences?

Method

Participants. A total of 192 Korean high school students participated from a coed high school located in Seoul, Korea. Data was collected during class hours. Of the 192, 98(51.0%) was male, 72 (37.5%) was female, and 22 was missing. The average age was 16.43 and the range was 14-19.

Materials. The questionnaire used for this study consisted of Gestalt contact boundary disturbance scale, self-construct scale, and survey sheet collecting demographic information of age, gender, and educational level. For the measurement of contact boundary disturbance, Yoo's (2000) Korean version of the disturbance scale was used. Yoo (2000) translated the Caffaro's (1989) *The Revised Gestalt Contact Boundary Styles Scale* which consists of 122 items. In addition to the original 122 items of the Caffaro's study, Yoo developed and added 20 more items. Therefore, in this study, the 142 items from Yoo's study which placed on a six-point Likert-type format was used.

Caffaro's (1989) factor analysis with a group of American professional Gestalt therapists showed the evidence of construct validity of the scale. The internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach alpha) from Yoo's

study with Koreans were .57-.88 (*introjection*, .71; *projection*, .78; *confluence*, .57; *retroflexion*, .87; *deflection*, .88; and *desensitization*, .75). Reliabilities (Cronbach alpha) from the previous study by Youn & Kim (2003) were .34 for *introjection* .77 for *projection*, .63 for *confluence*, .86 for *retroflexion*, .88 for *deflection*, and .77 for *desensitization*.

The self-construct scale developed by Singelis (1994) consists of 30 items (15 independent items and 15 interdependent items) placed on a seven-point Likert-type format. The original internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alpha) of the independent subscale was .69 and the interdependent subscale was .73. In Youn's (2000) study with the US college students, the alpha reliability of the independent subscale was .63, and the interdependent was .64. In the previous study with Korean college students (Youn & Kim, 2003), internal consistency reliability for the self-construct subscales were .70 for the independent, and .67 for the interdependent. Singelis (1994) reported the evidence of construct validity in a study that examined the factor structure of the scale with a group of Hawaiian college students, including Asian-Americans and Caucasian-Americans.

Design and Procedure. For the analysis of the relation between the six Gestalt contact boundary disturbances and the two aspects of the self-construct, multiple regression analyses were employed. Before the multiple regression, the reliability (Cronbach alpha) of the individual items of both scales was analyzed. The items with negative item-total correlation or items with item-total correlation lower than .10 were dropped from analysis. The predictors were the two aspects of the self-construct, and the criterion variables were the six dimensions of Gestalt contact boundary disturbances.

Results

The internal consistency reliabilities (Cronbach alpha) of the six disturbance subscales were .50 for *introjection*,

.77 for *projection*, .56 for *confluence*, .85 for *retroreflection*, .86 for *deflection*, and .71 for *desensitization*. Cronbach alpha reliabilities for the self-construal subscales were .70 for the independent and .74 for the interdependent subscale.

Table 1 shows that Korean high school students' *ITSC* is slightly higher than their *IDSC*, but there is no significant differences. In table 2, again slightly higher interdependent score patterns are observed from the respective gender groups but the differences are not significant, either. In table 3, no significant gender difference is observed in the interdependent score, whereas females' independent score is significantly higher than that of male students.

Table 1. Mean score difference of the self-construal.

Self-Construal	N	Mean	SD	t	p
IDSC192	192	4.49	.77	- .97	.332
ITSC192	192	4.55	.79		

Table 2. Mean score difference of the self-construal by gender.

Male					Female			
SC	N	Mean(SD)	t	(p)	N	Mean(SD)	t	p
IDSC	98	4.37 (.84)	-1.33	(.187)	72	4.64 (.63)	-.20	(.841)
ITSC	98	4.49 (.87)			72	4.67 (.69)		

SC = Self-Construal, IDSC = independent self-construal, ITSC : interdependent self-construal.

Table 3. Mean score difference of the IDSC & ITSC by gender.

IDSC					ITSC			
SC	N	Mean(SD)	t	(p)	N	Mean(SD)	t	p
Male	98	4.37 (.84)	-2.38	(.018)*	98	4.49 (.87)		
Female	72	4.64 (.63)			72	4.67 (.69)	-1.451	(.149)

* = significant $\alpha = .05$

Table 4. Mean and the standard deviation of the six disturbances.

Disturbances	N	Mean	SD
Introjection	192	4.31	.67
Projection	192	3.50	.73
Confluence	192	3.96	.72
Retroreflection	192	4.02	.70
Deflection	192	3.63	.59
Desensitization	192	2.83	.66

Table 4 provides mean score and the standard deviation of the six Gestalt contact boundary disturbances. No gender differences were found from any of the six dimensions.

Table 5 indicates significant negative relations between Korean high school students' *IDSC* and *confluence* or *retroreflection*, but no significant relations with the other four disturbances. In the previous study (Youn & Kim, 2003), Korean college students' *IDSC* showed significant negative relations with all the six disturbances.

Table 6 shows significant positive relations of Korean

high school students' *ITSC* with *introjection*, *confluence*, and *retrofection*, and non significant relations with the other three disturbances. In the previous analysis (Youn & Kim, 2003), Korean college students' *ITSC* showed significant positive relations with *introjection* and *confluence*, but not with *retrofection*.

Table 5. Multiple regression between the IDSC and the disturbances.

	Constant	B	β	R ² Change	R	R ²
<i>Introjection</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Projection</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Confluence</i>	3.553	-.248**	-.267	.060	.358**	.128
<i>Retrofection</i>	2.973	-.168*	-.187	.029	.310**	.096
<i>Deflection</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Desensitization</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-

* = significant $\alpha = .05$; ** = significant $\alpha = .001$; *IDSC* = independent self-construct.

Table 6. Multiple regression between the ITSC and the disturbances.

	Constant	B	β	R ² Change	R	R ²
<i>Introjection</i>	3.172	.250**	.295	.087	.295**	.087
<i>Projection</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Confluence</i>	3.553	.334**	.369	.068	.358**	.128
<i>Retrofection</i>	2.973	.294**	.334	.067	.310**	.096
<i>Deflection</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Desensitization</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-

* = significant $\alpha = .05$; ** = significant $\alpha = .001$; *ITSC* = interdependent self-construct.

Table 7 and 8 summarize gender variance relational patterns between the two aspects of the self-construct and the six disturbance. In table 7, Korean high school students' *IDSC* is not significantly related with any of the six disturbances except the negative relation between male students' *IDSC* and *confluence*. In the previous

Table 7. Multiple regression between the IDSC and the disturbances by gender.

	Male				Female			
	B	β	R ² Change	R	B	β	R ² Change	R
<i>Intro.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Pro.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Conf.</i>	-.345**	-.365**	.106	.445**	-	-	-	-
<i>Retro.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Def.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Desen.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* = significant $\alpha = .05$; ** = significant $\alpha = .001$; *IDSC* = independent self-construct.

Intro=Introjection, *Pro*=Projection, *Conf*=Confluence, *Retro*=Retrofection, *Def*=Deflection, *Desen*=Desensitization.

Table 8. Multiple regression between the ITSC and the disturbances by gender.

	Male				Female			
	B	β	R ² Change	R	B	β	R ² Change	R
<i>Intro.</i>	.198*	.255	.065	.255*	.431**	.450	.202	.450**
<i>Pro.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Conf.</i>	.428**	.468**	.092	.445**	.233*	.256	.065	.256*
<i>Retro.</i>	.187*	.232	.054	.232*	.307**	.308	.095	.308**
<i>Def.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Desen.</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* = significant $\alpha = .05$; ** = significant $\alpha = .001$; *ITSC* = interdependent self-construct.

Intro=Introjection, *Pro*=Projection, *Conf*=Confluence, *Retro*=Retrofection, *Def*=Deflection, *Desen*=Desensitization.

study (Youn & Kim, 2003), Korean male college students' *IDSC* was negatively related with all the six disturbances, and the same negative patterns were also observed from female students except the relation with *retroreflection*. That is, non significant relation was identified between Korean female college students' *IDSC* and *retroreflection*.

Table 8 shows that both Korean male and female students' *ITSC* is positively related with *introjection*, *confluence*, and *retroreflection*. In the previous study, Korean male college students' *ITSC* showed positive relation with *introjection* only, while females' showed positive relations with both *introjection* and *confluence*.

Discussion

1. Individualism-Collectivism and psychological difficulties from Gestalt therapy

In the previous study by Youn & Kim (2003), Korean college students' interdependent score (mean=4.79, sd=.57) was significantly higher than their independent score (mean=4.65 sd=.65) and there was no gender difference. In addition, Youn's (2000) study showed that American students' independent score increased with the increase of their age or educational level. That is, their independent mean score was 4.90 at the undergraduate level, and it increased up to 5.08 at the graduate level. On the other hand, their interdependent score decreased, that is, from 4.89 at the undergraduate level down to 4.50 at the graduate level. Thus the previous findings (Youn, 2000; Youn & Kim, 2003) showed that Markus and Kitayama's (1994) proposition was confirmed that the *interdependent self-construal* is predominant in collectivistic cultures and the *independent self-construal* is dominant in the individualistic cultures as discussed in the introduction.

The present results, however, are not consistent with such proposition or with previous findings. It may be

because that Korean high school students' identity is not completely established yet. Even though the difference between the two aspects of the self-construal was not statistically significant, the fact that their interdependent score was slightly higher than the independent score indicates that the development of the interdependent aspect would prevail as they get older as indicated by the previous study with Korean college students (Youn & Kim, 2003).

An alternative explanation is that such differences between the two young generations may be a reflection of rapidly changing reality of our society. Either case requires further investigation. Instead of cross sectional research, longitudinal study will be required in the future in order to better clarify the above explanation.

The findings of this study showed that Korean high school students' individualistic self-view is either negatively related with (*confluence* and *retroreflection*) or has nothing to do with the Gestalt contact boundary disturbances. In the previous study, Korean college students' individualistic self-view was negatively related with all the six disturbances. These differences between the two Korean student groups may be because that Korean high school students' identity formation process has not been completed yet.

Thus the negative relational pattern that was consistently observed in the previous study (Youn & Kim, 2003) between Korean college students' individualistic self-view and all the six dimensions of Gestalt disturbance was only partially confirmed in this study.

Korean high school students' collectivistic self-view showed positive relations with *introjection*, *confluence*, and *retroreflection*, and non significant relations with the rest three disturbances. In the previous study, Korean college students' collectivistic self-view also showed positive relations with *introjection* and *confluence* but not with *retroreflection*. Thus, the positive relationship pattern between Korean high school students' collectivist side and the disturbances was observed again in this

study as in the previous study with Korean college students. Furthermore, Korean high school students' collectivist aspect was associated with more psychological difficulties than that of college students.

Thus the present results partially confirmed the results of the previous findings with Korean college students. Even though Korean high school students' individualist aspect showed negative relations with only a couple of disturbances and non significant relations with the others, implicit in these results is that again it is Korean high school students' individualistic aspect that is associated with their psychological health from Gestalt therapy perspectives. On the other hand, their collectivist aspect was associated with more psychological problems than that of Korean college students of the previous study.

1) Korean traditional values and psychological difficulties

The previous findings (Youn, 2000; Youn & Kim, 2003; Youn & Yang, 1989) showed that *collectivism* is still dominant in Korea. This study showed that Korean high school students' collectivist self-view was positively related with their psychological difficulties. The concept of *individualism-collectivism* emerged as western societies became industrialized from agricultural society with the emergence of guilds in Europe (Christopher, 1992). As such, while *individualism* is cultural values of the industrialized society, *collectivism* reflects the values of the agricultural society.

Korea used to be an agricultural country, and is now entering into a highly industrialized and information-oriented society. During Korean agricultural Yi-dynasty which lasted up to the early 20th, *Confucius'* teachings were the ruling principles and its influence is still pervasive. Thus *collectivism* and *Confucianism* in Korea overlaps each other in various cultural aspects, especially in their emphasis on harmonious and cohesive human relations.

Confucian interpersonal relationship is characterized by hierarchy, that is, between parents and child, teacher and student, etc. Such hierarchical interpersonal relationship is also reflected in the use of elaborated respect terms of Korean. For example, there are several dimensions of Korean hierarchical terms for the English word *you* - from the highest *kwiha*, to *dangshin*, and the lowest *nur* used in equal or horizontal relationship.

In Hofstede's study (1991), Korean culture was explained in terms of large *power-distance*, strong *uncertainty-avoidance*, and *femininity* as well as *collectivism* (Hofstede, 1991). Such characteristics are also consistent with those of Korean *Confucian* culture. That is, large *power-distance* refers to a hierarchical culture, and in a hierarchical culture, it would not be easy to tolerate uncertainty, therefore uncertain situations tend to be avoided. *Femininity* was explained as a cultural dimension emphasizing interpersonal relationships characterized by modesty and tenderness. *Collectivism* gives priority to group welfare over those of individuals. Likewise, in *Confucianism*, the interest, welfare, or the honor of the in-group (or the family) is more important than those of individual members. In addition, collectivistic interpersonal relation is characterized by emotional dependency (i. e., Korean *Cheong*-relationship) as already mentioned (Triandis, 1994). As such Korean interpersonal relationship is characterized by vertical, group-oriented, and emotionally cohesive (*Cheongful*) human relations. And such interpersonal relationship pattern must have been functional (therefore adaptive and healthy) for survival reasons in the Korean traditional agriculture society where team-work or group cooperation is crucial for group-oriented production or achievement.

The problem is that even though Korea is no longer an agricultural society, collectivistic values from Korean traditional society is still dominant in Korea as indicated by previous findings. In other words, we haven't been that successful in making psychologically healthy and

flexible adjustment in response to such radical and rapid social changes from an agricultural to a highly industrialized society. This may be a behind reason for the observed positive relations between Korean students' collectivist self-construal and *introjection*, *confluence*, and *retroflexion*. More explanations will be given in the following section.

2) Individualism-collectivism, introjection, and confluence

(1) Collectivism and introjection

Introjection was explained as swallowing whole or passively accepting what is taught and learned from the environment without discrimination or criticism. *Introjection* is a negative contrast of assimilation that can be compared to a digestive process of chewing, destroying, taking apart, and putting together or restructuring, thus taking time and effort.

Previous study by Youn (2000) which analyzed Korean teacher-student relationship in terms of Hofstede's (1986) four cultural dimensions showed that Korean teacher-student relationship is characterized by teacher-centered approach where teacher-student relation tends to be vertical and emotionally-dependent, that is, *binding* and *personal*. On the other hand, the US teacher-student relationship tends to be student-centered where teacher-student interaction is horizontal and emotionally-independent, therefore, *freeing* and *impersonal*.

In Korean teacher-centered interaction, students are expected to follow orders or instructions from their teacher. In such a learning situation, usually it is the teacher rather than the student who initiates and controls students' learning experiences. Students need to learn *how to do* by following teacher's instructions, instead of learning *how to learn* by himself or herself. Such learning practices would inevitably lead to students' feeling uncomfortable, as Hofstede (1986) pointed out, when they are faced with unstructured or uncertain tasks

or situations. Certainty-oriented people tend to be closed-minded, try to avoid uncertainty rather than reduce it, like to hold on to traditional beliefs and have a tendency to reject ideas that are different (Rokeach, 1960).

The Korean teacher-student relation is also likely to be *personal* in that both parties are allowed to interact emotionally (Hofstede, 1986). Emotional dependence or involvement (i.e., Korean *Cheong*) is a characteristic feature of the collectivistic interpersonal relationship (Triandis, 1994). Also such personal interactions between the two parties may have been central to the achievement of the traditional learning objectives (Hofstede, 1986) which stresses transference of personal wisdom and knowledge from particular teachers to students.

In a learning situation where the teacher-student relation tends to be *binding* and *personal* and obedience to teachers' instructions is emphasized, students' criticisms or challenges directed at teachers may be interpreted by teachers as a reflection of students' personal disloyalty to teachers or students' unwillingness to learn. Such Korean teacher-student interaction thus seems to place more emphasis on the development of such student qualities as accuracy or punctuality (instead of creativity, flexibility, or open-mindedness), or passiveness and uncritical acceptance of teacher's instructions. As such Korean teacher-student relationship tends to make students passive recipients of their teachers' teachings, rather than facilitate or nurture students' independent assimilative learning process of chewing, criticizing, destroying, analyzing, taking apart, and putting together or restructuring of what they learned.

In recent years, there has been educational reform movement against such Korean traditional educational practices. Such traditional practice is so fundamental, however, that innovative changes demanding tremendous time and efforts proceeds slowly. Under Korean educational system where rote learning and vertical

teacher-student interaction is still commonly practiced, just passively accepting what is taught instead of assimilating which requires time and efforts could be taken as more practical and effective ways of learning.

Such vertical and emotionally dependent relationship pattern is not limited to the relationship between teacher and student. It is commonly observed in other areas of Korean interpersonal relationships. Thus the positive relation between Korean high school students' collectivistic *self-construal* and the *introjection* seems to be related with *Confucian* relationship patterns characterized by hierarchy, and cohesiveness or emotional dependency.

In the US student-centered relationship, on the other hand, teachers tend to allow students to initiate and control their learning experiences as well as respect their independent and innovative learning approaches. However, the two parties are not supposed to be emotionally involved. As discussed already, emotional independence between individuals is a characteristics of individualistic interpersonal relationship (Triandis, 1994).

According to Hofstede (1986), in a weak *uncertainty-avoidance* culture like the US, teachers also tend to allow students to contradict or criticize teachers, and teachers interpret such intellectual disagreement as a stimulating exercise. That is, confrontation in learning situations is salutary, and conflict can be brought into the open. It may be because, in a learning context where the teacher-student relation tends to be *freeing* and *impersonal*, students may freely challenge or criticize teachers, and teachers may not take them personally, for the two parties are not personally or emotionally involved.

Implicit in the above discussion is that the development of students' critical thinking may be facilitated in the US, where not only the *power-distance* is small but also the spirit of criticism and challenge is more acceptable and encouraged. Thus the US student-centered approach might be facilitative to the development of such student qualities as individuality or

independence, open-mindedness, flexibility, active-ness, and critical or independent thinking. As such in the US where the individualism is strong, individual students' independent assimilative learning process is more likely to be nurtured and encouraged instead of engulfing or swallowing up or passively taking over what their teachers tell them without any criticism or discretion. In fact significant negative relation between the individualistic self-construal and the *introjection* was identified from the previous study with Korean college students. Thus previous finding showed that individualistic emphasis is negatively related with *introjection*, even though such negative relation was not observed in this study.

(2) Collectivism and confluence

In confluent relationship, there is no boundary between the self and others or the environment. It involves an absence of conflict and a belief that every in-group members should feel and think the same way. Any differences and conflict or disagreement are experienced as threatening to the relationship (Corey, 2001). As such people in confluent relationship demand likeness from others, and if somebody does not conform, they tend to persecute the person. In unhealthy confluent relationship, feelings of guilt and resentment are frequently experienced when such implicit agreement is violated.

On the other hand, healthy *confluence* can be observed in some social or political activities, sports team-work and sports-cheering, and agricultural affairs of traditional society where cooperation and team-work is important for the group achievement. As such while Korea was an agricultural society, confluent relationship might have been functional for the survival reasons, accordingly could have been healthy and adaptive. In addition, collective interpersonal relation is characterized by cohesive emotional dependency (*Cheongful* relation) as well as group-orientation. In such a cohesive

Cheongful and group oriented relationship where the group-interest, group-decision and group-achievement are more important than those of individuals, individuals can hardly feel, think, and behave differently from others not to mention the cultivation of individuality. The positive relation between Korean students' collectivist aspect and *confluence* may have been thus observed,

(3) Collectivism and *retroreflection*

In this study, Korean high school students' collectivist side was positively related with *retroreflection*. Inability to express or act on anger was discussed in the introduction as the hallmark of *retroreflection*, and extreme case of *retroreflection* is the depressed client who is ending up with suicide.

Keeping one's *Chemyon* (saving face) is important in *Confucian* hierarchical culture of our society, and the ability to restrain or control rather than properly express one's emotions and feelings was regarded as signs of mature personality. So Koreans are not familiar with or skillful at expressing their feelings or emotions freely, especially anger, and this may a reason for Korean indigenous psychological problems called *Hwabyung*. However, boys are usually allowed to express their ideas or thoughts, be articulate and even aggressive sometimes, and traditionally, it was girls who were supposed to be voiceless in any circumstances. According to Miriam Polster (1983), *retroreflection* is most frequently resorted by women.

However, in this study both male and female high school students showed the same positive relation between their collectivist aspect and *retroreflection*. Such positive relation between the two was not observed with Korean college students. This may be because that unlike college students, high school students are still minors being unable to claim their rights. In addition, they need to repress their own feelings and desires while preparing for highly competitive college entrance

examination throughout their high school years in Korea.

3. Gender difference in *confluence*

Both Korean male and female high school students' collectivist aspect was positively related with *introjection*, *confluence*, and *retroreflection*. Thus, no gender difference was observed in the relation between Korean high school students' collectivist aspect and disturbances. In the previous study, Korean male college students' collectivist side was positively related only with *introjection*, and females' with *introjection* and *confluence*. These differences between the two Korean student groups have been discussed already in the previous section.

The results of this study showed that Korean female high school students' individualist aspect showed non significant relations with all the six disturbances, and the same non significant relational pattern was observed with male students except their negative relation with *confluence*. Korean female high school students' independent score was significantly higher than that of males (see table 3). Nevertheless, Korean female high school students' individualist aspect showed non significant relation with *confluence*, while males showed significant negative relation with it. This may be because of females' care taking tendency as will be explained later.

In the previous study, Korean college students' individualist side showed significant negative relations with all the disturbances except female students' non significant relation with *retroreflection*. Non significant relation between Korean high school students' individualist aspect and the disturbances again might be associated with their identity formation process as previously discussed.

According to Leary (1997), it is in their *caretaking* tendency that confluent people can be most readily identified and such *caretaking* tendency may be more

general with and also more important to women as also identified by Gilligan's (1982) research which critically analyzed Kohlberg's (1963) theory of moral development from women's perspectives. According to Gilligan, women tend to give higher priority to the ethics of love and care than the ethics of justice which is a characteristics of masculine morality.

4. Psychological difficulties of Koreans and Gestalt therapy in the present Korean context

The findings of this study showed that collectivist Korean high school students tend to experience psychological difficulties associated with *introjection*, *confluence*, and *retrofection*. Such psychological difficulties were explained in relation to the *Confucianism-collectivism* of Korean traditional agricultural society in this study. That is, while Korean society has been changed from an agricultural to a highly industrialized and information-oriented society, Korean cultures or psychological life of Koreans, however, did not come up with such environmental changes, thereby experiencing such disturbances.

The three disturbances (*introjection*, *confluence*, and *retrofection*) are characterized by the lack of solid sense of self, sense of personal power, and personal choice as discussed in the introduction. Therapeutic approach associated with the heightening of the sense of self or establishing the sense of choice or personal power may help undoing such disturbances. Thus, Gestalt emphasis on individual choice and responsibility, personal empowerment, and self-actualization may help collectivist Korean clients to have contact with or liberate the repressed aspects of their personality, and thereby accept what they are and what they potentially can become (Clarkson, 1989). Thus, Gestalt approach is not only therapeutic but also supportive and facilitative for the realization of Korean client's individuality or true self in a group-oriented society.

In the present, as already mentioned, Korea is

undergoing radical and rapid social and cultural changes as entering into a more technologically advanced and information-oriented society. In order to remain psychologically healthy and better adjusted, Koreans may need to cultivate the ability to respond with more flexibility, creativity, and adventurous curiosity to a changing reality filled with uncertainties and complexities. Experiential approach of Gestalt therapy aiming at the facilitation and heightening of clients' awareness allows people to experience and live their present life fully, thereby helping them to live under constantly changing environment with more flexibility and creativity.

5. Implications for Korean counseling education and training

This study showed that Korean high school students' individualistic self-view is negatively related or had no relations with Gestalt disturbances, whereas their collectivistic self-view is either positively related with or has nothing to do with the disturbances. Thus the previous claims by Saner (1989) and Christopher (1996) that Gestalt therapy reflects individualistic cultural values have been partially reconfirmed by the results of this study. Such individualistic influence is not limited to Gestalt therapy only, however. As already mentioned in the introduction, most counseling theories that are taught and practiced by Korean counseling professionals are individualistic approaches.

According to Markus and Kitayama (1994), individualism is *characteristics of White, urban, male, middle-class, secularized, contemporary people* (p. 97). Thus, because the scope of the populations characterized by the individualistic cultural values are so limited that even within the US, the need for the cross-cultural counseling was recognized already in the early 1990s. As a result, the cross-cultural counseling division under the American Psychological Association (APA) has been established in order to provide culturally compatible

counseling services to diverse ethnic groups with different cultural backgrounds. The accreditation was also given by the APA only to the schools with counseling or psychology department that is offering at least one cross-cultural or multi-cultural counseling course from the early 1990s.

By realizing prominent cultural differences between the two countries, Korean counseling psychologists also made significant research efforts considering Korean cultural aspects in counseling since 1980s. Such efforts, however, have been sporadic, made on an individual basis, and rarely been systematically organized as in the US. Only a few Korean schools are occasionally offering counseling courses dealing with cultural issues in the present. And so far no subdivision under any Korean counseling associations has been established placing exclusive focuses on the cultural issues in counseling.

As Christopher (1996) and Saner (1989) pointed out and also identified by the findings of this study, most American counseling approaches take on individualistic assumptions in their definition of psychological health and maturity or *who the person is and should be* (Christopher, 1996). Korean counselors trained with such counseling approaches would naturally adopt such individualistic views, and nothing is wrong with that only if they are aware of the nature of such adopted attitudes or views, and able to practice with discretion and discrimination considering specific Korean social and cultural contexts. Blind application of the individualistic counseling approaches without sensitivity and awareness or discretion for differential cultural values between the theory and Korean clients' social and psychological background may be more harmful sometimes than beneficial to the welfare and interest of Korean clients.

For example, in the US movie titled *Dead poet's society*, a high school boy happens to find what he truly wants to be, through the encounter with his liberal high

school teacher. He wanted to be a poet. However, when his father found about this, he tried to make his son join the navy, because he could not tolerate his son's decision, and which made his son to commit suicide.

Real life story may not be this dramatic. However, the kind of pressures that the boy in the movie would have experienced might be more frequently and commonly experienced in our *Confucian* collectivistic cultural context where children is often regarded as the extension or the possession of parents rather than separate individuals or in the context where the group (or family) decision and group (or family) interest is more important over individual's choice, decision and welfare.

It's important for Korean clients to find, liberate, and nurture one's true self or individuality, thereby realizing one's personal power and potentiality through counseling process. In addition, counseling process needs to help them go further toward wise integration of what he/she learned and achieved through counseling processes with one's everyday life situation where usually the group or the family (*Woorisung*, that is *Weness* instead of *I-ness*) is more important than the individuals. So that they can refer to their interdependent or independent aspect according to the situational demands with more flexibility. Accumulated research findings associated with the application of individualistic counseling approaches to our social and cultural contexts seem to be necessary through future research efforts.

Thus, the findings of this study showed that more attention and systematic effort need to be given to the culture related issues in counseling. Specifically, cultural issues associated with interpersonal relationship patterns, communication process, and other characteristic differences as well as *individualism-collectivism* distinction need to be considered. In addition, Korean indigenous cultural issues associated with *Buddhism*, *Confucianism*, and *Shamanism*, and Korean folk psychology such as *Cheong*, *Chemyon*, *Weness*, *Shimcheong*, etc. may need to receive more attention and also need to be integrated

into college counseling courses where mostly American individualistic counseling theories and approaches are taught and learned, in order to develop and provide counseling models and approaches that are better suitable to our current Korean contexts.

6. Limitations of the present study and suggestions for future research

This study employed a convenience sampling method, therefore, the probability of the occurrence of systematic bias was not controlled. In addition, the participants were limited to Korean high school students from a coed private school located in Seoul area. The findings of this study therefore need to be generalized only to the population with the similar characteristics of the present college sample. In future research more diverse population groups may be required including multi-cultural samples. This study showed that collectivistic values are positively related with *introjection*, *confluence*, and *retrofection* only, and no significant relations with other disturbances. For more specified understandings between Korean cultures and the Gestalt disturbances, therefore, it seems to be necessary to add other cultural variables than individualism-collectivism in the future.

References

- Caffaro, J. V. (1989). *A factor analytic study of the Gestalt contact boundary styles among professional Gestalt therapists*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Fielding Institute.
- Cho, K. H. (1999). Psychological issues from the Confucian teachings. In Choi, S. J., Yoon, H. K., Han, D. W., Cho, K. H., & Lee, S. W. (Eds.), *Eastern psychology* (pp. 34-162). Jisik publisher, Seoul, Korea.
- Choi, S. C. (2000). *Korean psychology*. Seoul : Chung-Ang University Press.
- Choi, S. J. & Kim, K. (1999). *The Shimcheong therapy for Koreans : A formulation of an indigenous cultural approach*. Paper presented at the 2nd World Congress for Psychotherapy, Vienna Austria July, 4-8.
- Christopher, J. C. C. (1992). *The role of individualism in psychological well-being : Exploring the interplay of culture, ideology, and the social sciences*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, The university of Texas at Austin.
- Christopher, J. C. C. (1996). Counseling's inescapable moral visions. *Journal of counseling and development*, 75, 17-25.
- Clarkson, P. (1989). *Gestalt counseling in action*. London : Sage publications.
- Clarkson, P. & Mackewn, J. (1993). *Fritz Perls*. London : Sage.
- Corey, G. (2001). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy*. Books/cole, Thomson Learning, United States.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice : Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, M A : Harvard University Press.
- Gilliland, B. E. & James, R. K. (1998). *Theories and strategies in counseling and psychotherapy*. Boston, MA : Allyn and Bacon.
- Gould, J., & Kolb, W. V. (1964). *A dictionary of the social sciences*. Glencoe, IL : Free Press.
- Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations*. London : McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Hofstede, G. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10, 301-320.
- Kim, C. D. (1994). *The coping process of Koreans as compared to white Americans : The influence of culture*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, NY, USA.
- Park, W. S. (1991). *Asian foreign students' evaluations of individualistic and collectivistic counseling styles*. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation. Indiana

- University.
- Kim, J. K. (1995). *Gestalt therapy*. Hakjisa, Seoul, Korea.
- Knight, W. K. (2002). *Pastoral counseling : A Gestalt approach..* Binghampton, NY : The Haworth Pastoral Press.
- Kohlberg, L. (1963). The development of children's orientations toward moral order. P1. Sequence in the development of moral thought. *Vita Humane*, 6, 11-33.
- Leary, E. (1997). Confluence versus empathy. *The Gestalt Journal*, 20(1), 137-154.
- Mackewn, J. (1997). *Developing Gestalt counseling*. Sage publications.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1994). The cultural construction of self and emotion : Implications for social behavior. In S. Kitayama, & H. R. Markus (Eds.), *Emotion and culture* (pp. 89-130). Washington D. C. : American Psychological Association.
- Perls, F. S. (1973). *The Gestalt approach and eye witness to therapy*. New York : Bantam Books.
- Polster, E & Polster, M. (1979). An oral history of gestalt therapy, part 3 : A conversation with Erving and Miriam Polster. *Gestalt Journal*, 2(1), 3-26.
- Polster, E. & Polster, M. (1973). *Gestalt therapy integrated*. NY : Vintage books.
- Polster, M. (1983). Women in therapy : A Gestalt therapist's view. In Hatcher, C. & Himelstein, P. (Eds.), *The handbook of Gestalt therapy* (pp. 545-562). Northvale, New Jersey : Jason Aronson Inc.
- Rokeach, M. (1960). *The open and closed mind*. New York : Basic Books.
- Saner, R. (1989). Culture bias of Gestalt therapy : Made in U.S.A. *The Gestalt Journal*, 12(2), 57-72.
- Sharf, R. S. (1996). *Theories of psychotherapy and counseling : Concepts and cases*. Pacific Grove, CA : Brooks/Cole.
- Simon, L. A. (1996). The nature of the introject and its implications for Gestalt therapy. *The Gestalt Journal*, 19(2), 109-130.
- Singelis, T. M. (1994). The measurement of independent and interdependent self construals. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20(5), 580-591.
- Triandis, H. C. (1994). Major cultural syndromes and emotion. In S. Kitayama, & H. R. Markus (Eds.), *Emotion and culture* (pp. 89-130). Washington D. C. : American Psychological Association.
- Yoo, S. K. (2001). Korean youth's referral patterns and usage of counseling, *The Korean Journal of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, 13(3), 95-105.
- Yoo, K. S. (2000). *A study on the development of body-centered Gestalt group counseling program and its effects*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Hongik University, Seoul, Korea.
- Yoon, H. K. (1999). Buddhism and counseling. In Choi, S. J., Yoon, H. K., Han, D. W., Cho, K. H., & Lee, S. W. (Eds.), *Eastern psychology* (pp. 327-376). Jisik publications, Seoul, Korea.
- Youn, I & Kim, S. M. (2003). Gestalt contact boundary disturbances, gender, and the self-construal, *Korean Christian Counseling and Psychotherapy*, vol 5, 53-105.
- Youn, I. & Choi, I. J. (2001). *Attitudes Toward Counselors and Counseling Processes*. Paper presented at the 4th annual conference of Asian Association of Social Psychology, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2001, July 10-13.
- Youn, I. & Yang, K. M. (1998). *The Impact of culture on the development of Epistemological beliefs about learning*. Paper present at the third annual conference of Asian Association of Social Psychology, Taipei, Taiwan, 1999, 8/4-7.
- Youn, I. (2000). The culture specificity of epistemological beliefs about learning. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, 3(1), 87-105.
- Zinker (1977). *Creative process in Gestalt therapy*. New York : Vintage Books.

한국 고등학생의 문화적 자기개념과 Gestalt Contact Boundary Disturbances 관계 분석

윤 인 · 김기범

중앙대학교

본 연구에서는 한국 고등학생들의 문화적 자기 개념과 여섯 가지 게스탈트 contact boundary disturbances(즉 introjection, confluence, projection, retroflection, deflection, desensitization)의 관계를 분석하고자 했다. 본 연구를 위해 Caffaro's (1989)의 contact boundary disturbance 척도와 Singelis (1994)의 자기구성개념 척도(self-construal scale)가 사용되었고, 자료는 고등학생 192명으로 대상으로 수집되었다. 분석 결과, 독립적인 자기 개념을 가진 고등학생들이 confluence, retroflection과 부적인 관계가 있는 것으로 나타났고, 다른 네 가지 disturbances와는 유의미하지 않는 관계로 나타났다. 반면에, 상호의존적인 자기 개념을 가진 고등학생들은 introjection, confluence, retroflection과 정적인 관계가 있는 것으로 나타났고, 나머지 세 가지 disturbances와는 관계가 없는 것으로 나타났다. 그리고 여섯 가지의 disturbances와 두 가지 자기개념간에 남녀차이가 있는 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구의 결과는 한국 대학생들을 대상으로 한 연구(Youn & Kim, 2003)와 비교 제시되었고, 개인주의적 관점의 게스탈트 이론과 한국문화의 관점에서 논의되었다. 또한 한국 상담자 교육과 상담 실습에 대한 본 연구의 시사점이 논의되었다.

주요어 : 문화적 자기구성개념, Gestalt contact boundary disturbances, 독립적 자기, 상호의존적 자기, 상담

원고접수 : 2003년 6월 13일

심사통과 : 2003년 7월 23일