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Compatibility quotient, and its relationship with marital satisfaction and personality traits in Italian married couples

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ABSTRACT
The increasing numbers of divorces and separations in Italy has focused the attention of many researchers on the necessity to develop psychological instruments to measure the probability that a couple will end their marriage. Wilson’s compatibility quotient (CQ) is considered a valid test for measuring risk of divorcing in married couples. The test measures the level of compatibility or similarity between partners. One hundred and eighty-four Italian married heterosexual couples were administered the CQ, the Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment Test measuring marital satisfaction and the Big Five Questionnaire. Couples with high compatibility scores have higher level of marital satisfaction and partner’s attractiveness. Energy, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability Openness and Agreeableness were also related to couple compatibility. Therefore, Wilson’s CQ could represent a suitable tool for measuring divorce risk in married couples.

1. Introduction
In Italy, the crisis of family is represented by an increasing number of divorces and separations (ISTAT, 2013). In 1995, 158 separations and 80 divorces occurred for every 1000 marriages, and in 2012, the numbers grew up to 311 for separations and to 174 for divorces. Separations occur mainly after 16 years of marriage, and divorces follow separations after a period of 3 years. The mean age of separating men and women are 44 and 40 years, respectively, and the mean age of divorcing men and women are 47 and 44 years, respectively. Therefore, in the age range between 40 and 50 years there is the greater risk of marriage dissolution.

For Italian law, when we talk about separation, we refer to a provisional interruption of the civil effects of the marriage. During this period, the couple can try a reconciliation. After a minimum of three years of separation, the couple can divorce once and for all. In other words, separation is provisional and divorce is definitive. Legal separation represents the needed condition in order to reach divorce in Italy. With the divorce we have a dissolution of marriage and a termination of its civil effects.
Since divorce affects directly and indirectly the well-being of involved individuals, the possibility to reliably predict its occurrence based on personal and couple characteristics could be of great benefit. Some studies (Bentler & Newcomb, 1978; Hejmanowski, 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 1995) found a relationship between partner similarity and duration of their marriage or engagement. Many authors investigated which characteristics of similarity a couple should have to guarantee a long-lasting marriage. With regard to sexual satisfaction, researchers have consistently shown that women’s sexual satisfaction may be more susceptible to the influence of contextual factors, such as acculturation, education, and religion, than that of men (Baumeister, 2000; Okami & Shackelford, 2001; Peplau, 2003). In addition, in both cross-sectional (Hurlbert & Apt, 1994; Nicolson & Burr, 2003) and longitudinal studies (McNulty & Fisher, 2008), husbands’ sexual satisfaction is strongly associated with the physical aspects of sex (e.g., frequency), whereas wives’ sexual satisfaction is more likely to be susceptible to the emotional aspects of the sexual relationship (e.g., sexual expectancies). Researchers found that couples composed of partners with a greater similarity in physical characteristics, attitudes or beliefs had an increased probability of a long-standing marriage (Buss, 1984; Lou & Klohnen, 2005; Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). Researchers suggested that partner similarity in attitudes, behaviors and beliefs can strengthen the duration of a marriage. Also, similarity in personality traits represents an important factor for marriage stability. Some studies investigated the relationship between personality and marriage, showing that traits like Neuroticism, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness are related to marital adjustment (Nemechek & Olson, 1999; Russell & Wells, 1994).

A growing number of studies have been focused on the link between couple similarity and marital satisfaction, but the results are discordant. While Robins, Caspi, and Moffitt (2000) found that spousal similarity was associated with better marital satisfaction, Watson et al. (2004) did not find any significant correlation. Perhaps, as suggested by Gattis, Berns, Simpson, and Christensen (2004), it must be admitted that the principal motivations in selecting a partner for engagement or marriage are still poorly understood.

Many of the empirical studies examined marital satisfaction and its relationship to religiosity and spirituality measures (Beach, Fincham, Hurt, McNair, & Stanley, 2008; Butler, Gardner, & Bird, 1998; Butler, Stout, & Gardner, 2002; Call & Heaton, 1997; Kallampally, Oakes, Lyons, Greer, & Gillespie, 2008; Orathinkal & Vansteenwegen, 2006).

Other important factors for marriage stability are age, education, employment and culture. Age disparity is associated with higher divorce rates, especially where the man is significantly younger than the woman (Janssen, 2002; Lehrer, 2008). Zhang, Ho, and Yip (2012) found that age has a significant effect on both dimensions of satisfaction for husbands, and on the sexual satisfaction of wives. Specifically, older husbands with younger wives were more likely to be happy with their marital relationship than couples where the partners were of a similar age, whereas younger husbands with older wives were less likely to be happy with both their marital and sexual relationships. Tzeng (1992) found that education plays an important role for the duration of relationship. Women who were better educated than their husbands tended to report lower marital satisfaction, which is consistent with previous research (Butterworth, Berry, Oz, & Rodgers, 2008). However, other studies contradicted this finding (Chan & Halpin, 2003; Lyngstad, 2004).

Cao, Fragmiere, Gauthier, Sapin, and Widmer (2010) showed that dissimilar educational levels were associated with lower rate of divorce. Talking about the employment,
some studies underlined the association between wives’ employment and marital satisfaction, providing support for both positive and negative effects of wives’ employment on marital satisfaction (Schoen, Rogers, & Amato, 2006). Culture is another important factor. Couples in which both partners were from the same Country had much lower odds of divorcing than those where partners were from different Western countries (Cao et al., 2010).

In addition to these researches, some authors (Miller, Lefcourt, Holmes, Ware, & Saleh, 1986; Smolen & Spiegel, 1987) found that the partners’ locus of control is very important for predicting a longer marriage. Partners’ tendency to believe that their behavior is controlled internally rather than by external events could be correlated with a long-lasting and satisfying marriage. If similarity between partners is an important factor for marriage stability and marriage duration, the possibility for a person to know the characteristics of his/her partner before starting a stable relation could be useful for guaranteeing a successful relationship. Theory and research suggest that personality traits are related to marital satisfaction.

Karampatsos (2011) showed that personality plays a role in marital communication and conflict resolution. Individuals with higher scores on Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Intellect, and lower scores on Neuroticism tend to be those with greater marital satisfaction, more effective marital communication and are better at successfully resolving conflicts in a healthy manner.

Wilson and Cousins (2003) developed a specific test to measure partner compatibility, the compatibility quotient (CQ). Wilson and Cousins (2003, 2005) and Wilson, Cousins, and Fink (2006) carried out studies to test the validity and reliability of the CQ. The major result of these studies was that the similarity between partners was fundamental for a longer relationship and that the level of satisfaction was positively correlated with the level of similarity between partners.

On the basis of these results, the CQ could be a useful measure to predict the risk of divorces and separations and to increase the level of marriage satisfaction also for Italian couples. Wilson and Cousins (2003) tested convergent validity of the CQ by comparing the CQ with another scale of marital satisfaction, the Locke–Wallace Marital Adjustment (LWMA) Test (Locke & Wallace, 1959). Wilson and Cousins (2003) found a correlation of .33 for males and .28 for women between CQ and LWMA.

In addition to partner similarity, it is particularly interesting to examine the personality traits of partners, because little research have been done to investigate the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction (Karampatsos, 2011; Nemechek & Olson, 1996; Russell & Wells, 1994). Amiri, Farhoodi, Abdolvand, and Bidakhvadi (2011) investigated the relationship between the Big Five personality traits, communication styles and marital satisfaction. They found that Neuroticism was the most important predictive factor of marital satisfaction. Stroud, Durbin, Saigal, and Knobloch-Fedders (2010) found that Neuroticism and Extraversion were related to marital satisfaction. The importance of personality traits for an enduring marriage was studied by Buss and Shackelford (1997), who found that low Conscientiousness, high Narcissism and high Psychoticism were the personality characteristics most strongly linked to susceptibility to infidelity.

Specifically, according to a meta-analytic review of the Big Five personality traits presented by Heller, Watson, and Ilies (2004), Emotional Stability, Agreeableness and
Conscientiousness are the personality traits with the most robust effects for relationship satisfaction. Individuals who are higher in each of these attributes report higher levels of relationship satisfaction. Also Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, and Lucas (2010) provided consistent support for the idea that Emotional Stability, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness seem to be the “Big Three” personality traits able to predict marital satisfaction.

The main aim of our research was to study the relationship between the CQ and personality traits in an Italian sample of married couples to analyze which personality traits interact with couple compatibility. Furthermore, we were interested in studying the validity of the Wilson’s CQ in an Italian sample.

2. Materials and method

2.1. Subjects

One hundred and eighty-four Italian married couples participated in the study. The mean age of men was 44.76 years (SD = 11.186) and the mean age of women was 41.46 years (SD = 10.828). Participants were primarily recruited from different regions of the south of Italy. They were recruited through advertisements, flyers and display on notice boards in community settings. Participants answered the questionnaires at home and were asked to work independently.

Our sample was composed only by legally married, heterosexual couples. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants after full explanation of the study’s procedure, according to the principles in the Declaration of Helsinki.

2.2. Materials

Participants were administered the following psychological questionnaires: the Big Five Questionnaire 2 (BFQ-2), the CQ and the LWMA.

The Big Five Questionnaire 2 (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, & Vecchione, 2007) is composed of 134 items and is the most used personality test in Italy. Participants have to indicate their agreement on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (absolutely false) to 5 (absolutely true). Based on the model of the Big Five personality traits, BFQ-2 allows the identification of five basic dimensions of personality: Energy, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability and Open-mindedness.

The CQ is composed of 25 items and is based on the principle that partner similarity is important for a better relationship. The scoring for each item is on a scale from 0 to 4, according to the degree of the difference between the responses of partners. Absolute values of partner differences are summed to produce the raw discrepancy score for each couple. Raw discrepancy scores are then transformed with a mathematical formula to yield standardized scores with mean = 100 and standard deviation = 15.

Eight different intervals of the standardized scores were determined to evaluate the compatibility level of couples: from scores lower than 70, indicating that the partners are completely incompatible, to scores above 145, indicating that the partners are extremely compatible. Therefore, eight profiles were processed according to the characteristics of the couples and their degree of compatibility as described by Wilson and Cousins (2005).

The LWMA (Locke & Wallace, 1959) is a measure of marital satisfaction composed of 15 items. The global score is obtained by summing all test items. The higher the global
score, the higher the marital satisfaction of partners. The LWMA assesses partners’ attitudes towards specific aspects of the relationship such as sex, finances, friends, leisure, personal interests and conflict resolution abilities.

All the couples were administered two copies of all three tests and were asked to compile separately their tests so as to avoid possible reciprocal influences.

### 3. Results

The descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1. Workers and employees represented the most frequently reported employment status and high school was the most frequent educational degree. In addition, marriage duration of most of the couples was between 0 and 10 years, and most of them had two children.

Table 2 shows the frequencies of CQ standardized score ranges. The greatest number of couples had an above average level of compatibility.

Table 3 shows the correlations between the scores of each item of the Wilson’s CQ and the global score of marital satisfaction, measured with the LWMA test, both for women and men.

To test whether partners of couples with an increased CQ were more likely to have a larger global score on the LWMA, we divided the sample in four balanced subgroups after estimating quartiles of CQ scores distribution. Therefore, the first subgroup ($N = 24$)

### Table 1. Employment, education, years of marriage and number of children for the 184 Italian couples.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Frequencies(^a)</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Frequencies(^a)</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Frequencies(^b)</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Frequencies(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0–10</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retiree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>11–20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>21–30</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Ph.D</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsman</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Vocational training</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specified</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Number of subjects; $N = 368$.

\(^b\)Number of couples; $N = 184$.

### Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of CQ standardized score ranges ($N = 184$ couples).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CQ standardized score ranges</th>
<th>Partners compatibility</th>
<th>Frequencies (no. of couples)</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;70</td>
<td>Incompatible</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70–84</td>
<td>Quite incompatible</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85–94</td>
<td>Compatible below the average</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95–104</td>
<td>Compatible within the average</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105–114</td>
<td>Compatible above the average</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115–129</td>
<td>Very compatible</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>130–144</td>
<td>Extremely compatible</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;145</td>
<td>Extra compatible</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
included subjects who were in the first quartile (0%–25%) of CQ scores distribution; the second subgroup (N = 100) included subjects who were in the second quartile (25%–50%) of CQ scores distribution; the third subgroup (N = 180) included subjects who were in the third quartile (50%–75%) of CQ scores distribution; and the fourth subgroup (N = 64) included subjects who were in the fourth quartile (75%–100%) of CQ scores distribution. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) on global LWMA scores showed a significant between-group main effect (F_{367} = 11,006; p < .001).

Subjects of the second, third and fourth subgroups have higher scores on LWMA than subjects of the first subgroup. Therefore, couples with higher CQ scores tend also to have higher score on the LWMA.

Because some quartiles did not maintain a sufficient numerosness, to consent the power of statistical analysis, we combined the first interval of the standardized scores of CQ with the second, the third with the fourth, the fifth with the sixth, and the seventh with the eighth to obtain four groups. We conducted a post hoc test with CQ and LWMAT. The results show that the second, third and fourth subgroups have higher CQ scores on LWMA test than subjects of the first subgroup and that the third and fourth subgroups have higher CQ scores on LWMA than subjects of the first and the second subgroups.

Figure 1 shows the mean LWMA test scores for each subgroup.
To test our hypothesis that partners with high CQ scores are more likely to have similar personality traits, we divided the couples on the basis of the median of their CQ raw scores to obtain two subgroups, one with CQ scores below the median and the other with CQ scores above the median. Then we splitted the subject group by the CQ median, and correlated the scores of the men with the scores of the women, obtained at the five scales of BFQ-2, for both subgroups. Table 4 shows the correlations of the two subgroups for each BFQ-2 dimension. While for the first subgroup there were no significant correlations, for the second subgroup there were significant correlations between partners in all dimensions of the BFQ-2.

4. Discussion

Regarding the CQ validity, there are some significant correlations between the CQ item scores and the LWMA. These results are partially in accordance with the Wilson and Cousins's (2003, 2005) findings. On the basis of the data obtained in our sample, item 9
(Sexual Fidelity) had the highest negative correlation for women \( (r = -0.343, p < 0.001) \) and the highest negative correlation for men \( (r = -0.267, p < 0.001) \), while Wilson and Cousins (2003) found positive correlations both for women and men \( (r = 0.26 \) and \( 0.29, \) respectively; \( p < 0.001 \)). For item 8 (Libido), we found a highly significant correlation with the LWMA \( (r = 0.32) \) only in women, while Wilson and Cousins (2003) obtained, instead, significant correlation coefficients both for men and women \( (r = 0.18 \) and \( 0.21, \) respectively; \( p < 0.001 \)). Item 15 (Desire for Children) in our sample had significant correlations with the LWMA for women as well as for men \( (r = 0.17 \) and \( 0.147, \) respectively), while in Wilson and Cousins (2003) study, this item did not show significant correlation either for men or for women \( (r = 0.06 \) and \( 0.02, \) respectively). Item 2 (Body Shape) is significant for men, and this underlines the importance that physical aspects have among men with respect to women. However, the ANOVA performed on the four subgroups with increasing CQ global scores confirmed that couples with high compatibility might also show a high marital satisfaction.

With respect to the relationship between the CQ and personality traits, we found that partners of couples with CQ scores above the median showed a larger similarity in all dimensions of BFQ-2. This finding confirms the results obtained in previous studies (Amiri et al., 2011; Buss, 1984; Heller et al., 2004; Karampatsos, 2011; Russell & Wells, 1994). Therefore, specific personality characteristics of the partners could have influence on couple relationships.

However, some limitations of the present research need to be mentioned. First, our sample was small. Second, the results could be different with more heterogeneous samples, for example, including homosexual couples. Third, we used only self-report instruments.

Concluding, on the basis of our analyses, Wilson’s CQ could be considered a valid instrument to estimate compatibility in Italian couples. Nevertheless, future longitudinal studies are needed to measure the variability of CQ scores in couples over time and to analyze whether CQ is a good predictor of future divorce or separation.

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**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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