

## FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: A LONG-LASTING SOURCE OF WELL-BEING

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*This article examines the link between family relationships and well-being, focusing on relationship quality, as well as on the positive and negative constructs used to describe it. Fincham and Beach (2010) developed a perspective aimed not only at reaching a balance between the negative and the positive aspects of relationships, but also at understanding a relationship 'in itself', where 'relationship flourishing' represents the core construct. The relational-symbolic model (Scabini & Cigoli, 2000) has provided new insights into the concept of 'relationship flourishing'. According to this model, generative well-being can be considered as a specific form of well-being produced by flourishing family relationships. Generative well-being occurs when family generativity and social generativity are connected to each other. Research findings highlighting the two-fold role of family and social generativity are reported in the final part of the contribution.*

**Keywords:** relationship quality, flourishing, generative well-being

### 1. Introduction

Family is currently a topic of much debate, this being most likely due to the rapid socio-demographic changes that are taking place worldwide (Albert & Ferring, 2013). In Western countries, particularly in Europe, the Sixties saw the beginning of a decline both in fertility and propensity to marry, while civil unions and other types of partnership increased, together with the rates of separation and divorce. Furthermore, we have witnessed a rise in the number of children born out of wedlock, single-parent families, step-families, and same-sex marriages.

However, as evidenced by the European Values Study, the family is still seen as extremely important by individuals and couples from different life trajectories (Rossi, 2012). In addition, the decrease in birth rates - which no longer guarantees generational change - along with the ageing of the population, have had a general impact on family dynamics. This has led to the formation of families characterized by a smaller number of cohabiting members, and by the presence of living relatives (although not cohabiting) from three or more different generations.

These trends are also confirmed by the SHARE (Survey of Health Ageing and Retirement in Europe) research project, which showed - through different waves of data collection - a diversified

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distribution of families with three or four generations in the European countries involved ([www.share-project.org](http://www.share-project.org)). Such families - termed 'beanpole families' by Dykstra (2010) - feature relatively few intra-generational ties and numerous multigenerational ones (Bengtson, 2001). Family relationships are therefore paradoxical. On the one hand, they are more fragmented - due to the small number of cohabiting members and the presence of divorced families -, whilst on the other hand they present more intergenerational ties than in the past. Moreover, massive immigration to Europe has contributed to the emergence of families from different ethnic backgrounds and interethnic families, as well as second- and third-generation immigrant families, thus compelling us to approach the relationship between gender and generations both at home and in society in a brand new way.

A fundamental question, therefore is: what are the risk factors that may affect the well-being of families? And also: what are the protective resources for the family to best fulfill its fundamental role, that is "to make human beings human," as Bronfenbrenner (2005) maintained?

## **2. What Do We Know about the Link between the Couple Relationship, the Parent-Child Relationship, and Well-Being?**

A large number of studies show that married or cohabiting adults score better on physical health and mental health conditions than their never-married or separated/divorced counterparts (for a review, see Koball, Moiduddin, Henderson, Goesling, & Besculides, 2010). Where unmarried adults are more likely than married adults to drink, use drugs, and engage in negative health behaviors, married people are more likely to engage in positive health behaviors, such as seeing a doctor regularly, eating healthy meals, or, in the case of chronic or severe health problems, adhering to treatment regimens. Despite evidence being limited, research suggests that marriage may also increase longevity.

In addition, marriage has been linked, with regard to mental health, to lower levels of depression and higher levels of self-worth, sense of connectedness, subjective well-being, life satisfaction, and purpose in life. If living in a couple or living as a single person makes a difference, it clearly follows that being in an intact or a separated couple relationship also might have an impact on well-being.

In a considerable number of studies comparing intact families and separated/divorced families (Amato & James, 2010; Amato, 2000), divorced men and women reported on average lower levels of physical and mental health than their continuously married counterparts. The former exhibited a greater number of depression and anxiety symptoms, health problems, and substance use, along with a generally greater risk of mortality. Divorce appears to have beneficial effects only when the couple relationship is characterized by a high degree of violence, particularly for women (Vatnar & Bjorkly, 2012).

Why should divorce affect mental and physical health? Most explanations refer to the stress of marital disruption along with the loss of protective factors afforded by marriage. Marital dissolution is a stressful experience for most individuals, and stress can have adverse effects on physical and mental health, partly through its detrimental effects on immune system functions. With respect to protective factors, marriage provides many benefits, including emotional support, companionship, a regular sexual partner, economic security, and the encouragement to adopt healthier lifestyles.

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Separation and divorce also have an impact on the well-being of children. The children of divorced parents score lower on physical health outcomes in comparison with the children of continuously married parents (Amato & James, 2010). In particular, young children report more cases of accidents and illnesses, while adolescents are more likely to use alcohol and tobacco as well as to engage in high-risk sexual behaviors. Moreover, they present more internalizing and externalizing symptoms and lower educational attainment.

Some aspects of maladjustment (for instance, those regarding educational outcomes) tend, at least partially, to subside after one or two years, while others (for instance those regarding the internalization of couple functioning) emerge later in time. In other words, there is a ‘sleeper effect’ from divorce. Thus, when young adults form their own couple relationships, fears and insecurity re-emerge, which can lead to engaging in numerous short-lived relationships, or difficulty in committing to a serious relationship.

The well-being of both children and parents however, also depends on how relationships are restructured after separation. Research has particularly highlighted the risks faced by monoparental families, particularly those that are mother-led. Children from these families, often labeled ‘fragile families’ (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010), tend to have poorer social, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and health outcomes, especially if they are in chronic and persistent poverty. However, the severity of these outcomes decreases if the family structure (monoparental or step-family) is stable.

To summarize, the risk conditions of children derive from fewer resources being available to these families when compared with intact families, and, last but not least, from the quality of the relationship between ex-partners and between parents and children.

### **3. Quality of Relationship and Well-being**

The last factor, that is the quality of a relationship, needs to be examined in more depth. Psychological literature has increasingly underlined the notion that not only family structure impacts well-being, but also the quality of the relationship between partners as well as between parents and children. A recent meta-analysis conducted by Proulx, Helms, and Buehler (2007) demonstrated both a concurrent and a longitudinal positive association between marital quality and personal well-being. These authors found that the higher the quality of the couple relationship, the higher the partners’ personal well-being. Moreover, countless studies have found that child well-being is predicted by parenting quality (for a review see Newland, 2014, 2015), which also appears to be the case for separated or divorced families.

What do we mean exactly by quality of relationship? Although relationship quality is studied in a variety of disciplines, it lacks conceptual and empirical clarity. The literature is littered with numerous terms such as satisfaction, adjustment, happiness, and health, all of which tend to be used interchangeably.

There is increasing recognition of two major approaches to quality of relationship, which focus on intrapersonal and interpersonal processes respectively (Fincham & Rogge, 2010). The intrapersonal approach focuses on the individual judgments of family members, namely, their subjective evaluation of family relationships. This approach tends to use such terms as satisfaction, happiness, and health. In contrast, the interpersonal approach typically looks at patterns of interaction such as conflict, communication, and support, and tends to favor the use of

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terms such as adjustment. This approach employs a variety of constructs to identify crucial aspects of relationship quality.

However, if we look at the articles on family relationships that have been published during the last decade, we notice that negative constructs have been employed more than their positive counterparts. For instance, the literature has extensively investigated the role of conflict in determining marital distress or children's maladjustment, but only recently it has investigated the role of forgiveness in determining individual and relational well-being (Hodgson & Wertheim, 2007; Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003).

Attention to positive constructs, even if less pronounced, is certainly of interest to family scholars since it leads us toward a more adequate understanding of what constitutes the quality of the relationship in terms of relationship health. In fact, relationship health is not merely the absence of relationship dysfunction - just as the absence of a physical illness is not sufficient to define physical health. For example, we can have a devitalized marriage, that is, a marriage that is relatively free of pain, and yet relatively free of positive benefits (Fincham & Beach, 2010). Various approaches have been tried to bring into focus the quality of a relationship in terms of its health status.

One approach used to address this problem has been to consider the quality of the relationship not as a unidimensional construct - ranging from extreme dissatisfaction to extreme satisfaction - but as a bidimensional construct composed of both positive and negative dimensions. For instance, forgiveness toward a partner after an offence can be analyzed both in terms of its negative dimension (absence of revenge and withdrawal) and its positive dimension (presence of benevolence) (Paleari, Regalia, & Fincham, 2009). Assessing positive relationship quality and negative relationship quality as independent constructs provides additional information on current relationship functioning that could not be obtained from unidimensional measures (Mattson, Rogge, Johnson, Baker, & Fincham, 2013; Fincham & Rogge, 2010).

In fact, using two dimensions allowed the researchers to identify those who were high in positivity and high in negativity (ambivalent partners) versus those who were low in positivity and low in negativity (indifferent partners), both of which had previously been neglected in marital research.

Another approach to conceptualizing the quality of the relationship has been to consider constructs not as positive or negative per se, but to identify the processes that make these constructs positive or negative (e.g., Donato & Parise, 2015). Consequently, we can discuss, for example, constructive and destructive conflict and identify positive processes in conflict, such as negotiation, compromise, problem-solving, affiliative styles, and negative processes, such as verbal or physical aggression, coercive styles, and withdrawal (McCoy, Cummings, & Davies, 2009; Veroff, Young, & Coon, 1997).

Recently, the literature has also identified some relational constructs such as dyadic coping, which describe positive or negative styles whereby partners cope with daily stress (Donato et al., 2015; Bodenmann, 2005). Among dyadic coping strategies, Bodenmann (2005) identifies shared coping strategies that both partners enact together as a couple. Such shared strategies, called common dyadic coping, can be described as pro-relationship.

Another construct that can be rightfully included in the category of pro-social and pro-relationship constructs is 'commitment', particularly since it has been considered in the works of Caryl Rusbult (e.g., Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Commitment represents a long-term orientation toward a relationship and has at its core a process of transformation of motivation that leads partners to

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depart from their immediate self-interest and to act on the basis of the good of the relationship (e.g., Rusbult & Buunk, 1993).

Some of these constructs have been used to analyze both the functioning of the family as a whole and specific dyadic relationships. In this regard, an interesting example is the construct of self-efficacy belief. This can be investigated both in terms of filial, parental, and marital efficacy, and in terms of collective efficacy (Caprara, Regalia, Scabini, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2004), which impact on the quality of family functioning and family life satisfaction (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Regalia, & Scabini, 2011).

These are only a few of the many constructs that could be cited. They attest, on the one hand, to the complexity of the concept of relationship quality, but also to its generic nature as an umbrella concept that contains myriad of constructs. In any case, these constructs are evidence of an effort to identify the family's resources, rather than just its deficits, thus responding to the need expressed in the field of close relationships to move from a deficit model to a salutogenic model (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987).

#### **4. For a Science of Positive Family Relationships: Relationship Flourishing**

Undoubtedly, such a change of perspective cannot be achieved only by striving to achieve a balance between negative and positive aspects. It is necessary to be able to view family resources as an end in themselves (Fincham & Beach, 2010), to study the relationship in and of itself, and to promote not individual well-being, but the good of the relationship.

This necessity leads us to a metalevel of analysis with respect to the observations made so far. In particular, it compels us to outline a comprehensive framework of family functioning that would connect the specific aspects of family relationships. In this respect, Fincham and Beach (2010) recently attempted to create a true positive relationship science in which the central construct is represented by '*relationship flourishing*'. Fincham and Beach applied this to couple relationships, however it can also be extended to family relationships.

According to the authors, this new field can be included in the broader fields of positive psychology and relationship science. In both of these sectors the topic of family relationships is only peripheral, owing to the individualistic climate that characterizes Western society, and also permeates psychological science. It can be argued that it would be much more fruitful to consider it as central to family relationships. In fact, "a complete positive psychology requires positive relationship science as a fourth pillar of equal importance to its existing three pillars (positive experiences, positive individual traits, positive institutions) (Fincham & Beach, 2010, p. 18).

But what does the expression 'relationship flourishing' imply? It is worth noticing that social philosophers use the term 'flourishing' rather than 'happiness' (Snow, 2008; Rasmussen, 1999). They do so to highlight the eudaimonic aspects of well-being as well as to shift the focus from short-term affective well-being (i.e., happiness) to more enduring life challenges, such as having a sense of purpose and direction, achieving satisfying relationships, and realizing one's true potential. Fincham and Beach (2010), in discussing family relationships, use the expression 'flourishing' to define the features of the well-being of the relationship and highlight the aspect of optimal functioning, the perfection toward which the relationship can strive, thereby giving meaning and direction to the lives of the participants.

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Following this line of thought, these authors state that a relationship is flourishing if it expresses the deeper aspirations of families. These comprise their aspirations for connection, engagement, and meaning. Moreover, a flourishing relationship allows a dynamic balance between focusing on the marital relationship, other family subsystems, involvement in other social networks, and engagement in the broader community within which the relationship exists.

This perspective is interesting for at least two reasons:

a) It considers the family relationship in and of itself as a source of well-being and not as an element of individual well-being. This well-being, however, in keeping with a perspective of eudaimonic well-being, is pursued to the extent that the family relationship realizes its potential, by maintaining connection, engagement, and meaning alive.

b) It underlines the capacity of family relationships to flourish – that is functioning well – as the ability to both connect various subsystems (i.e. marital, parental, sibling) with one another as well as the family with the community network.

The family is a multigenerational system with interdependent relationships, and the functioning of the entire system is connected to the functioning of the various subsystems. From this point of view, the conceptual and empirical challenge of family study is to maintain the focus on a subsystem or a specific relationship. Likewise, it also needs to see their connections with other subsystems and other relationships so as to move toward an understanding of the entire system. However, the latter is difficult to capture since it is more than the sum of its parts.

However, if we want to develop the concept of relationship flourishing to that of '*family relationship flourishing*', we have to better identify the specific nature of family relationships. This will help us to understand the peculiar features of family ties and to plan more appropriate and effective family interventions.

The relational symbolic model that I have developed in collaboration with Vittorio Cigoli and our colleagues at the Family Studies and Research University Center can provide interesting insights for responding to these needs (Scabini & Cigoli, 2000, 2012; Cigoli & Scabini, 2006).

## **5. The Relational-Symbolic Model: The Peculiar Features of Family Relationships**

The analysis of this issue begins with the question: What are the peculiar features of family relationships that set them apart from other kinds of relationships that we cultivate over the course of our lives?

First of all, unlike extra-familial relationships, where we act through the role that we play, we are involved in family relationships with our entire person, and not only with one aspect of ourselves. Thus, for example, being a parent does not coincide with the exercise of the paternal or maternal role, even if it includes it. The family relationship is a surplus in that it exceeds the role into which it is conveyed.

This aspect reveals not only the richness, but also the constraints, of the family relationship. One might escape from a family role, but not from family membership. For example, each of us has no choice about being born into a family and to our parents. For this reason, family relationships and, in particular, generational relationships have a crucial influence on the construction of personal identity and well-being over the entire course of one's development.

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The family relationship exceeds this role, but it also goes beyond interactions. The relationship is positioned on a level that is above and inclusive of the role and, in the same way, as Robert Hinde (1997) points out, it is above and inclusive with respect to the interaction, containing meanings that transcend those emerging from interactions.

The term relationship refers to the fact that, when something happens to a family member (or to a family as a whole), the meaning attributed to this event is linked to the history of previous relationships and to the history of the family ties. These ties are in turn part of a mother culture. Family members are strongly linked together over time, even if they are unaware of this; when we speak about the family relationship, we are thus making reference to what has been implicitly or explicitly established (and continues to be agreed upon), with regard to values, meanings, habits, and the assignment of roles.

Interaction, on the other hand, is considered to be the observable side of the underlying, imperceptible relationship. The interaction is focused on the 'here-and-now' of exchanges between family members, while the relationship requires a broader temporal scope. The relationship reveals itself, in fact, in the connection between past, present, and future. In these terms, the relationship has, by definition, an intergenerational aspect. We can therefore confirm that we view family as a generational context.

This perspective delineates the intergenerational side of the relationship, which means that we need to take into consideration the role of different generations in order to understand the current pattern of family functioning. Therefore, when we speak about the couple's well-being, we think that it is important to take into account not only the quality of the relationship between the partners, but also the quality of the relationships with their families of origin. Research carried out in line with this perspective has provided interesting insights and broadened our knowledge of the relational sources that contribute to the good functioning and the well-being of a family sub-system (Manzi, Parise, Iafrate, Sedikides, & Vignoles, 2015; Parise, Donato, Pagani, Ribeiro, & Manzi, 2015; Donato, Iafrate, Bradbury, & Scabini, 2012; Sabatelli & Bartle-Haring, 2003).

In addition, and even more importantly, if we want to understand the construction of an immigrant couple's identity (a very relevant problem in Europe) and the quality of their relationship, we must take into account the partners' relationship with their families of origin and what this brings in terms of values, habits, and traditions. Further, we need to consider their relationship with the host culture in terms of its representations, habits, and values with respect to the couple's relationship.

The intergenerational dimension, however, cannot only be equated with previous generations, but also with those of the future. This introduces us to another specific aspect of family relationships - the concept of generativity, which we assert (with good reason) to be at the heart of family relationships.

## **6. The Relational-Symbolic Model: Generativity**

Generativity is a word coined by Erikson (1982) from the root words 'generation' and 'generate', and it represents a peculiar feature of adult development. Generativity primarily expresses the desire to procreate and to take care of one's offspring. However, it can also manifest itself in other ways, for example, in productive and creative activities at the service of

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the new generation. Its opposite is represented by stagnation, which essentially consists of an exasperated preoccupation with oneself (self-preoccupation).

The concept of generativity was revisited from the 1990s by several authors, including McAdams, and de St. Aubin, who clarified its meaning and extended the field of its applications by introducing the concept of social generativity. This term refers to the commitment toward the following generation by fostering the development and well-being of individuals and social systems that outlive the self (McAdams, 2001, p. 396). In particular, McAdams and de St. Aubin (1998) propose a model of generativity that involves power and love, agency and communion, self-expansion and the care of and commitment to the new generation, which implies giving up the self for the good of something beyond the self. Generativity is a construct situated in the psychology of individual lives and is an especially salient psychological issue in midlife, but it can arise at any point during the course of adult life (McAdams, 2001). With regard to research, three interrelated aspects have been analyzed: generative concern, generative goals, and generative actions. It is important to point out that societies may differ drastically with respect to the content and form of generativity. Cultural forces, in fact, decisively shape how people orient themselves toward the next generation (de St. Aubin & Bach, 2015).

In our relational symbolic model, generativity is understood to be the outcome of family relationships and the exchange between generations, provided that these family relationships realize their best potential. In the opposite case, they produce degenerative outcomes.

The core of generativity is the drive to go beyond the self, the realization of pro-sociality in its strongest sense, and the desire to transform and transmit everything that one has received to posterity.

Thus, by bringing a child into the world, parents are generative if they not only see the child as an extension of themselves, but if they are also able to see the child as a new family and social generation to support and launch into the future. Through their child, they realize not only a form of genetic immortality, but also a symbolic immortality if they commit to transmitting their legacy and, at the same time, leaving room for this new generation's contribution. This process is analogous to what occurs in other forms of artistic, cultural, and social generativity. This is the form of typical familial well-being that we can call 'generative well-being' – a form of well-being produced by a flourishing family relationship in its strictest sense.

This, however, only happens if generativity is seen in generational terms i.e., if family generativity and social generativity are connected. Generativity ties together different generations, promotes exchange between generations, and passes on values and legacy from generation to generation. Thus generativity includes, on the part of the preceding generation, caring and letting go and, on the part of the following generation, it includes taking into account the received legacy and actively and pro-socially transforming it both for the family's future and for that of society.

## **7. A New Form of Stagnation**

Today, however, family generativity runs the risk of a new form of stagnation. The child is not regarded as a new familial and social generation, but mainly as an expansion or mirror image of the self. This is typical of modern Western culture in a period that has been called "the era of the glorified self" (Baumeister & MacKenzie, 2014). Parenting seems to have lost the generative



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power in that it has gradually morphed into a long-running activity with the purpose and justification of serving the self: to make oneself happy, and to promote self-actualization (Baumeister & MacKenzie, 2014), very often through the child. The child, in this sense, tends to become a form of affective realization of the adults.

This loss of generativity is found not only in the child's earliest stages of development, but also later, in the child's transition to adulthood which now assumes, in Western countries, the fluid features of a long transition. In southern European countries in particular, it gives rise to what is termed the 'on-going family', as children prolong their stay in the parental home. There are different modalities by which family relations are structured during a child's young adulthood; a constant finding, however, is that the family tends to assume greater prominence as compared with the past and that parents tend to prolong care, often excessive care, for their children, as is clearly seen in the phenomenon of 'helicopter parenting'. Helicopter parents are those who are overly involved in their children's lives, even when they attend college (Padilla-Walker & Nelson, 2012).

In general, research shows strong and positive links between family variables and the well-being of young adults. This holds true even in countries in which children live for a longer time with their parents, and have less economic independence, such as in southern Europe - Italy, in particular (Crocetti & Meeus, 2014; Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006; Scabini, Lanz, & Marta, 2006; Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007). More specifically, a recent national-level study of a sample composed of nine thousand young Italians (Alfieri & Marta, 2014) found that young adults, in general, have a positive perception of family relationships, which are characterized by high levels of support from parents (91.2%) and good communication (76.0%). Trust in the family and its components also reached high levels (90.0% for the responses 'very' and 'quite'). The mother, in particular, turns out to be the figure that obtains the most positive scores (93.0% for the answers 'very' and 'quite') (Scabini & Marta, 2013).

On the other hand, the research shows elements of ambivalence with regard to the relationship between the family and the social context. In fact, the family is perceived with similar, moderately high percentages as both a place of openness to exchange with others (69.4% for the answers 'very' and 'quite') and as a refuge from the world (66.6% for the answers 'very' and 'quite') (Scabini & Marta, 2013).

Given this picture, we can ask: do these good family relationships produce true generative well-being?

In-depth interviews conducted with parents and adult children found problematic elements in this regard (Cigoli, Margola, & Molgora, 2010; Scabini & Cigoli, 1997). We have spoken of a stifled generativity and intergenerational impasse, which reveals a reciprocal advantage between the two generations. On the one hand, parents - precisely because they see their child above all as an extension of themselves - tend to hyper-protect them and reduce their emancipatory push. Thus, they have the benefit of prolonging the parenting process (becoming 'forever parents'). On the other hand, children postpone making choices and committing to adult responsibilities, remaining 'forever young'. Furthermore, parents and children have shared representations of their future. They are drawn together by a negative representation of adult life characterized by uncertainty and precariousness, whether on the social level - the difficulty of achieving one's career aspirations - or on the family level - the difficulty in finding a trustworthy partner. Parents and children also share an idea of self-fulfillment based on emotional self-centeredness severed from generativity and its concomitant responsibility toward a future family and the future of society. This representation of the future in terms of worry and anxiety is more

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prevalent in families with children who are still students, in comparison with families containing younger members who are in employment. These younger working people have a more constructive attitude toward society, and are more distant from their parents. This problematic intergenerational transfer has also been observed in Italian family-owned businesses (Ghislieri & Gatti, 2012).

However, this loss of family generativity has a counterpoint in an intergenerational impasse of a social type. In fact, the generation of parents, the ‘adults’ and ‘elderly people’ in society, and that of children (the ‘youth’), have relationships of an opposite type compared with family relationships. In particular, they appear to behave in an opposite manner to their behavior within the family; it is not protection that dominates - but competition - with the adult-elderly generation holding the resources and power, and the younger generation experiencing difficulty in finding a space for active realization (generational unfairness, see Donati, 1991). From a macro-systemic perspective, one could extend the argument to the relationship between the rich Global North (primarily consisting of adult-elderly populations) and the poor Global South (primarily consisting of populations of youth and children), as was made abundantly clear by this year’s EXPO’s theme: “Feed the Planet, Energy for Life.”

## **8. Connecting Family Generativity to Social Generativity**

How can this risky intergenerational game be stopped? The solution is to call upon parents to undertake a specific transition, that is, to move from parental generativity to social generativity, thus augmenting their own culture’s symbolic system and passing it on to following generations. Social generativity is aimed at the future of all young people: it promotes an ethical cycle of generational inclusion and supports the establishment of intergenerational equity. Trust, hope, justice and equity are the symbolic gifts or values involved in this process.

Parents must more forcefully enable this two-fold aspect of generativity to emerge, pushing individuals to move not only beyond the self but also beyond the family, and toward the social realm. A growing body of research reveals the connection between these two faces of generativity. Generative adults are more effective and responsible parents in the social realm in comparison with their less generative counterparts (McAdams, 2006). Moreover, high levels of generativity in parents were associated with valuing trust and communication with their children and perceiving parenting as an opportunity to pass on values and wisdom to the next generation.

The most impressive documentation of the role of generativity in both family and society comes from MIDUS (Survey of Midlife Development in the United States), a nationwide study of over 3000 American adults ranging in age from 25 to 74 years (for an overview see Brim, Ryff, & Kessler, 2004). Even controlling for age and other demographic factors, generativity was the single strongest and most consistent predictor of many dimensions of socially responsible behavior, such as contributing time and money to family members and to community concerns (Rossi, 2001). More generally, measures of generativity were positively associated with a number of measures of psychological and social well-being (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008).

In addition, generative concern and generative goals are also important for the growth of children who consequently will have more resources with which to positively face the transition to the adult condition (Lanz & Marta, 2012). The research previously cited reveals a group of

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young people who can be called generative: these young people recognize that they hold good relationships with parents that are characterized by support and very little control. Unlike other groups that identify less positive relationships with their parents, members of this group are also more open to the social realm, have greater trust in people and institutions, are more active in volunteerism and political engagement, and want to start their own families (Alfieri & Marta, 2014).

Family and social generativity should be seen as connected, and this applies to all age groups, including the elderly, as outlined in a recent study by Boccacin and Bramanti (2015). These authors, analyzing data gathered through the SHARE project, concerning the European population of 65-year-olds, found different ways of experiencing active ageing. Particularly interesting are the so-called social generative elderly (nearly 22% of the European sample), who combine high levels of social commitment with high family commitment. The social generative elderly exhibit a better quality of life, not only in comparison with those who live individually, but also with those who are only committed to family relationships and activities, or only committed to social relationships and activities.

## **9. Generativity as the Intergenerational Transmission of What Is Valued**

Here the relationship between family and social generations comes to the fore, particularly in terms of transmission between generations. Essentially, generativity is “the intergenerational transmission of that which is valued” (de St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2003, p. 266). In the field of psychology, this topic has been investigated primarily in terms of the study of values transmission, particularly in terms of similarity-dissimilarity of values between generations (Barni, Ranieri, & Scabini, 2012; Knafo, & Schwartz, 2009; Trommsdorff, 2009). In the field of sociology, the same topic has also been addressed, although with different constructs such as continuity sharing, and discontinuity-difference between the generations (Bengtson, 2001; Mannheim, 1952). A mix of continuity and innovation appears to guarantee both personal and family well-being, as well as solidarity. Self-transcendent values, including trust, justice, and loyalty, constitute the core values on which intergenerational continuity is founded. In contrast, we find the greatest differences between the generations to be in terms of values of tradition, with adult generations tending toward conservativeness, whilst the younger generations showing a preference for the new.

This paper does not enter the complex debate – both theoretical and empirical - regarding how transmission in the family and society has been addressed. As before, when speaking of eudaimonic and generative well-being, the very real necessity of identifying constructs and new operational modalities that respect the multi-dimensionality of the concept is not addressed (Ryff, 2014; Huppert & So, 2013). However, in keeping with our relational symbolic model, it is important to adopt not so much a perspective of resemblance-symmetry as a point of view that expresses the generative aspects of transmission. From this perspective, the road ahead seems to reflect on the process of valorization/devalorization of the generational legacy.

Returning to the previous example of the case of the family of young adults, the family relationship is hyper-valued and the social relationship is devalued. As a result, generativity suffers in that it resides in flourishing family relationships centered on pro-social motivations, openness toward the social realm, and self-transcendent values.

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In particular, what should be valued are precisely the aspiration, desire, and capacity to transform the symbolic values-imbued legacy received from the previous generation and pass it on to the following generations, as opposed to consuming or holding it back within a single generation. What is transmitted may change form in times of great transformation, but what must always be safeguarded is the desire and commitment to be generative. We can say, therefore, that what should be valued as a long-lasting source of well-being is generativity, with its gifts, that is values of trust and hope in family ties as well as justice and equity in the exchange between the generations.

## 10. Conclusions

The main findings regarding the link between family (i.e., couple and parent-child relationship) and well-being (i.e., physical and mental well-being) were examined in this article. In particular, we have focused on relationship quality, as well as on the constructs developed to describe it. The recent effort made by some scholars to pay attention to positive constructs such as forgiveness and commitment, rather than negative constructs such as conflict, provides a better understanding of the components of relationships in terms of relationship health.

Fincham and Beach (2010) focused on a perspective aimed not only at reaching a balance between the negative and positive aspects of relationships, but also at understanding the relationship in itself and promoting the good of the relationship. They proposed the idea of a true 'positive relationship science' whose core construct is represented by 'relationship flourishing'. The relational-symbolic model (Scabini & Cigoli, 2000) has provided new insights into the idea of 'relationship flourishing' by identifying the specificities of 'family relationship flourishing'. According to the 'relational symbolic model' - the core construct of which is generativity - the family is conceived as a multigenerational system. Generativity is an outcome of family relationships, provided that these relationships realize their best potential; in the opposite case they produce degenerative outcomes. In this regard, generative well-being can be regarded as the form of well-being produced by flourishing family relationships. Generative well-being occurs when family generativity (i.e., care and commitment toward the children) and social generativity (i.e., care and commitment toward the new generations) are connected to each other.

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