


# Religiosity, Marital Quality and Couple Generativity in Italian Couples Belonging to a Catholic Spiritual Association: A Quali-Quantitative Study

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**Abstract** The current studies aimed, firstly, at exploring the relationship between the level of religiosity and marital outcomes, in terms of relationship quality and couple generativity; secondly, at gaining insight into which strategies the couples use to ensure their marital quality/couple generativity, and understanding if religious practices have a positive influence on the development of such strategies. The studies focused on a specific aspect of religiosity, that is the active involvement in a Catholic association, and compared couples with a high level of religious involvement (HRI) belonging to a Catholic international association (New Families) and couples with a low level of religious involvement (LRI). Study 1 ( $N = 194$ ) adopted a quantitative approach and analyzed data from questionnaires administered in two phases. Study 2 ( $N = 32$ ) adopted a qualitative approach (grounded theory) and analyzed data from semi-structured interviews. Results of Study 1 showed that HRI men scored higher in relationship quality and couple generativity than LRI men, while HRI women scored higher in couple generativity than LRI women. In Study 2, no differences were found between HRI and LRI couples with respect to the factors that ensure marital quality and generativity (care of the relationship, dialogue, sharing, maintenance of the centrality of the relationship), but HRI and LRI couples used different strategies to achieve these goals.

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## Introduction

A large body of research documents a positive influence of religiousness on different aspects of individual functioning. In particular, religious attendance and intrinsic religiosity are positively associated with personal well-being, and with social and communal involvement (Wink and Dillon 2003). Frequent church attendees are more likely than others to report high levels of happiness and satisfaction with life (Diener et al. 1999; Myers 1992; Veenhoven 1984), to engage in voluntary and community caregiving activities (e.g., Putnam 2000; Rossi 2001) and to be generative (Rossi 2001). Similarly, religiousness is positively associated with family (Kim et al. 2016) and couple well-being (Giblin 1997; Mahoney 2010). In this respect, studies have generally found a positive association between religiosity and couples' relationship quality or satisfaction (Ellison et al. 2010; Fincham and Beach 2010; Wolfinger and Wilcox 2008). Among couples' outcomes, however, an attribute that is gaining scientific attention is couple generativity or the ability of a couple to take care of its social bonds. While research generally identifies the two main outcomes of couple relationship with relational satisfaction and stability, couple generativity as well is a specific indicator of a good relationship functioning (Bertoni et al. 2012).

A well-known psychological theory (Erikson 1963) has shown that for the adult individual the mere well-being is not his/her own most developed outcome, rather it is his/her capacity of being “generative.” Individual generativity is the ability to move away from a narcissistic self-concern to take care of those who are to follow (Erikson 1963; McAdams et al. 1993). Generativity does not pertain exclusively to the biological level, but may be expressed especially at the social level. Drawing from this theory, it could be argued that the good functioning of a marital relationship cannot be measured only in terms of relationship satisfaction or stability, but it may involve also the ability to be generative, that is, that ability to go beyond one's boundaries as a couple and to take care of new generations.

The present contribution, by combining a quantitative and a qualitative study, aims at exploring the relationship between the level of religiosity and marital outcomes, in terms of relationship quality and couple generativity (Study 1—quantitative), and to gain insight into which strategies the couples use to assure their marital quality and couple generativity (Study 2—qualitative). In particular, we focus on a specific aspect of religiosity, that is, the active involvement in a Catholic church association and we compare couples who are actively involved in the activities of the association (couples high in religious involvement) and couples who just have a Catholic faith but who are not directly involved in church activities (couples low in religious involvement).

In order to define this parameter (religious involvement), we adopted the categories which are used by the sociology of religion. In particular, data related to religiosity in Italy show that 78% of adults identify themselves in Catholic religion; 82.5% of Italians, whether or not they attend religious functions, declare to be “religious people,” 9.7% define themselves “not religious” and 4.7% are atheist; 3.1% do not express themselves (Lanzetti 2011). In Italy, therefore, what is relevant for qualifying the religiosity is not just the “belief” aspect (the Catholic religion represents a pervasive cultural frame), but it is

the “practice” and the “belonging” (Brambilla et al. 2014). Specifically, the results of the last European Values Study (Lanzetti 2011) show that 48.5% of Italian people are practicing (attending religious functions at least once a month), while just 10.3% belong to religious associations and 7.4% carry out voluntary work in religious associations.

We have then used the criteria of practice and belonging in order to differentiate the sample: a) couples low in religious involvement (LRI): not practicing and not belonging/active to/in religious associations; b) couples high in religious involvement (HRI): practicing and belonging/active to/in religious associations. In particular, we have chosen New Families, a branch of Focolare Movement founded by Chiara Lubich, developed in 1967, which has more than 300 thousand members all over the world. New Families are committed to building and spreading a new way of being family, based on four guidelines: spirituality, education, sociality and solidarity. In particular, the members are asked to live the spirituality of unity, characteristic of Focolare Movement, protecting the family as it is the “basic cell of society,” through the life of families who go “against the tide,” responsible, open, looking upwards. According to the criteria used by Ivtzan et al. (2013), the LRI couples are characterized by “a low level of religious involvement with a low level of spirituality,” while the HRI couples by “a high level of religious involvement with a high level of spirituality.”

## Study 1: Religious Involvement, Marital Quality and Couple Generativity

The aim of this study was to explore the link between the level of religious involvement and marital outcomes in terms of relationship quality and couple generativity in a sample of couples in transition to marriage. Drawing on longitudinal data, we hypothesized that level of religious involvement measured before marriage would predict subsequent relationship quality, that is, the global degree of happiness toward the couple relationship (Hp1), and subsequent couple generativity, that is, the degree to which partners are involved as a couple in their community and take care of their social bonds (Hp2).

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants were 194 married individuals from 97 couples involved in a longitudinal project on the transition to marriage in Italy. In this project, couples provided data in two occasions. On the first occasion, couples were recruited at prenuptial courses<sup>1</sup> and were given a pack of self-report questionnaires to fill in at home with both oral and written instructions. Couples were subsequently contacted by researchers approximately 4 years after the first data collection. On this occasion, couples were mailed a pack of questionnaires, one postage-paid return envelope, a consent form and a cover letter informing them about the study. At Time 2, couples had been married from 1 to 82 months. 46.4% of couples had at least one child. Husbands ranged in age from 26 to 48 years, with a mean age of 36 (SD = 4.2). Wives ranged in age from 27 to 44 years, with a mean age of 34 (SD = 3.98). Partners had received a relatively high level of education in relation to Italian

<sup>1</sup> Prenuptial courses are normally held by councils or parishes and aim to provide couples with information that should help them in preparation for their marriage. For Catholic couples that intend to get married in church, these courses are compulsory.

society (wives: 15.5 years of education,  $SD = 3.4$ ; husbands: 14.3 years of education,  $SD = 3.7$ ) and reported an average net income of 1000–1500 Euros per month.

## Measures

### *Religious Involvement*

Partners were asked to indicate if they belonged to New Families; moreover, the religious involvement was assessed with a single item: “How much are you involved in church activities?”. The item was administered on a five-point scale (from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a lot*). In the analyses, we considered this measure assessed at Time 1.

### *Quality of Relationship*

The Quality of Marriage Index (Norton 1983), a six-item inventory, was used to assess marital quality ( $\alpha = .91$  for men;  $\alpha = .90$  for women). The first five items are on a seven-point scale (from 1 = *completely disagree* to 7 = *completely agree*) (Item example: “The relationship with my partner makes me happy”), whereas the last item, measuring a global perception of relationship quality, is on a ten-point scale (from 1 = *very unhappy* to 10 = *very happy*). In the analyses, we considered this measure assessed at Time 2.

### *Couple Generativity*

Couple generativity was assessed through four items inspired by the Loyola Generativity Scale on individual social generativity (McAdams et al. 1992). The items were administered on a five-point scale (from 1 = *completely disagree* to 5 = *completely agree*). Examples of items are: “We are committed as a couple to our community;” “We are a reference point for our friends.” The items were averaged to form a global index of couple generativity and showed good internal consistency ( $\alpha > .70$ ). In the analyses, we considered this measure assessed at Time 2.

## Results and Discussion

To test our hypotheses, we split the sample into two groups on the basis of the degree of religious involvement measured at Time 1. Partners who were part of New Families and reported to be religiously involved were considered in the group of HRI partners while partners who were not part of New Families and reported no religious involvement were considered LRI partners. We then conducted two series of one-way analysis of variance to analyze the differences between the two groups in terms of relationship quality and couple generativity for both women and men.

As for Hp1 no differences were found between HRI and LRI women in terms of relationship quality. On the contrary, HRI men ( $M = 6.41$ ) scored higher in relationship quality [ $F(1, 95) = 4.826, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ ] than LRI men ( $M = 5.99$ ). As for couple generativity (Hp2), statistically significant differences emerged between HRI ( $M = 3.18$ ) and LRI ( $M = 2.80$ ) women [ $F(1, 95) = 4.64, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .05$ ] and between HRI ( $M = 3.07$ ) and LRI ( $M = 2.62$ ) men [ $F(1, 95) = 9.37, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ ].

Our findings suggest that couples who entered their marriage with high levels of religious involvement are more prone to take care of their social bonds than less religious couples. This is in line with the literature showing that religiosity is connected with individual levels of generativity (e.g., Rossi 2001). Moreover, our results suggest that religious involvement may help husbands to be satisfied with their marriage. However, HRI women did not differ from LRI women in terms of subsequent marital quality. This result may suggest that religiosity can affect couple quality not directly but through indirect ways, for example assuming a moderating role between individual characteristics and satisfaction (e.g., Sullivan 2001).

## Study 2: Strategies and Religious Practices for Marital Quality and Generativity

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the strategies that couples use to ensure their marital quality and couple generativity and the role that religious practices play for the development of such strategies. Consistent with the goals stated above, we chose a qualitative approach, following Glaser and Strauss's Grounded Theory approach (1967), using an inductive process to create a theory tailored to the phenomenon under analysis. This approach guided both the data generation phase (semi-structured interview) and the one in which the discursive productions were analyzed, through the creation of categories generated by reading both the entire corpus and the literature.

The following two research questions were investigated: How do couples develop marital quality? Does the religious practice help the development of the relationship quality? What is the way to achieve this? (RQ1). What does the expression "couple generativity" mean? Does the religious practice help the development of generativity? What is the way to achieve this? (RQ2).

While several studies have been conducted regarding the importance of these constructs for the satisfaction of couples (e.g., Fincham and Beach 2010; Mahoney 2010), little research has been done allowing participants to describe how they actually build and nurture these constructs. There is even less research investigating whether and how religiosity, and in particular a spirituality that is proposed as a spirituality of the couple can help these processes.

## Method

### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants in this study were 16 heterosexual married couples. This was the only marriage for all 16 couples. The number of years the couples had been married ranged from 1 year to 10 years ( $M = 5.31$ ,  $SD = 3.20$ ). The age at marriage for the wives ranged from 20 to 34 ( $M = 26.69$ ,  $SD = 3.27$ ). The age at marriage for husbands ranged from 22 to 36 ( $M = 28.81$ ,  $SD = 3.23$ ). Half of the couples had at least one child ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = 0.89$ ,  $Mode = 2.0$ ); half of the couples were childless. Half of the couples reported to belong to New Families. All of the couples resided in the district of Milan.

Networking was used for generating a purposeful sample. The method of soliciting participants was the snowball technique. The researcher contacted the participants by telephone and explained the nature of the research as a study focusing on marital

functioning and entailing an interview with both spouses at their home or wherever was convenient. It was also explained that the questions would not be of an extremely personal nature. The researcher then told the couples that she would give them time to talk it over and consider participation and that she would call whenever it was convenient to schedule a time for the interview. The second telephone call was to solicit an answer to participation, to schedule a time for the interview and define the place; all the couples were interviewed at their home.

At the onset of each interview, the couples were given a copy of a letter explaining the procedures and confidentiality of the project. The questions designed for the interview were a guideline to be followed, but the responses of the participants served as the guide through the interview. All the interviews were taped and transcribed; the answers were coded by Atlas.Ti. Thirteen categories were created (total 100 codes) that best described the different responses. The individual responses were then placed in whichever of the categories most accurately described them.

### *The Interview Framework*

This study used the qualitative methodology interview format to gain a further in-depth understanding of factors contributing to the good quality of marriage from the perspective of the couple. While several questions generally guided the interviews, this study explored many issues more in depth, and relied on the answers given by the participants to dictate the flow of the questions. The interviews were structured around several guiding frameworks based on the existing literature. General demographic information was obtained, including: age of marriage, length of marriage, number of children and their age.

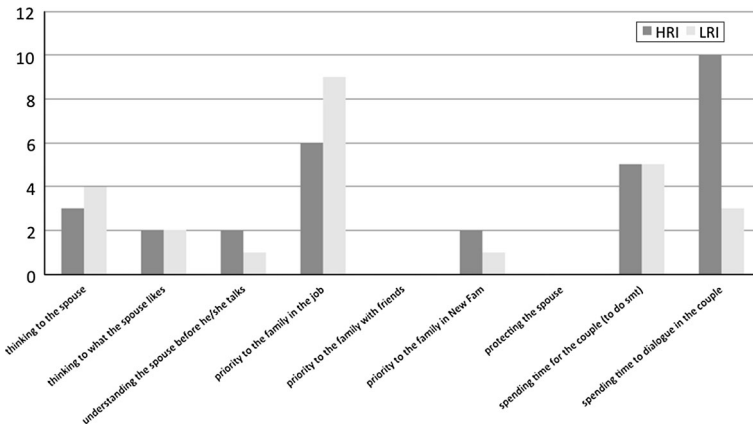
To answer our Research Questions, we chose to investigate three areas: “Marital quality”: definition, factors that facilitate/hinder marital quality; “Project of the couple”: dreams during the engagement, the choices made to achieve those goals/dreams, the critical issues encountered and the strategies/resources used to address them; “Relationship care”: definition and strategies used to pursue it.

## **Results and Discussion**

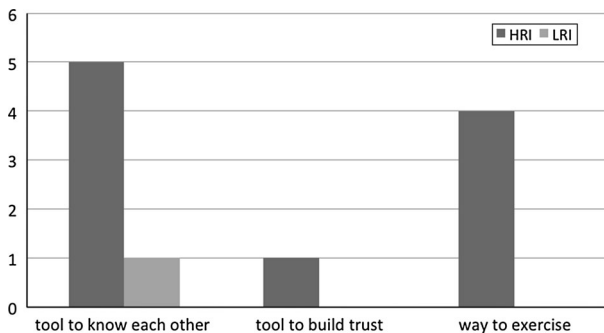
As for Research Question 1 (How do couples develop marital quality? Does the religious practice help the development of the quality of the relationship? What is the way to achieve this?), all interviewed couples mentioned the same factors: care of the relationship, dialogue, sharing, maintaining the centrality of the relationship. With reference to the LRI couples, the care of the relationship (see Fig. 1) consists above all of concrete facts such as giving priority to the family rather than to work and dedicating time to the couple (“and above all we are able to roll up our sleeves when we are in trouble...”; “it can be both in little and in big things, I don’t know, the favourite dish, the little things, because daily life grounds also on banality”; “differently from him, I am the most thoughtful one, I am the one who actually acts more tenderly, the one who cuddles...”). The care for the relationship, for HRI couples, is made, above all, of attention to dialogue and to the comparison between each other, of energy spent in thinking “in the other’s shoes” and refining a common perception (“I think it is this game of satisfying the other, to be able to lose a little part of us without losing our identity, this is the game”; “we have always given priority to the other’s needs”), as claimed by Dudley and Kosinski (1990) who highlighted how the role of religious activities can help couples to increase “think[ing] of the needs of others, be more loving and forgiving, treat each other with respect, and resolve conflict”

(p. 82). As suggested by Dudley and Kosinski (1990), prayer for the partner might encourage partners to think about each other in more loving or compassionate terms and so to treat each other with greater respect and sensitivity.

The dialogue, which is considered by HRI couples as something which helps to take care of the relationship, is used by these couples in a very specific way, which characterizes them (and then is strongly due to the spirituality shared by this subsample) and which clearly differentiates them from LRI (Fig. 2). It is interesting to observe that only HRI couples consider the dialogue as an important “step” to reach their objectives, while LRI intend the dialogue a crucial “resource” to overcome difficulties. We think this is due to the fact that the dialogue, in the couples belonging to New Families, is also a method, a tool which is searched and refined during time, thanks also to the educational inputs that the Movement supplies to the couples. This kind of dialogue is something to be learnt, which does not raise spontaneously, which has to be built through exercise, a “gymnastics” which improves through a continuous and accurate exercise. Not only “speaking about things to be solved, to find an agreement” but “trying to understand each other to go in depth, to know the other in her/his diversity”; “we gave fundamental importance to dialogue, so it was a resource, we were able to capture all the nuances of the character of both. We did not take anything for granted and it was always a useful exercise.”



**Fig. 1** What is “Caring for the relationship”? Study 2

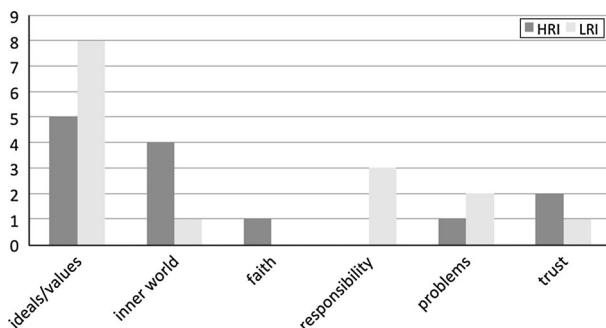


**Fig. 2** What is “Dialogue”? Study 2

Sharing the inner world is a quality which is present since the engagement time especially for HRI (Fig. 3): “...I think above all during the engagement: instead of doing many things, we talked a lot because we wanted to go deep in the relationship between us.” Ideals and values are the most shared elements by both the subsamples (“...my dreams were to meet someone with whom to share life, someone attractive and at the same time someone with whom to share some values of mine...”; “And then sharing, trying to share certain ideals, and we understand how important the openness that we tried to maintain was, the availability, the comparison with other families”); religiosity, instead, seems to facilitate also the sharing of the inner world of the couple, seen as something regarding the future (planning dimension), a goal to be reached and also an assessment of what has happened in the past. Since the beginning, HRI couples have a wider range of aspects to share/already shared. This thought is related to one of the foundations of the New Families Movement, and it can be considered a “*conditio sine qua non*” to realize the Art of Love: “...the real behaviour giving sense to the expressions ‘love’, ‘to love’, is ‘to become one’, to meet with the other’s demand. To ‘become one’...we have to completely ‘cancel’ ourselves and shoulder the other’s necessities” (Lubich 1996).

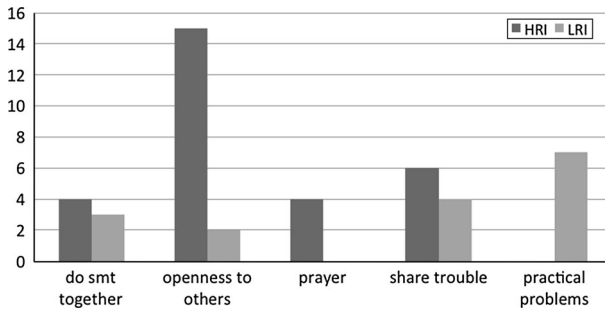
Another tool to develop marital quality is sharing (Fig. 4): LRI intend sharing as the co-management of the practical daily duties or as bearing with the problems and sufferings; instead HRI are characterized by a higher level of sharing of all the dimensions; also they are characterized by the sharing of activities and attention to the world outside the couple: Openness to others is understood as a dimension of service that enriches although it is likely to take a little of time away from the couple but which is recognized as a resource.

Finally, HRI cultivated the centrality of the relationship putting the spouse at the center from different points of view: being a “tool” of happiness for each other (“you also want the good of the other and you give all your energy to become an instrument for the happiness of the other and this creates a replacement of energy, a spiritual growth that increases the desire to be together ...”), totally giving oneself and his world to the other (“to find the space to be couple, in order to maintain and sustain a relationship, even if there are children, not only as parents, a space to compare, in an open way, where you know you can trust the other, say everything, even hard things, because when you get an open discussion you know that something said can hurt the other, and it’s hurting to tell the other, but I think it’s fundamental, otherwise some points won’t ever be clarified...”), giving oneself time (“the right time to stay together, to have the chance to express ourselves on different levels, the verbal level, even in the space of sexuality lived within an outstretched relationship”), giving up pride in order to reduce conflict (“a common thing is



**Fig. 3** What did the couples shared during the engagement period? Study 2





**Fig. 4** What is currently shared? Study 2

not going to bed when we are angry. It seems trivial... we try to restart before sleeping”), as confirmed by several studies (Butler et al. 1998; Marsh and Dallos 2001; Lambert and Dollahite 2006). LRI cultivated centrality of the couple by adapting individual preferences about work, home, place of residence to the needs of the couple.

Finally, the interviews have pointed out how HRI couples, concretely, move from the desired quality level of the relation to the one of “cultivated” centrality: We mean that HRI couples do not just say that the couple is the most important relational axis, but they act to demonstrate it to the partner, actively searching for situations to share, defeating laziness (“trying to see ourselves every possible moment, it can also be to see us for lunch rather than picking her up by motorbike—that is faster, but you can not talk: so we stay in the traffic, but we are there together and we can speak”; “sometimes we go to work together in the morning, so we look for all the possible moments, we try to cultivate this relationship, to talk about all the matters, to tell each other the things that are going well and the things that are wrong, what bothers me, how we can improve our relationship”), but also protecting these moments together from external intrusions (“at work I have said that for me the family is a priority, so I needed a more secure job and they were dazzled by my choice, they tried to make me give up”) or just from routine (“We have also eliminated the TV, so we aren’t even tempted to zap... Staying together is really a need... and then we try to create moments just for the couple, to be together and enjoy each other, to talk about life and not just about who’s going to pay the bill... talking about future plans, without being constrained by the day-by-day routine”).

As for Research Question 2 (What do couples mean for generativity? Does religious practice help generativity development? How?) The two subsamples are significantly different about the need to be generative, which can be intended in two ways. First of all, HRI couples desire to have children twice as much than LRI couples, while the most important dream of the latter ones is to “live together,” considered as an investment for the couple (Fig. 4). Moreover, LRI couples mainly refer to “having children,” an expression where children are seen as an independent element, as if they were a separate entity (even if generated) from the couple, conceived as an “unicum” (“there was the search for children, so we knew we desired children...”), while HRI couples, instead, emphasize the family (“building a family”), referring to children as something that in the future will complete the family itself, stressing the becoming process and an idea of family that, changing itself, overcomes the couple (“my dream was to build a family...”) (Cigoli and Scabini 2006).

Generativity, intended as the ability to move away from a narcissistic self-concern to take care of those who are to follow (Erikson 1963; McAdams et al. 1993), for HRI couples

becomes also a resource for coping with difficult moments (Fig. 4). HRI couples consider the openness toward other people as the most important aspect, seen as being available to others, a distinctive commitment of New Families (“a key moment was when we decided to become teachers of natural methods, because this choice is also an opportunity to discuss, to go into depth of the meaning of marriage...a way to do something for other couples”); an aspect that is considered fundamental because, when it is not present, the couple is impoverished (“in my opinion the dialogue is essential to enrich the life of the couple from the point of view of what we do, our motivation, how we grow together”).

## General Discussion

The present studies investigated the role of religiosity for marital functioning, by comparing highly religious couples with low religious couples. In Study 1, HRI partners were found to have higher global levels of marital quality (only men) and generativity than LRI partners. These results provide support for prior research, which indicates that religiosity is associated with greater marital satisfaction (David and Stafford 2013; Ellison et al. 2010; Pargament and Mahoney 2005). Moreover, our findings extend our knowledge on the link between religiosity and generativity. While the literature has shown the link between religiosity and individual levels of generativity, our findings, to our knowledge the first in scientific research, underline that religiosity predicts higher levels of couple generativity. The more partners are religiously involved the more they are able as a couple to take care of their social bonds.

Study 2 helped to identify the strategies and processes that favor the maintenance of marital quality and generativity. As for marital quality, we found that highly religious partners increase their marital quality thanks to a constant disclosure of their inner world. Disclosure is crucial for relationship maintenance (Bertoni and Bodenmann 2010; Laurenceau et al. 2005), as it helps partners to get to know each other and, thus, to respond to each other in an appropriate manner (Finkenauer and Buyukcan-Tetik 2015; Pagani et al. 2015; Reis and Shaver 1988). It is a relationship-long process in which partners reciprocate and match each other’s disclosures (Jourard 1971), favoring partners’ mutual understanding, validation and care (Rimé 2016). HRI couples were found in particular not only to share personal ideals, values, thoughts or feelings but also to discuss openly about their relationship (past experiences, common future plans). This aspect seems to be the means by which intimate partners build a feeling of we-ness and their identity as a couple. Communication in general, in fact, is the substrate of partners’ sense of we (Fergus 2015). In particular, giving the relationship thought and attention, i.e., “minding the relationship” or “relationship awareness,” boosts partners’ perceived we-ness (Acitelli 2002). Couple identity or we-ness is a central aspect of the quality of relationship (Manzi et al. 2015; Parise et al. in press) and commitment (Rusbult et al. 2000) and is an important source of strength and resilience in difficult times (Fergus 2015). Highly religious partners cultivate this “we” giving their relationship the centrality it deserves, through communication, dialogue, time and energy spent together, and defending it against external intrusions.

Moreover, highly religious partners are characterized by a greater capacity to be in the shoes of the other, a sort of “empathic accuracy” (Iafraite et al. 2012; Simpson et al. 2003), which make them able to recognize their partners’ needs and desires. Consequently, they are willing to sacrifice their own needs for the partner and they are prone to forgive the

partner after conflicts. Religiousness, thus, appears to enhance a transformation of motivation from one of self-interest to one which favors the other's interests and/or those of the relationship (Agnew et al. 1998; Parise et al. 2015; Rusbult et al. 1999). Religious activities in fact, priming cooperative goals, may decrease the frequency or intensity of negative relationship behaviors and the reciprocation of negative partner behaviors (Fincham et al. 2008; Prouty et al. 2016). In addition to decreasing negative relationship behaviors, religiosity promotes partners' capacity to support each other and work as a team against difficulties (Rusu et al. 2015), and to appreciate positive aspects of their lives (Lambert et al. 2009), which are crucial predictors of marital quality (Donato 2014; Donato and Parise 2012; Hilpert et al. 2016; Donato et al. 2014).

As for generativity, while for LRI couples generativity is intended mainly as having children (a biological generativity), for HRI couples generativity is related to all those activities that allow the couple to transcend its boundaries (both at the biological and at the social level). In this perspective, having children is a way to enrich and transform the couple and to grow as a couple. But overall, for HRI couples generativity is reflected in joint activities that partners take on together with the aim of improving their social and community context. In this way, highly religious partners demonstrate to be capable of moving away from a self-referential perspective and of becoming a resource for the whole society.

For HRI couples, the openness toward society, lived as an experience of the couple, is a fundamental way to maintain their couple identity and positive couple functioning. In line with Aron et al. (2002), couples' shared activities (beyond the couple boundaries) are the means through which partners continue to maintain their identity as a couple.

## Limitations and Future Paths

Study 2 was conducted throughout the Milan district. The data were collected from a non-random sample and therefore cannot be generalized to the wider population. In addition to the geographic and sampling limitations, there is a race limitation. All respondents were Caucasians born in Italy. Factors contributing to the marital satisfaction of different races or nationalities, or those of mixed race or nationality, might be dissimilar.

The interview format of this research might have caused couples to be too embarrassed or more reluctant to decline participation if they are not satisfied with their marriage. The analysis of data in this study might be a further limitation. This study was designed to give a more complete and richer picture of marital satisfaction. In asking couples open-ended questions, the research yielded an extremely wide range of responses. In an effort to search for themes and patterns among the responses, the responses were coded: The possibility of researcher bias is a plausible consequence. For the purpose of this study, respondents were asked to explain what factors contribute to the marital quality: The spouses might influence each other.

We chose a Catholic association strongly dedicated to the family and its promotion: For this reason, the influence of religiosity on the life of the couple could be even stronger than average: it would be interesting to see whether the involvement in religious movements that don't have this specific aim produces the same impacts. In both studies, the sample was composed of relatively young spouses with young children. It would be interesting to explore how/if couples maintain the marital quality and develop generativity during different stages of the life cycle.

## Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of interest** None.

**Ethical Approval** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Informed Consent** Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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