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RELIGIOSITY AND IDENTITY PROCESSES: CULTURAL, FAMILIAR AND SOCIAL CORRELATES OF YOUTH'S RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

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Introduction

The interest for religiosity and the amount of innovative research in this field had a significant increase in the last few years (Sedikides, 2010). Recent events, as the terroristic attack of September 11 and the raising of positive psychology, contributed to intensify a debate which in the last decades neglected religiosity for various reasons, as for example because it has been considered for long time a defence mechanism (e.g., Freud, 1927), or a private matter, or if not private, pertaining to the realm of life domains, for long time ignored by research in favour of mental processes (Sedikides, 2010). Currently, the specific role that psychological science could have in the debate about religiosity became more and more clear: a role which is not in opposition with theological science, but which can provide complementary explanations at different levels of analysis (Emmons, 1999).

Therefore, with a new interest after the capital works of James (1902) and Allport (1950), contemporary psychologists approached again the study of religiosity: in a first time, their research approached religiosity as an undifferentiated and stable phenomenon, prevalently positive or negative depending upon the point of view (Pargament 2002), but in a second period, it reached a more detailed analysis of the *different* ways of being religious, which undergo the influence of *different* contexts and which have *different* implications for individual and social well-being (Pargament, 2002).

Thus, we decided to approach the study of religious identity from a social psychological perspective, applying to it some theories from the mainstream psychology

(see also Aletti & Rossi, 2004; Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009; Neyrinck, Lens, & Vansteenkiste, 2005), as for example the motivated identity construction theory (MICT, Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006; Vignoles, 2011) and the self determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thanks to the rich tradition of research of our Athenaeum Centre for Family Studies and Research, we tried to develop a deeper look about family relations and religious identity: this was possible thanks to the constant supervision of professors Camillo Regalia and Claudia Manzi, and to the encouragement and suggestions provided by Eugenia Scabini. The collaboration, along all the research phases, with international scholars strengthen the solid bases of the research framework. In particular, I am grateful to prof. Vivian Vignoles and Maja Becker, who coordinated and supervised the part concerning identity issues; to professor Maykel Verkuyten who co-projected and supervised the study on intergroup relationships; and to professor Avi Assor, who inspired and supervised the chapter regarding family antecedents of religious internalization. Finally, thanks to all research's participants, who gave us their precious time, and thanks to three Italian donors, some no profit associations which sustained the research with their offer of a prize: Equotube, Edizioni La Meridiana, and Ape Italian Style.

In the *first* chapter we introduced a literature review about some of the crucial issues concerning the study of religious identity: the definitional aspects, the antecedents of religious identity and the relationship between religiosity and outcomes, in particular prejudice directed towards other groups. In the *second* chapter, we presented an overview of the three empirical studies, the details about the three samples and the procedural aspects. In the *third* chapter we described the first empirical study: a cross-cultural study about the self-categorization of religious identity, focusing on the level of self categorization (individual versus social) and on the centrality of religious self in personal identity; in the *fourth* chapter, we illustrated the second empirical study, which addressed the analysis of the relational antecedents of religious identity, investigating the effects of parents' behaviors and the influence of the religious group on religious internalization. The *fifth* chapter showed the third empirical study, aimed at investigating the effects of different types of religious internalization on intergroup prejudice, and the mediational role of prosocial versus conformity values in this pattern

of relationship. Each chapter includes a "*box*" with additional information or extra data analysis which were not included in the main studies but which we found of particular interest especially for offering new insights for future research.