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(54) **FIBER OPTIC CONNECTOR EMPLOYING
OPTICAL FIBER GUIDE MEMBER**

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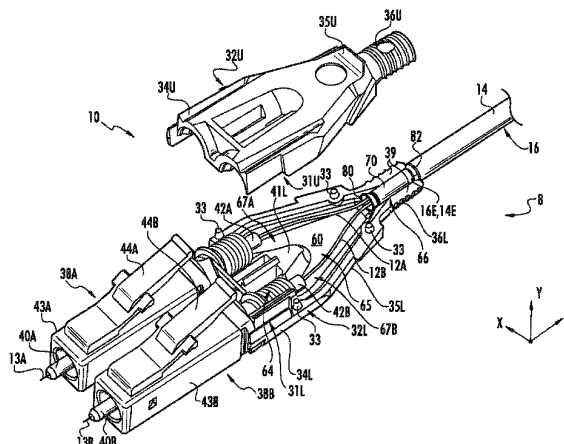
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A fiber optic connector that employs an optical fiber guide member, and a cable assembly that uses the connector are disclosed. The connector has a connector housing formed by mateable sections. The connector housing defines a housing passage having opposite connector-end and channel-end portions that define respective connector-end and channel-end passages, with the channel-end portion configured to be arranged adjacent the end of a fiber optic cable. An optical fiber guide member is disposed in the channel-end passage and has a first transition end that faces the connector-end passage. The optical fiber guide member has a conduit configured to loosely confine and guide the optical fibers to the connector-end passage. Connector sub-assemblies can be operably supported at the connector-end portion supporting end portions of the optical fiber.

22 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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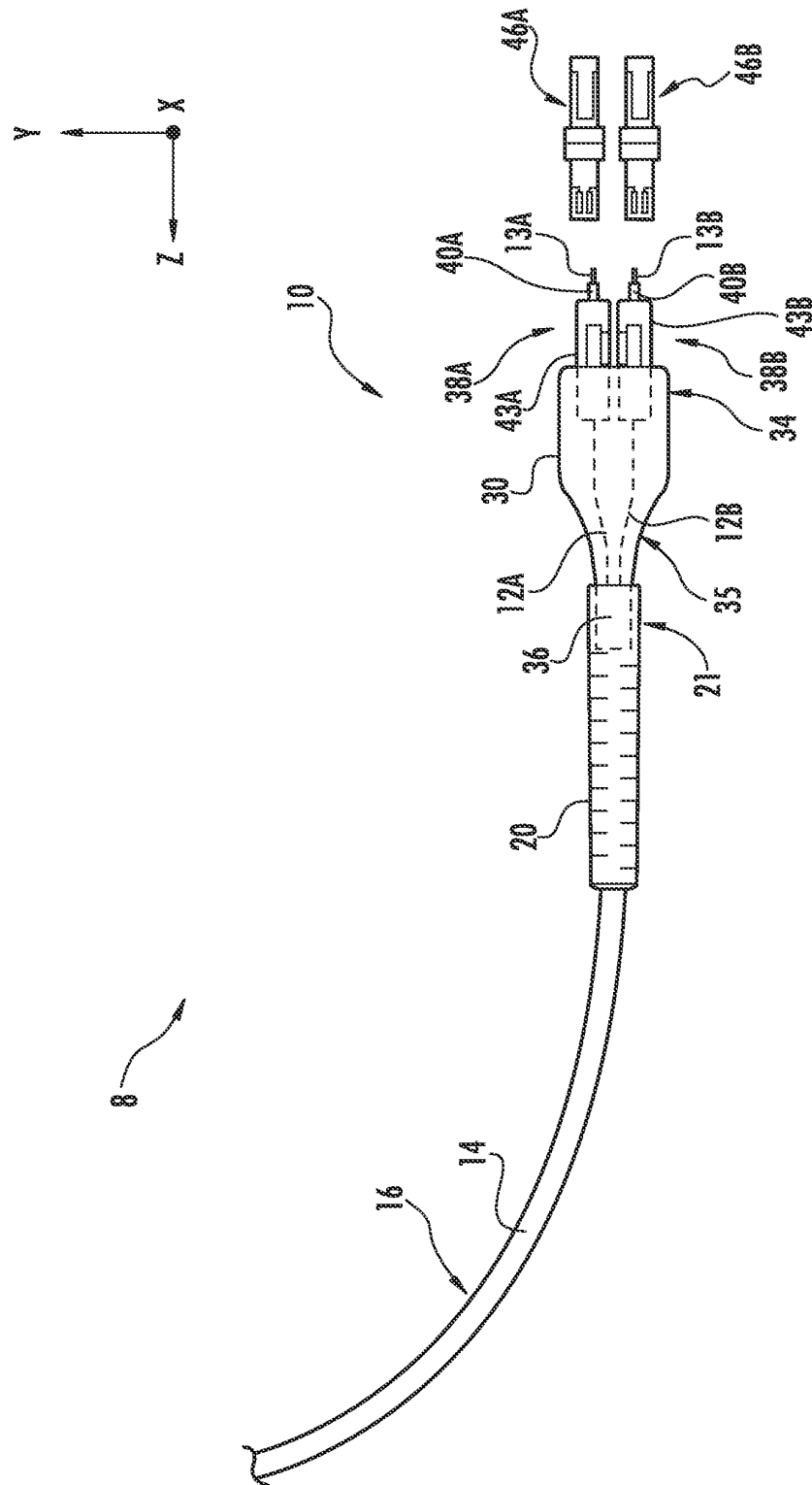
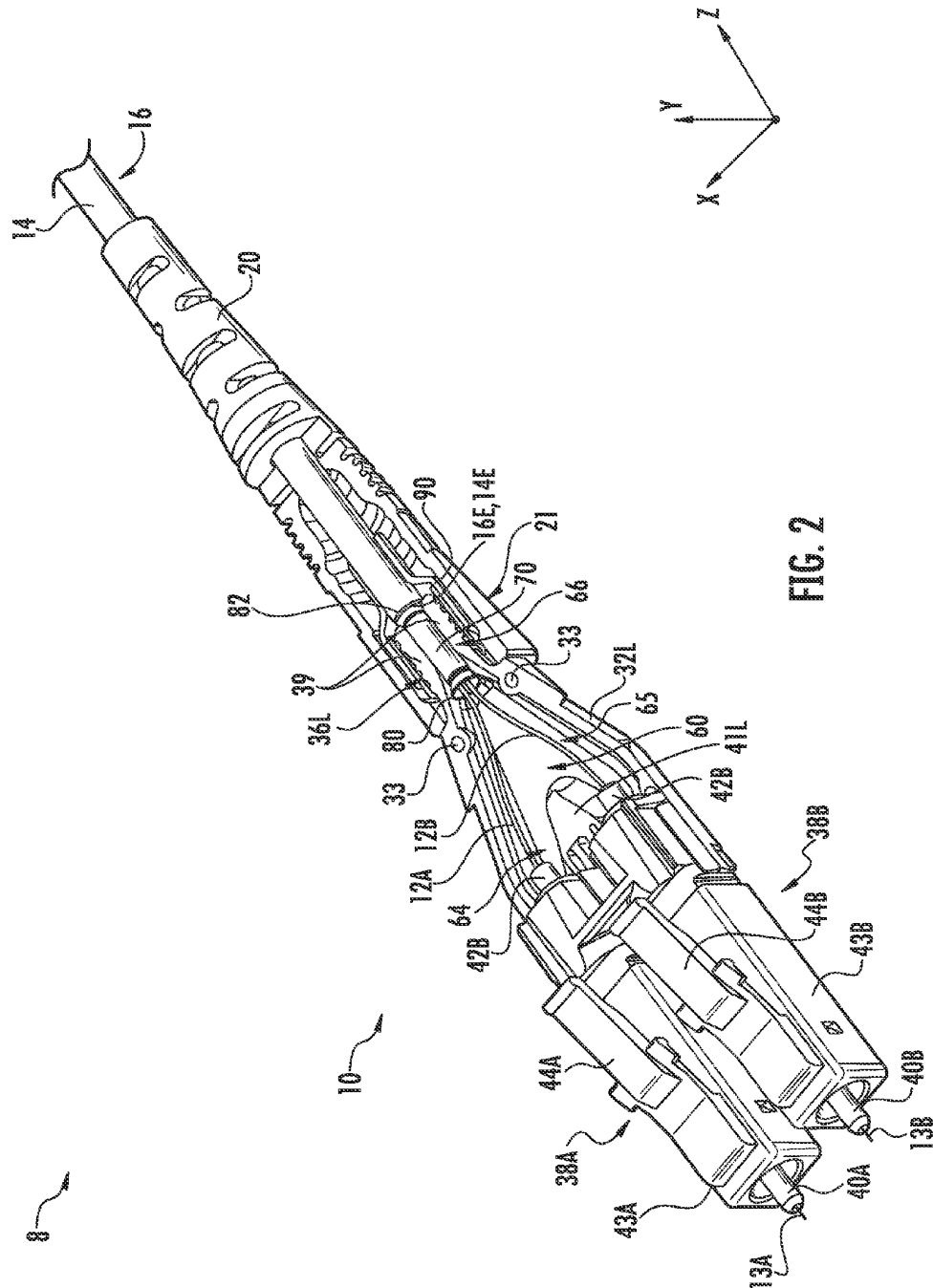
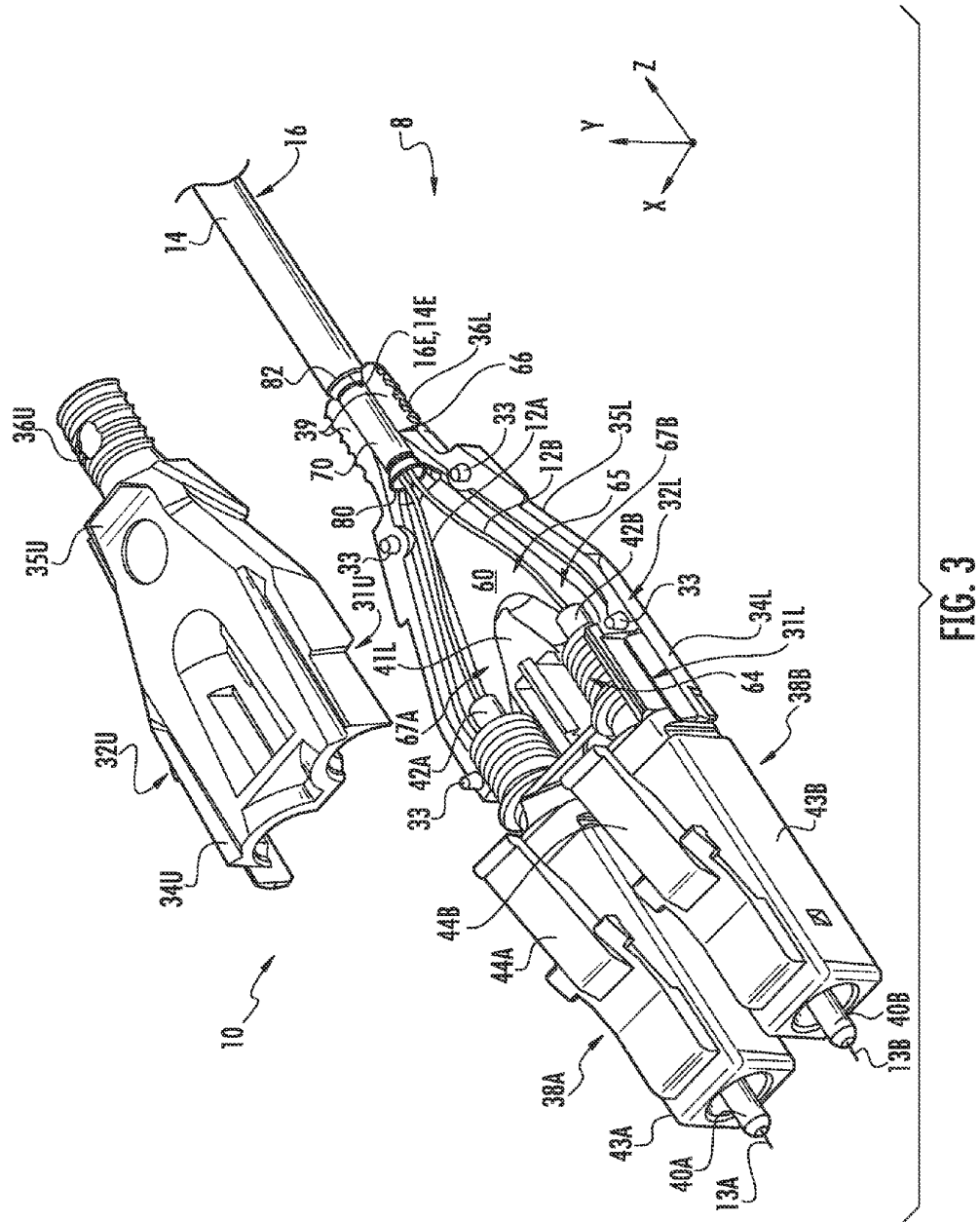


FIG. 1





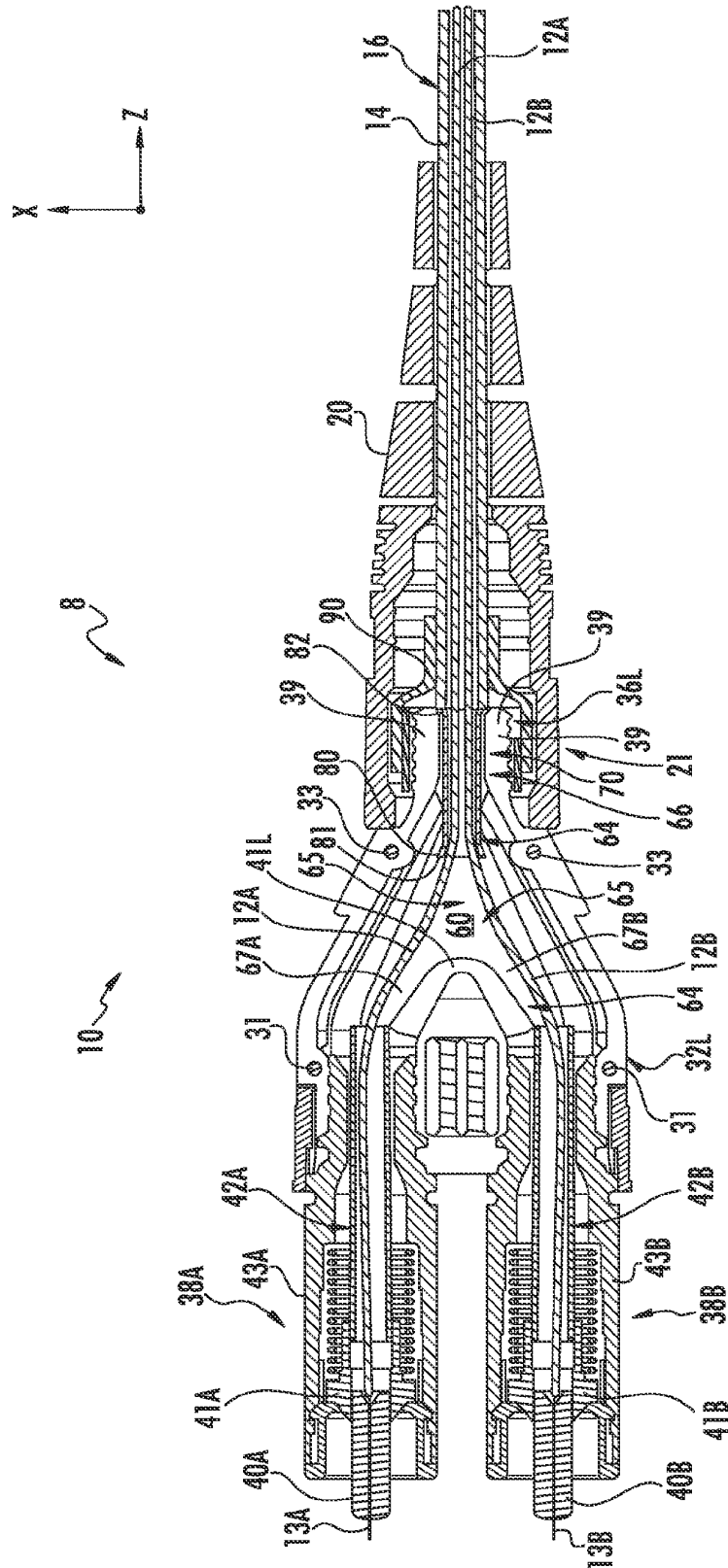
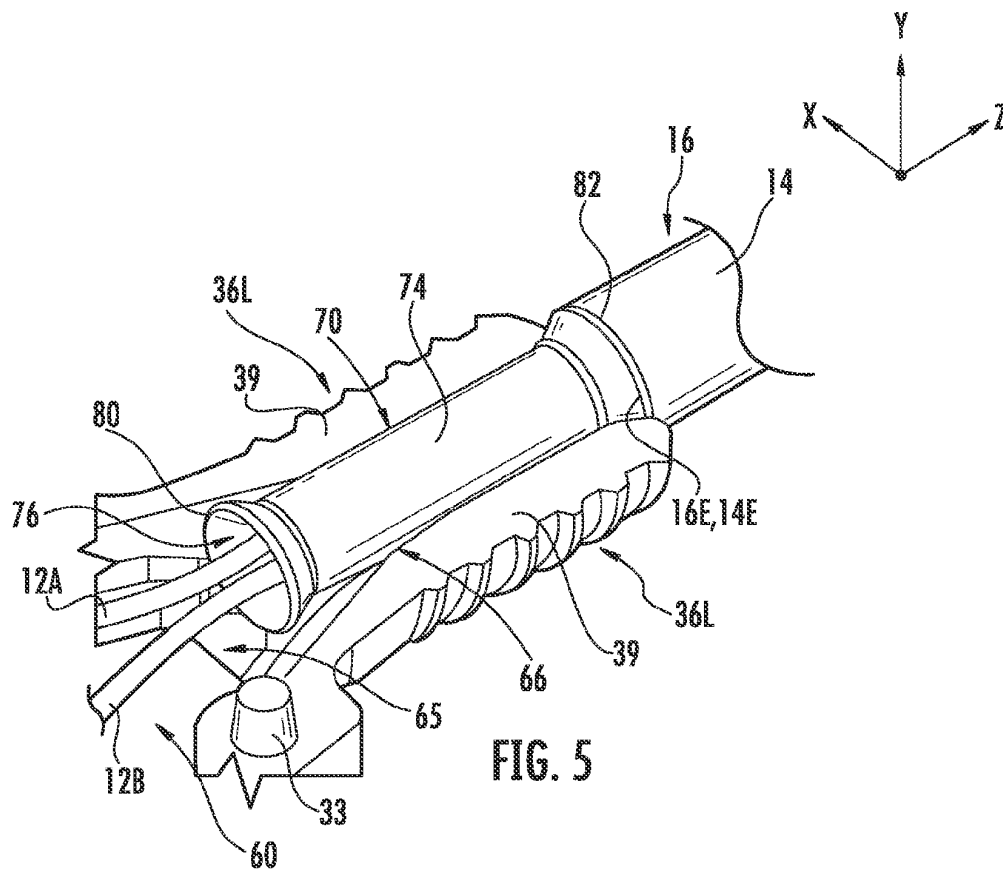


FIG. 4



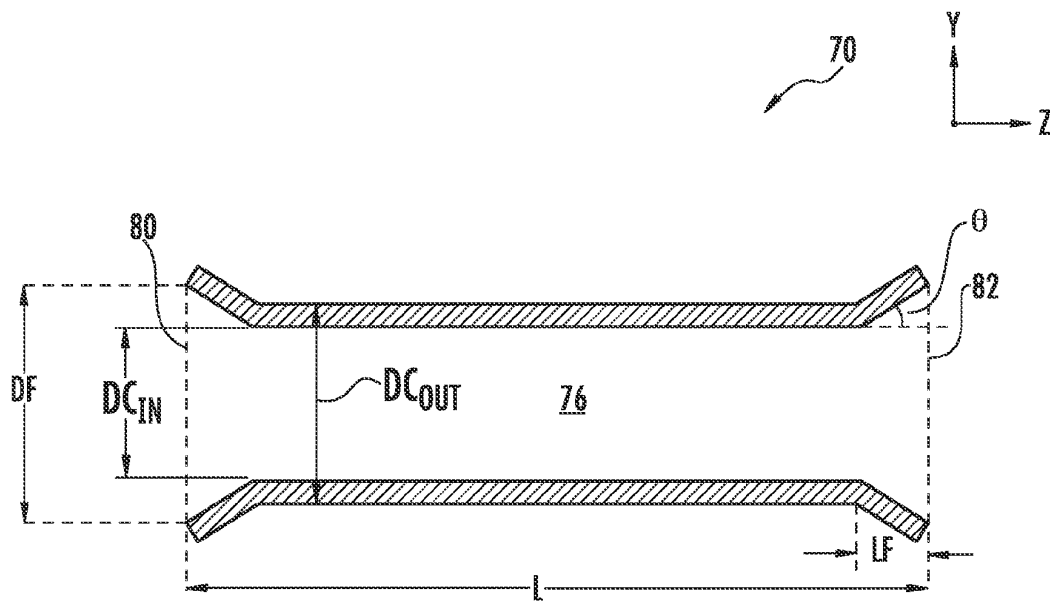


FIG. 6

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FIBER OPTIC CONNECTOR EMPLOYING OPTICAL FIBER GUIDE MEMBER

FIELD

The present disclosure relates generally to fiber optic connectors, and in particular relates to fiber optic connectors that employ an optical fiber guide member configured to protect at least one optical fiber during connector assembly.

BACKGROUND

Optical fiber is used for a variety of telecommunications applications, such as broadband voice, video, and data transmission. The benefits of optical fiber use include extremely wide bandwidth and low-noise operation. With the increasing and varied use of optical fibers, efficient methods of interconnecting optical fibers are needed. To this end, fiber optic connectors have been developed that do not significantly attenuate or otherwise alter the transmitted optical signal. Such fiber optic connectors need to be relatively rugged and adapted for frequent connection and disconnection to accommodate changes in the optical fiber transmission path. Because of the skill required in making optical fiber connections and the variety of applications and environments in which they are used, fiber optic cables carrying one or more optical fibers are typically pre-connectorized with fiber optic connectors by the fiber optic cable manufacturer before the fiber optic cable is deployed in a telecommunications system. The combined connector and fiber optic cable constitute a cable assembly.

Fiber optic connectors are designed to interconnect single or multiple optical fibers. Assembly of connector housing parts can create the risk of damaging or pinching an optical fiber. In the case of multiple fibers, for one example, a duplex fiber optic cable carries two optical fibers for full duplex communications. One type of duplex fiber optic connector used with a duplex fiber optic cable is an LC fiber optic connector. The LC fiber optic connector comprises a connector housing constituted by two connector housing sections that snap together during connector assembly. Unfortunately, the snap-assembly of the connector housing presents a substantial risk of pinching one or more of the optical fibers, which can damage the optical fibers and cause connection problems.

SUMMARY

An aspect of the disclosure is a fiber optic connector for connecting at least one optical fiber that extends from an end of a fiber optic cable. The connector includes a connector housing having mateable sections. When mated, the housing sections define a housing passage having opposite connector-end, which in an exemplary embodiment may be at a wide-end of the housing, and channel-end portions that define respective connector-end and channel-end passages. The channel-end portion is configured to be arranged adjacent the fiber optic cable end. The connector also includes an optical fiber guide member disposed in the channel-end passage and having a first transition end, which may be a flared end, that faces the connector-end passage. The optical fiber guide member defines a conduit configured to loosely confine and guide the optical fibers from the optical fiber cable end to the connector-end passage. The connector also includes at least one connector sub-assembly operably supported at the housing connector-end portion and configured to respectively support at least one end portion of the optical fiber.

2

Another aspect of the disclosure is a method of forming a fiber optic cable assembly for first and second optical fibers extending from an end of a duplex fiber optic cable and having respective first and second bare ends. The method includes providing a connector housing having opposing first and second mateable housing sections. The connector housing has opposite connector-end and channel-end portions that define a housing passage having corresponding connector-end and channel-end passages. The method also includes operably arranging first and second connector sub-assemblies at the housing connector-end portion. The method further includes providing an optical fiber guide member having a central conduit and a first transition end, and fixedly disposing the optical fiber guide member in the channel-end passage with the first transition end facing the connector-end passage. The method additionally includes leading the first and second optical fibers from the cable end, through the optical fiber member central conduit, out the first transition end, and through the housing passage to the first and second connector sub-assemblies. The method also includes respectively operatively engaging the first and second optical fiber bare ends in the first and second connector sub-assemblies.

Another aspect of the disclosure is an LC fiber optic connector for connecting first and second optical fibers that extend from an end of a duplex fiber optic cable. The connector includes a tapered connector housing having a connector-end portion and a channel-end portion. The connector housing defines a passage from the channel-end portion to the connector-end portion. The connector also includes first and second LC connector sub-assemblies operably arranged at the connector-end portion and configured to respectively support first and second bare ends of the first and second optical fibers. The connector also includes an optical fiber guide member fixedly disposed at the channel-end portion and having a transition end, which may be for example a flared end, that faces the connector-end portion. The optical fiber guide member is sized to loosely confine and guide the first and second optical fibers from the cable end and into to the housing passage for connection to the first and second LC connector sub-assemblies.

Additional features and advantages of the present disclosure are set out in the detailed description that follows, explaining the principles and operations thereof, and will also be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art from the description and/or recognized by practicing the disclosure as described. It is to be understood that the general description above and the detailed description that follows present exemplary embodiments of the disclosure, which are intended to provide an overview and framework for understanding the nature and character of the disclosure as it is claimed. The accompanying drawings are incorporated into and constitute a part of this specification, illustrating and further highlighting the exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure.

These and other advantages of the disclosure will be further understood and appreciated by those skilled in the art by reference to the following written specification, claims and appended drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A more complete understanding of the present disclosure may be had by reference to the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 illustrates an example multi-fiber fiber optic cable assembly that includes a duplex LC fiber optic connector and a duplex fiber optic cable;

3

FIG. 2 is a perspective partial cut-away, close-up view of the cable assembly of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is similar to FIG. 2 and shows the upper housing section separated from the lower housing section;

FIG. 4 is an X-Z cross-sectional view of the cable assembly of FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a close-up view of the optical fiber guide member as disposed in the channel-end portion of the lower housing section as shown in FIG. 3; and

FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of the optical fiber guide member of FIG. 5 as taken in the Y-Z plane and illustrating a tubular guide member embodiment with two transition ends.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Reference is now made in detail to the embodiments of the present disclosure, examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Whenever possible, the same or like reference numbers are used to refer to the same or like components or parts.

FIG. 1 illustrates an example multi-fiber fiber optic cable assembly ("cable assembly") 8 that includes a duplex LC fiber optic connector ("connector") 10 and a duplex fiber optic cable ("cable") 16. FIG. 2 and FIG. 3 are perspective partial cut-away, close-up views of connector 10 as part of cable assembly 8. FIG. 4 is an X-Z cross-sectional view of the cable assembly 8 of FIG. 2. A two-optical-fiber configuration for cable assembly 8 is shown and discussed herein by way of example. In general, cable assembly 8 can be figured for handling one or more optical fibers.

With reference to FIG. 1 through FIG. 4, connector 10 provides a connection in cable assembly 8 for two optical fibers 12A, 12B enclosed in a cable jacket 14 of cable 16. Cable 16 has an end 16E that corresponds to where cable jacket 14 has an end 14E. Optical fibers 12A, 12B extend from cable 16 at cable end 16E and have respective bare optical fiber end portions ("bare ends") 13A, 13B. In an example, optical fibers 12A, 12B are unbuffered. Further in an example, optical fibers 12A, 12B are bare optical fibers (e.g., 250 micron diameter optical fibers) covered by a sheath.

Cable assembly 8 also includes a flexible boot 20 and connector 10 includes a connector housing 30. Boot 20 includes an end section 21 that covers cable end 16E and that engages a channel-end portion 36 of connector housing 30, as discussed in greater detail below. Boot 20 is configured to prevent sharp bends in cable 16 where the cable engages connector 10.

With reference to FIG. 3, connector housing 30 includes upper and lower housing section 32U, 32L. In an example, upper and lower housing sections 32U, 32L are configured to mate (connect) with one another to form connector housing 30. An example mating configuration for connector housing 30 provides a snap-fit connection, as discussed below. Upper and lower housing sections 32U, 32L include respective connector-end portions 34U, 34L, respective channel-end portions 36U, 36L that are narrower than the connector-end portions, and respective middle portions 35U, 35L surrounded by their corresponding connector-end and channel-end portions.

The above-described connector housing portions respectively define a housing connector-end portion 34 and a housing channel-end portion 36, with a housing middle portion 35 in between the connector-end and channel-end portions when upper and lower housing sections 32U, 32L are mated. Housing connector-end and channel-end portions 34 and 36 are thus at opposite ends of connector housing 30, and housing middle portion 35 is therebetween. In an example, housing

4

middle portion 35 is tapered and gives connector housing 30 a generally tapered geometry that is narrower toward housing channel-end portion 36 and wider toward housing connector-end portion 34.

In an example, lower housing section 32L includes a locking feature 31L that snap fits with a corresponding locking feature 31U on upper housing section 32U to form the aforementioned snap-fit connection between upper and lower housing sections 32U, 32L to form connector housing 30. Upper and lower housing sections 32U, 32L may also contain alignment features 33 to ensure that the two housing sections are fitted together in the correct orientation.

FIG. 2 illustrates an example of cable assembly 8 with just lower housing section 32L in place. FIG. 3 is similar to FIG. 2 and shows upper housing section 32U positioned above lower housing section 32L in anticipation of connecting the two sections to form connector housing 30. In an example, upper housing section 32U and lower housing section 32L define a connector housing passage 60 having a connector-end passage 64 corresponding to housing connector-end portion 34, a middle passage 65 corresponding to housing middle portion 35, and a channel-end passage 66 corresponding to housing channel-end portion 36.

In an example, lower housing section 32L includes at housing middle portion 35 a protuberance 41L that provide housing passage 60 with a Y-shape, with channel passages 67A, 67B that lead from middle passage 65 to connector-end passage 64 (see FIG. 3 and FIG. 4).

Connector 10 also includes two fiber optic connector sub-assemblies ("connector sub-assemblies") 38A, 38B operably supported by connector housing 30 at connector-end portion 34. Connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B include respective ferrules 40A, 40B configured to support optical fiber bare ends 13A, 13B. Ferrules 40A, 40B are operably supported by respective ferrule holders 41A, 41B, which also respectively hold optical fiber lead-in tubes 42A, 42B (see FIG. 4). A portion of lead-in tubes 42A, 42B extend into connector-end passage 64.

In the example connector 10 shown in FIG. 1 through FIG. 4, connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B are LC fiber optic connector sub-assemblies that have generally rectangular housings 43A, 43B. Connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B also include respective levers 44A, 44B, whose function is discussed below.

Connector 10 also includes an optical fiber guide member 70 arranged in channel-end passage 66. FIG. 5 is a close-up view of an example optical fiber guide member 70 as disposed in the channel-end portion 36L of lower housing section 32L. Optical fiber guide member 70 is arranged adjacent cable end 16E when cable 16 is present. In an example, optical fiber guide member 70 is in the form of a cylindrical tube with a round or oval cross-section.

FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of an example optical fiber guide member 70 as taken in the Y-Z plane of FIG. 5 and illustrating a tubular guide member embodiment having two transition ends 80, 82, which can be for example, flared ends. Optical fiber guide member 70 has an outer surface 74 and a central conduit 76 sized to loosely confine optical fibers 12A, 12B. Optical fiber guide member 70 has opposite ends 80 and 82 that are open to central conduit 76. Optical fiber guide member 70 is fixedly disposed in channel-end passage 66. In an example, channel-end passage 66 is defined by substantially parallel housing walls 39 that form housing channel-end portions 36U, 36L. In an example, optical fiber guide member 70 is fixed within channel-end passage 66 by friction between outer surface 74 and housing walls 39 when the two housing sections 32U, 32L are mated (e.g., snapped together).

to form connector housing 30. In an example, guide member end 82 abuts cable end 16E, and further in an example can be affixed thereto.

Optical fiber guide member 70 has an axial length L, a central inside diameter DC_{IN} , a central outside diameter DC_{OUT} , the transition section can have a transition length LF, a transition angle θ , and a transition diameter DF at one or both ends 80 and 82. Example optical fiber guide member parameters include $L=5.5$ mm, $DC_{OUT}=1.38$ mm, $DC_{IN}=1.05$ mm, $\theta=30^\circ$, and $LF=0.55$ mm. The degree of transition at ends 80 and 82 may be different, including no transition at end 82.

Example materials for optical fiber guide member 70 include PVC, PVDF, PTFE, and like materials. Optical fiber guide member 70 can be formed by molding or by machining, and can have a unitary or a multi-body construction.

In cable assemblies utilizing multiple unbuffered optical fibers and a single connector housing, there is a risk of pinching the optical fibers between housing sections 32U and 32L, especially at or near their respective channel-end portions 36U and 36L when the housing sections are mated. If an optical fiber is pinched between the two housing sections during connector assembly, this can break or damage the optical fiber, resulting in a long-term fiber reliability issue for connector 10 and thus for cable assembly 8.

Optical fiber guide member 70 serves to loosely confine and guide optical fibers 12A, 12B from cable end 16E through connector housing passage 60 and out of transition end 80 to respective connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B, thereby preventing the optical fibers from straying between housing sections 32U, 32L, particularly at housing channel-end portion 36. The transition end 80 of optical fiber guide member 70 faces housing connector-end portion 34 and allows for optical fibers 12A, 12B to transition and spread out toward their respective connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B without rubbing up against a sharp or abrupt edge. Having a transition end 82 adjacent cable end 16E facilitates feeding optical fibers 12A, 12B from the cable end through optical fiber guide member central conduit 76. A transition end 82 also allows for improved contact between cable end 16E and guide member end 82 when the cable end and the guide member end abut each other.

With reference again to FIG. 1, an optical connection may be established for optical fibers 12A, 12B of cable 16 using connector 10 and adapters 46A, 46B. Two LC adapters 46A, 46B are shown in FIG. 1 and are configured to connect to respective connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B. Connector sub-assembly levers 44A, 44B are configured to latch to respective LC adapters 46A, 46B to create a secure fit between connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B and the LC adapters. LC adapters 46A, 46B are respectively configured to receive ferrules 40A, 40B and align them with complementary ferrules from optical connectors (not shown) connected to the opposing end of the LC adapters.

In an example of forming cable assembly 8, a cable retention member 90 is slide over cable 16, which is then inserted through boot 20. Boot 20 and cable retention member 90 initially remain loosely arranged around cable 16 not too far from cable end 16E until they are needed later on. Upper and lower housing sections 32U, 32L are then provided. Connector sub-assemblies 38A, 36B are operably arranged in lower housing section 32L at connector-end portion 34L.

Optical fiber guide member 70 is then disposed in channel-end portion 36 of lower housing section 32L, with guide member end 82 adjacent cable end 16E and with guide member end 80 facing connector-end portion 34L. In an example, guide member end 80 may extend into middle portion 35L

and thus into middle passage 65 when connector housing 30 is formed. Optical fibers 12A, 12B extending from cable end 16E are passed through guide member central conduit 76 and into housing passage 60 at middle passage 65. Optical fibers 12A, 12B are free to move within optical fiber guide member 70 but otherwise remain narrowly confined therein.

Optical fibers 12A, 12B are then passed through middle passage 65 to connector-end passage 64. The aforementioned tapered geometry for connector housing passage 60 as defined by a tapered housing middle portion 35 allows for optical fibers 12A, 12B to first be narrowly but loosely guided by optical fiber guide member 70 and then initially separated as they exit guide member transition end 80 to enter middle passage 65. In an example, optical fibers 12A, 12B are loosely guided to their respective connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B via channel passages 67A, 67B. Optical fiber bare ends 13A, 13B are feed through their respective ferrules 40A, 40B of the corresponding connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B.

Once optical fiber bare ends 13A, 13B are engaged by their respective connector sub-assemblies 38A, 38B, upper housing section 32U is mated to lower housing section 32L. At this point, cable retention member 90 (e.g., a crimpable ring) is slid over housing channel-end portion 36 while also engaging an end portion of cable 16 at cable end 16E. Cable retention member 90 serves to secure cable 16 to housing 30. Boot 20 is now slid over housing channel-end portion 36 so that boot end section 21 covers cable retention member 90, while the remaining part of the boot covers an end portion of cable 16.

Although the embodiments herein have been described with reference to particular features, it is to be understood that these embodiments are merely illustrative of the principles and applications thereof. It is therefore to be understood that numerous modifications may be made to the illustrative embodiments and that other arrangements may be devised without departing from the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A fiber optic connector for connecting at least one optical fiber extending from an end of a fiber optic cable, comprising:
 - a connector housing, the connector housing having mateable sections that when mated define a housing passage having respective connector-end and channel-end portions that define respective connector-end and channel-end passages, with the channel-end portion configured to be arranged adjacent the fiber optic cable end;
 - an optical fiber guide member, the optical fiber guide member disposed in the channel-end passage, the guide member having a first transition end associated with the connector-end passage, and the optical fiber guide member defining a conduit configured to loosely confine and guide the optical fibers toward the connector-end passage; and
 - at least one connector sub-assembly operably supported at the connector-end and configured to respectively receive an end of the at least one optical fiber.
2. The fiber optic connector according to claim 1, further comprising the optical fiber guide member having a second transition end opposite the first transition end.
3. The fiber optic connector according to claim 1, further comprising the connector housing sections being configured to snap-connect to each other.
4. The fiber optic connector according to claim 1, further comprising the at least one connector sub-assembly being part of a duplex connector configuration.
5. The fiber optic connector according to claim 1, wherein the optical fiber guide member includes an outer surface and the channel-end passage is defined by housing sidewalls, and further comprising holding the optical fiber guide member in

7

the channel-end passage by friction between the guide member outer surface and the housing sidewalls.

6. A cable assembly, comprising:

the fiber optic connector of claim 1; and

the fiber optic cable operably engaged to the fiber optic connector at the channel-end portion, with the at least one optical fiber passing through the optical fiber guide member conduit and into the connector end passage, and the fiber end of the at least one optical fiber operably supported by the at least one connector sub-assembly.

7. The cable assembly according to claim 6, further comprising:

a cable retention member that engages the connector housing at the channel-end portion and engages the end of the fiber optic cable; and

a flexible boot that surrounds the cable retention member and the fiber optic cable end.

8. The cable assembly according to claim 7, further comprising:

at least one adapter configured to engage the at least one of the connector sub-assembly.

9. A method of forming a fiber optic cable assembly for first and second optical fibers extending from an end of a duplex fiber optic cable and having respective first and second bare ends, comprising:

providing a connector housing having opposing first and second mateable housing sections and opposite wide-end and channel-end portions that define a housing passage having corresponding wide-end and channel-end passages;

operably arranging first and second connector sub-assemblies at the housing wide-end portion;

providing an optical fiber guide member having a central conduit and a first flared end defining a central passage through the optical fiber guide member;

fixedly disposing the optical fiber guide member in the channel-end passage with the first flared end facing the wide-end passage;

leading the first and second optical fibers from the cable end, through the central passage of the optical fiber guide member central conduit and first flared end, out the first flared end, and through the housing passage to the first and second connector sub-assemblies; and

respectively optically engaging the first and second optical fiber bare ends in the first and second connector sub-assemblies.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising snap-connecting the first and second mateable housing sections to form the connector housing.

11. The method of claim 9, further comprising providing the first and second connector sub-assemblies with first and second LC connector housings.

12. The method of claim 9, wherein the channel-end passage is defined by housing sidewalls, the optical fiber guide member has an outer surface, and further comprising fixedly disposing the guide member in the channel-end passage by

8

holding the guide member in the channel-end passage by friction between the guide member outer surface and the housing sidewalls.

13. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

securing the cable to the connector housing at the channel-end portion using a cable retention member; and covering the cable retention member and a portion of the cable with a flexible boot.

14. The method of claim 9, further comprising providing the optical fiber guide member with a second flared end that resides adjacent the duplex optical fiber cable end.

15. The method of claim 9, further comprising engaging one or both connector sub-assemblies to at least one LC adapter.

16. An LC fiber optic connector for connecting first and second optical fibers that extend from an end of a duplex fiber optic cable, comprising:

a tapered connector housing having a wide-end portion and a channel-end portion, and defining a passage from the channel-end portion to the wide-end portion;

first and second LC connector sub-assemblies operably arranged at the wide-end portion and configured to respectively support first and second bare ends of the first and second optical fibers; and

an optical fiber guide member fixedly disposed at the channel-end portion and having a transition end that faces the wide-end portion, the guide member sized to loosely confine and guide the first and second optical fibers from the cable end into the housing passage for connection to the first and second LC connector sub-assemblies.

17. The LC fiber optic connector of claim 16, further comprising the connector housing having upper and lower sections configured to snap-connect to each other.

18. The LC fiber optic connector according to claim 16, further comprising the first and second connector sub-assemblies respectively having first and second LC connector housings.

19. The LC fiber optic connector according to claim 17, wherein the optical fiber guide member is fixedly held in the channel-end portion by friction between the optical fiber guide member and the connector housing.

20. An LC fiber optic cable assembly, comprising:

the connector of claim 16; and

the duplex fiber optic cable secured to the channel-end portion of the connector housing, with the first and second optical fibers passing through the optical fiber guide member and out of the transition end and then through the housing passage, with the first and second optical fiber bare ends operably supported by the first and second LC connector sub-assemblies.

21. The method of claim 11, wherein the first and second LC connector housings form an LC duplex connector.

22. The LC fiber optic connector according to claim 18, wherein the first and second LC connector housings form an LC duplex connector.

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