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**Revisiting lesbians' and gay men's lives in Italy:
generation, relationships, and gender**

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*A mia madre, mio padre, mio fratello
e alla memoria dei miei nonni.*

*A tutti coloro che mi hanno aiutato,
a volte senza saperlo.*

Introduction

On 26th June 2015, the online page of the New York Times displayed at the top a judicial piece reporting on a judgment of the Supreme Court of the United States. Issued on the same day, the judgment ruled, on the basis of equality of citizens before the law, that US constitutional law requires marriages between persons of the same sex performed in any State of the United States be recognised in all States (Liptak 2015). The global reach of this transformation in American law could hardly be overstated (ILGA-Europe 2015a).

The renowned newspaper accompanied the story with an editorial citing opinions from a diverse crowd, including a leader of gay rights activism, a famed film director, and a Broadway musical author (Kantor 2015). Their voices bemoaned the end of gay culture brought about by its own social and legal victories. Reflecting on the lives of suburban same-sex desiring people, the editorial concluded that it is now thinkable, differently from a few decades ago, that gay culture might end, but its continued vivacity and mutability are supported by the many who still grapple with the meaning of their own and others' perceived difference and desired sameness in unexpected ways. On the other side of the Atlantic, Italian contemporary society is fraught with conflicts over homosexuality up to its most authoritative sectors, as shown by the recent judgement delivered by the European Court of Human Rights stating that the lack of legal recognition of same-sex relationships in Italy violates human rights (ECHR 2015).

Sociological inquiry aimed at unpacking difference and sameness across sexual divides for decades. This collective scientific endeavour proved to be relevant: in its 2015 judgment on same-sex marriage, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the produced knowledge as reliable ground for decision. Yet, in the same year Pepper Schwartz, one of the leading voices in social scientific studies on sexuality, compiled a list of fifty great myths hampering public knowledge of sexuality in collaboration with sexual health expert Martha Kempner, and gave the honour of closing the list to the following mythical belief: '#50: The struggle for gay rights is over' (Schwartz and Kempner 2015: 292).

Published a few months before the judgment of the Supreme Court, Schwartz and Kempner's argument did not lose relevance in light of the progress of gay rights. Debunking the fifty great myths one by one, among them also '#10: Homosexuality can be cured', '#25: She is not going to get pregnant if we just do it once' and '#33: Hooking up never leads to a relationship', the two authors stress that all these beliefs are woven into complex cultural forces shaping societies more profoundly than legal provisions alone can reach or mend (Schwartz and Kempner 2015: x-xi, 55, 137, 190).

In 2001, the first sociological study on lesbians and gay men based on data gathered in the whole of Italy was published; a few years later it was reissued and

expanded (Barbagli and Colombo 2007). The authors of this landmark Italian study (Zanola 2014) share Schwartz and Kempner's view: homosexual lives are influenced by wide-ranging historical transformations that can be understood only by taking into account changing relational and gender norms and conflicts regarding individual sexual agency. This interpretation leads them to the conclusion that the advancement of legal recognition of homosexual rights observed across national borders can be expected to soon make its appearance in Italy, and the lesbian and gay movement must be credited for a great share of this achievement (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 274-278, 288-292).

In recent sociological reflections regarding sexuality, this actual or expected politico-legal responsiveness to sexual diversity is grasped by the idea of sexual citizenship, an emerging aspect of the societal and global management of sexuality strongly rooted in contemporary transformations in the lives of sexual minorities (Parker *et al.* 2004). Reflecting on the global affirmation of sexual citizenship, I realised that sociological inquiry had overlooked potential transformations in lesbians' and gay men's lives in Italy in recent decades. With this in mind, I took part in the 2012 Bologna Pride march¹, set to gather survey data for my doctoral research. The data gathering continued in the numerous Pride marches in the following twelve months and expanded in a parallel stream of biographical interviews with same-sex couples. The resulting mixed-methods research focuses on the transformations undergone by three aspects of the lives of Italian lesbians and gay men in the past two decades: sexual developmental trajectories and resilience against homophobia, same-sex cohabiting couples and relational institutions, and parental desires and the social meaning of the child. This work argues that all three aspects underwent complex transformations in the past twenty years.

Chapter 1 presents a theoretical discussion guiding my research. As a first step, I discuss the enigma of sexual citizenship in Italy, a nation in which the politico-legal management of sexual diversity suggests stasis that strikes as an anomaly in the contemporary European and extra-European upheaval of sexual lives. Stemming from a history of conflict and reconsideration of sexuality in the past centuries, sexual citizenship alerts us to the features of sexuality as a historical construct.

The historicity of sexuality is the main tenet of my theoretical framework. Basing my discussion on it, I move through plural sexualities to argue the usefulness of the lens of generational sexualities in grasping sexual transformation even in relatively short periods of time. Generational sexualities are cultural frames individuals use to situate sexuality in the flow of their lives and the lives

¹ Pride marches are manifestations in which sexual minorities and other individuals participating in their everyday or imagined communities make their presence visible in public spaces and protest and counter shaming and marginalizing interpersonal and institutional framings of sexual diversity (Ross 2008). The history and development of the visibility of the lesbian and gay sexual minority in public spaces in Euro-American societies are recounted in Chapter 1.

that preceded them and will follow them. In their behavioural, emotional, and intellectual expressions, these cultural frames necessarily and differentially take into account what sexuality, sexual diversity, and sexual ties meant and could mean for those who are touched by their sources and consequences. The search for a workable sociological synthesis of the moments, transitions, and decisions in which the lives of sexually diverse individuals reveal the workings of generational sexualities leads us back to historical process.

A brief and schematic tour of the history of homosexuality in Euro-American countries indicates personal relationships and gender as two cultural constructs that same-sex desiring people faced and transformed when envisioning, expressing, and managing their sexuality. If contemporary lesbians' and gay men's lives in Italy have been changing, the lens of generational sexualities invites us to look into these individuals' take on relational and gender norms to glimpse it. In the last section of the chapter, I map contributions to the cross-disciplinary and sociological debate that, by seeing through the lens of relational and gender norms, point to sexual developmental trajectories and resilience, same-sex cohabiting couples and relational institutions, and parental desires and the meaning of the child as three aspects of lesbian and gay lives in which generational transformation can be observed with specifically designed sociological research. In conclusion of the chapter, I link generational sexualities back to sexual citizenship, discussing how lesbian and gay generations directly question sexual citizenship by creating new communities of individuals in which individual sexualities are cherished and empowered.

Chapter 2 presents my methodology, methods, and data. The research is based on secondary analysis on data on Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives gathered in 1995-96 for a previous study on homosexuality in Italy and on data gathered for my doctoral research in 2012-13. The design of the 1995-96 study, rooted in similar considerations to the ones that underpin my research, contextually provides rich data on homosexuality in Italy two decades ago and puts forward a qualitatively-driven mixed-methods framework that I expanded to produce new data on homosexuals' lives and tackle my research questions. The thesis is based on the 1995-96 survey and the 2012-13 survey on Italian lesbians and gay men in Italy, comprising about 6,000 non-heterosexual respondents, and on 24 interviews to same-sex partners in 12 cohabiting couples in Italy conducted in 2012-13.

Chapter 3 maps transformations in sexual developmental trajectories and resilience against homophobia. In timing and contexts of sexual developmental milestones, such as first disclosure of one's same-sex desire and first same-sex sexual contact, lesbians' and gay men's sexual developmental trajectories converge. Italian lesbians and gay men in the formative years of sexual development centred on adolescence and young adulthood redefined the gendered aspects of embodied sexual desire. They did so because they face the repressive force that gender sexual inequality exercises on sexual desire oriented towards the same sex and a national culture of sexuality that, differently from what is

observed in other Euro-American countries, struggles to move towards equal empowerment of female and male sexuality.

Emerging from newly empowered lesbian sexual developmental trajectories and relationally framed gay sexual trajectories, sexual desires feed into changing strategies of resilience when facing homophobia across the life course. Coming out to one's close family members retains its positive influence on lesbians and gay men. The effect of religiosity on internalised homophobia and the need to abandon the Catholic religious community because of it are still present, and increasingly weigh on same-sex desiring women's well-being. The voice of the lesbian and gay community, an instrument of sexual empowerment for many, widens its audience and reaches bisexuals more easily than before.

Chapter 4 focuses on same-sex cohabiting couples and argues that they prosper as families and life projects of Italian lesbians and gay men, and provide material and emotional resources that favour these individuals' personal development. This was already the case twenty years ago. However, lesbians and gay men today embrace coupledness as an institution with a shifting basis on relational and gender norms, and as a result are readier to invest in these relationships. The initial steps of getting to know potential partners and falling in love with them still are profoundly gendered experiences: sex and emotions are differently scripted for lesbians and for gay men in these situations. A small sign of change is detectable in lesbians' increasing readiness to look for partners through sexual flings. Lesbian and gay cohabiting couples experience the decisions that lead to cohabitation, the management of inequality between partners, and the exclusivity of care and attention between partners similarly across the gender divide, and as highly negotiable aspects of couple life to which great value is attached because of their functions as trials and confirmations of the rootedness of love in prosaic everyday life.

Gender divides are also patent in lesbian and gay cohabiting couples' experiences with monogamy and infidelity. In an overall diffusion of sexual monogamy, lesbian couples' highly majoritarian preference for sexual monogamy and gay men's openness to non-negotiated, implicitly negotiated, or explicitly negotiated sexual infidelity are rooted in the emotional aspects of sex as intimacy and sharing. This and the previous forms of mutual care and commitment feed into cohabiting lesbians' and gay men's appropriation of the cultural repertoire, the project, and the institution of marriage. Their relationships are continuously negotiated, increasingly stable and celebrated as a central aspect of personal lives.

Chapter 5 inquires into the changing emotions and rationalities Italian lesbians and gay men envision when thinking about parenthood in the context of an especially complex elaboration of relational and gender norms. Cross-nationally, the emergence of parental desires in homosexual lives took sociological analysis by surprise and overturned taken-for-granted ideas regarding sexual diversity in the second half of the XX century. As for the experience of familial coupledness, many Italian lesbians and gay men already desired

parenthood two decades ago. However, facing a highly gendered and pervasively heterosexist culture of family-building and personal life, homosexuals were likely to see this desire as unfulfillable or irreconcilable with other aspirations. Among individuals who had no children, this was especially true for lesbians.

Mobilising their reliance on their procreative bodies and the meaning of their relationships with potential and actual partners, Italian homosexuals today are much likelier to express parental desires. Lesbians are at the forefront of this transformation. Lesbians and gay men embrace the cross-national transformations in the social meaning of the child, predicated on the decisive connection between care-taking parenthood and well-being of the parent-child dyad. This framing of parental desires is evident in lesbian women's and lesbian couples' insistence on the sources of shared happiness that parenthood can and should produce. At a closer look, it is taking hold of gay men as well.

In my concluding remarks to the thesis, I summarise my findings across the examined aspects of lesbian and gay lives, underscoring the everyday pluralist politics of homosexuality gradually unhinging relational norms from gender norms. On the basis of these considerations, I argue that observing transformations in lesbian and gay lives allows us to reconsider where Italy stands in the affirmation of sexual citizenship. In conclusion, I discuss how contemporary Italian lesbian and gay generations are creating a new narrative of homosexuality, and through this narrative choosing their communities in ways that advance the societal appreciation and protection of sexual diversity.

1. Theoretical framework

1.1. Generation, relationships, and gender

1.1.1. *The enigma of Italian sexual citizenship*

The contemporary phase of the presence of sexual minorities in the Euro-American and global socio-political field is identified with the sociological concept of sexual citizenship. This term foregrounds the centrality, in private or public and national and international arenas, of the voices of sexual minorities and of supporting and opposing actors when choices regarding implicit and explicit norms on sexuality, intimacy, and private life are negotiated (Weeks 1998; Richardson 2000; Plummer 2001). If we briefly consider the politico-legal management of homosexuality in Italy in the past twenty years, the stasis of the conditions of same-sex desiring individuals seems evident.

A recent resolution of the European Parliament (2012) stresses that same-sex desiring individuals must be protected from the many instances of prejudice and homophobia they might encounter, and a previous recommendation of the Council of Europe (2010) points to the protection of same-sex desiring young people in their everyday social milieux, among them the school environment, as a priority in this endeavour. Behind a facade of engagement with these issues, the Italian political system ignores them. In 2013, a bill aimed at confronting homophobic hate speech and hate crimes was discussed in the legislative chambers. Following public debate specific amendments profoundly limiting the applicability to hate speech and hate crimes perpetrated in schools and other educational environments were approved, matter-of-factly robbing the legal provision of its *ratio* (Winkler and Strazio 2014: 130-135). As it could be expected, systematic plans to introduce 'sexuality and diversity' education in Italian schools were stopped and abandoned (Winkler and Strazio 2014; 135-139). In a paradigmatic case of moral panic regarding sexuality (Herdt 2009), a public campaign to discredit all such initiatives even at a local level, sponsored by political and religious authorities, swept the nation (Selmi 2015).

Twenty years ago a resolution of the European Parliament (1994) pointed to another central issue in the end of discrimination of same-sex desiring people and in the full respect of equality between citizens regardless of sexual orientation: the removal of legal obstacles to same-sex marriage. An Italian jurist and an Italian gay rights activist (Winkler and Strazio 2014: 31-32) cite a ruling of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, US in 2003 as a judicial and political milestone that clarifies the heft of same-sex marriage recognition as an anti-discriminatory tool.

The benefits accessible only by way of a marriage license are enormous, touching nearly every aspect of life and death. [...] [H]undreds of statutes are related to marriage and marital benefits. [...] It is undoubtedly for these concrete reasons, as well as for its intimately personal significance, that civil marriage has long been termed a 'civil right'. [...] Without the right to marry – or more properly, the right to choose to marry – one is excluded from the full range of human experience and denied full protection of the laws for one's 'avowed commitment to an intimate and lasting human relationship'. (Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts 2003)

The quoted passages, indicated by Winkler and Strazio as the heart of the ruling, connect the scope of capabilities and consequences tied to the right to choose to enter a marital relationship to the well-established recognition of marriage as a 'civil right' laying at the core of inclusion and protection of citizens under the rule of law. In Italy, the last long wave of transformations in the legal regulation of family relationships started in the 1970s and included the introduction of equal rights for husbands and wives, no-fault divorce, abortion rights, community of property as default condition for spouses, and the best interest of the child as a juridical principle (Saraceno 2003b: 50-57). Notwithstanding the evolution in cross-national legal and political management of homosexuality (Waaldijk 1994; Festy and Rogers 2006; ILGA-Europe 2015b), same-sex couples in contemporary Italy cannot legally marry, and similarly to different-sex couples they cannot enter a civil union, a registered partnership, or any other legal arrangement similar to marriage (Winkler and Strazio 2014: 18-26).

Some aspects and consequences of marital-like relationships, such as the management of the common residence, common expenditures, termination of the relationship, mutual support during the relationship and after its termination can be regulated through private contracts formed by the partners (De Gesu 2013: 9-10). Capabilities in managing other aspects, usually considered of outmost importance for marital-like relationships, are granted only by marriage in Italy. Among them: full control of inheritance rights between partners, income tax benefits, pension benefits, recognition of the status as next-of-kin in case of illness or accident of the partner, facilitations in obtaining citizenship or a residence permit (Winkler and Strazio 2011: 131-136). Regional and local bodies grant same-sex partners the possibility to register their unions, but these legal provisions are very limited in their scope and consequences and do not produce any effect on the above recalled legal matters (De Gesu 2013: 29-33).

In the previously cited resolution, the European Parliament (1994) refers to the removal of national legal obstacles to same-sex couples' adoption and foster care of children as another necessary step in the end of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Biological, social or care-taking parental ties between a homosexual person, a person in a same-sex couple relationship, or a same-sex couple and a child are among the most controversial aspects in the Italian debate over the rights of same-sex desiring individuals (Lingiardi 2012: 129-133). Some

States in the European Union surpassed the 1994 resolution of the European Parliament. Today, in these nations equal access to adoption, step-child adoption, medically assisted artificial insemination, and/or gestational surrogacy is granted regardless of sexual orientation of the parents or gender composition of the parental couple, and equal endowments of rights and duties emerge for biological and social parents, whether united in a couple or not, from these situations (ILGA-Europe 2015b).

In Italy, adoption is accessible only to heterosexual married couples; second-parent adoption and medically assisted artificial reproduction are accessible to heterosexual married and cohabiting couples; gestational surrogacy is prohibited. Italian same-sex couples do not have access to any of these paths to parenthood (Bilotta 2011; Winkler and Strazio 2014: 105-109). In the case of children of heterosexual couples who terminate their relationship, the Italian judicial praxis does not see the homosexuality or a same-sex relationship of a parent as an obstacle to grant them custody of their child (Long 2011; Winkler and Strazio 2014: 103, 109-114).

The initial impetus in researching change through time in contemporary Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives arose when I wondered: have Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives in Italy not changed at all in the past decades, as the stasis of legal provisions regarding homosexuality suggests? Contemporary sexual citizenship, influencing the life of sexual minorities and of the wider social milieu in which they reside (Waites 2009), emerged from a centuries-long history of reformulation of the place of sexual diversity. As argued in the next subsections, looking at the recent past in Italian and Euro-American homosexualities on the background of the historical developments of sexual diversity justifies a reasonable doubt on the immutability of Italian lesbian and gay lives suggested by Italian laws. In the last section of this chapter, I discuss why sexual developmental trajectories, same-sex marital-like couple relationships, and parental desires are especially relevant to my overarching research question, provide an initial description of the conceptual choices I made when inquiring in their transformations, and present the overall organisation of the thesis.

1.1.2. *Plural and generational sexualities*

As discussed by Heaphy (2007: 180-181), sociological research on private lives in late modernity requires a reflexive and explicit consideration of theoretical assumptions. I take my starting theoretical ground from Weeks (2010: 7-8, 12), when he stresses the value of:

seeing sexuality not a primordial 'natural' phenomenon but rather as a product of social and historical forces. 'Sexuality' [...] is a 'fictional unity', that once did not exist, and at some time in the future may not exist again. [...] Of course, sexuality exists as a palpable social presence, shaping our personal and public lives. But [it] is a historical construction, which brings together a host of different biological and mental possibilities, and cultural forms – gender identity, bodily differences, reproductive capacities, needs, desires, fantasies, erotic practices, institutions and values – which need not be linked together. [...] All the constituent elements of sexuality have their sources in the body or the mind [but] the capacities of the body and the psyche are given meaning only in social relations.

Historical contingency is the central and most decisive feature of human sexuality. It is so essential to it that, as Weeks (2010: 15) notes, 'a history of sexuality' is 'a history of a subject in constant flux'. The awareness of the socio-historical roots of sexual behaviour, sexual values, and sexual cultures is in itself a product of history.

Looking at the history of Euro-American countries, for centuries the hegemonic framing of sexuality has been 'essentialism', *i.e.* the idea that sexual expressions are fixed, immutable, and easily mapped on a hierarchy of desirability and legitimacy. The hegemony of essentialism has been chipped by the stumbling advance of more nuanced, anti-essentialist views of sexuality only in the past one hundred years. Globalisation and politicisation of sexuality are the historical processes supporting this attack to the *status quo*, and Weeks (2010: 6-9) invites us to glimpse them behind his pantheon of early sexuality research pioneers of the beginning of the XX century, including sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, and of sexuality research explorers of the following decades, including anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead, biologist Alfred Kinsey, and philosopher Michel Foucault.

The essentialist framing of sexuality justifies and is supported by a regime of public and private management of sexuality that Weeks (2010: 117-119) calls 'sexual absolutism'. The absolutist logic of sexual politics fixes sexuality in multiple respects. In this sexual regime, personal relationships do not encompass the possibility of reconsideration of power differentials between those involved in sexual encounters, *i.e.* identification of structural and interactional resource differentials shapes sexual encounters (Collins 2004: 250-252). Women and men experience a clearly defined gender divide in their sexual life courses, because of

the widespread repression of women (Therborn 2004: 14). Individuals must follow clear paths in their sexual life course, centred on sexuality in marital relationships aimed at procreation, if they want to avoid falling in their respective gender's underclass: either spinsters and widows or socially dead men without lineage and filial piety (Therborn 2004: 233). Therefore, value hierarchies between diverse sexual expressions encounter the favour of those who aim at efficiently assuring the compliance of differently gendered individuals to the production of their well-being and benefiting from others' failures to comply with social norms (Weeks 2010: 31-37). Social norms controlling sexuality are collectively maintained and upheld.

In the recent history of reconsideration of sexual essentialism and absolutism, two alternative sexual political frameworks have been proposed and, through the interplay of scientific, political, and socio-cultural instances, partially advanced: libertarian and liberal sexual politics. Libertarian views of sexual politics encounter the favour of those who, slipping through the cracks of sexual absolutism and managing to accrue and hold on to enough material and psychological resources to mobilise, see their aim as liberating sexuality from the shackles of social norms (Weeks 2010: 119-120). Libertarian management of sexuality emerges when personal relationships relatively unhinged from power differentials are discovered and politicised, *i.e.* personal lives undergo a process of democratisation (Barbagli and Kertzer 2005). This leads to discovery and politicisation of gender as a stratification system that harms the public well-being: the interconnections between relational norms and gender norms, *i.e.* how structural and interactional power differentials and the repression of women reproduce each other in situated and aggregated individual experiences, are discovered and politicised in scientific and public reflections (Gerhard 2002). Sexuality is seen as one of the human expressions imbricated in this reproduction of inequality, if not once and for all liberated from any expression that can be interpreted as reproducing inequality (Foucault 2013/1976: 142; Butler 1999). This latter eventuality would fatally undermine inequality-producing social norms through the diffusion of a regime of equal distribution of well-being among sexually creative, non-judgemental, and mutually satisfying individuals (Mieli 1977: 232-234).

In pluralist sexual politics, sexual diversity is continuously judged in light of the meanings individuals see through their sexual interactions (Weeks 2010: 118, 140). If these sexual interactions are beyond reasonable doubt positively experienced by those involved, their role in advancing positive social norms should be given credence. Since interpersonal relationships are the reality-making habitual interactions between individuals, it follows that sexual pluralism interprets compliance and dissidence to positive social norms through the lens of compliance and dissidence to the agreements that emerge from situated interactions, tainting all sexual norms that cannot be justified on the basis of positively-evaluated relational experiences emerging from sexuality.

Pluralist frames aim at undermining essentialist and absolutist views of sexuality, and at the same time are based on a set of assumptions aimed at understanding why historical change in sexuality happens. If libertarian frames assume that the liberation of sexuality from social norms would result in a complete reformulation of these norms, sexual pluralism recognises that social norms structure interpersonal interactions through a wider set of conditions than individual agency in sexual transformation can reach at once (Weeks 2010: 152). The two processes of globalisation and politicisation of sexuality that resulted in the first instances of counter-essentialist sexual transformations still deeply influence the contemporary landscape of potentially transformative individual sexual expressions.

In contemporary decades, globalising sexuality (Altman 2001: 32-33, 88-92, 159) and politicised sexuality (Bell and Binnie 2000: 39-43) transform everyday sexuality making it plural (Weeks 2010: 102), *i.e.* open to the voices calling for reconsideration of interpersonal and collective agreement, cultural hierarchies, and taken-for-granted meaningfulness. A striking feature of the last decades of plural sexuality, Plummer (2015) notes, is the diffusion of transformations of sexual cultures according to a two-fold logic: permeability of social and geographical boundaries, such that similarity and parallels between sexual lifestyles, sexual claims, sexual bodies can be observed in near and far locations, and malleability of underlying meanings, such that similar sexual lifestyles, claims, and bodies can be transformed and interpreted in highly localised ways. Resulting in contemporary plural, global, and politicised reinventions of sexual lives, these transformations call for new and nuanced conceptual tools to be observed and interpreted.

Plummer (2010) proposes the concept of ‘generational sexualities’ as a useful lens through which to look at the manifold, changing, and riveting world of contemporary sexuality. Three main preoccupations, derived from interdisciplinary debate on sexuality, inform the lens of generational sexualities. The original attack on sexual essentialism advanced by symbolic interactionism and similar sociological approaches (Garfinkel 1967: 133-140; Simon and Gagnon 1967; McIntosh 1968; Simon and Gagnon 1986; Stein 1989; Plummer 1995: 20-35) is renewed by the invitation to reconsider received knowledge on what in sexuality is mutable and what is fixed brought forward by queer theory (Butler 1990: 22-26; Kosofsky Sedgwick 1991: 22-45; Halperin 2002: 3-5) and intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989; Hill Collins 1996). This invitation directs Plummer towards the reflections on the life course initiated by Mannheim (1928) and Elder (1974), brought in sexuality research by Rossi (1994) and Cohler and Galatzer-Levy (2000), and recently reinvigorated by Carpenter and DeLamater (2012), and towards the narrative approach, epitomised in sexuality research by the works of Coxon (1996), Stein (1997), Rosenfeld (2003), and Cohler (2007) and recently reinvigorated by Cohler and Hammack (2009). These two strands of theorising sensitise sexuality research in respect to the mutual

construction of life trajectories and cultural frames. Each life moment and transition is interpreted and managed by individuals according to the narrations of life trajectories they receive from the past, and in turn each reinterpretation, revisitation, and modification they apply to such narrations directs them towards new life moments and transitions.

As such, a generational approach opens sexuality research to the observation of change in the place and the role of diverse sexual expressions that can happen in the diachronic development of life courses, the synchronic interaction of life courses, the synchronic existence of generations, or the diachronic flow of generations, and reverberate across these spheres (Plummer 2010). Combining the insight of the life course approaches regarding the interstitial influence of social norms on the many transitions between life moments that accumulate to direct intertwined life trajectories (Saraceno 2001: 27-28), and the insight of narrative approaches on individuals' subterranean and sometimes innovative engagement with the many manifestations of social norms (Ruspini and Inghilleri 2010), a generational approach to sexuality, as Plummer (2010) argues, accounts for the rapidity of transformations in the contemporary plural sexual landscape. When looking for these transformations, Olagnero (2012) writes, generations can be identified by tracing the agency of individuals through their lives. This means following individuals as they interpret and direct their actions in ways that change their diachronic life courses, and, by responding to and acting on the norms they encounter in the synchronic interactions of life courses and existence of generations, produce social outcomes that could not be envisioned in preceding generations.

The lens of generational sexualities offers directions on where to look to see rapid and profound transformations in Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives that can be expected in the contemporary plural landscape of sexuality and are conversely and enigmatically invisible in Italian sexual citizenship. Same-sex sexuality, as other sexual expressions, has a social history. The generations that make up this social history found and created the place and the role of same-sex sexuality elaborating on the life courses and narrations that previous generations had handed them, and in turn handed their life courses and narrations to those that followed. The next subsections map this social history in Euro-American countries, and argue that personal relationships and gender are the decisive aspects of life that homosexuals have, for a long time, reinterpreted from their past and reinvented for their future.

1.1.3. *Legacies of past homosexualities*

The history of homosexuality is as varied as its cultural variety (Murray 2000: 2-8) Based extensively on previous work by other scholars, the historical recollection presented by Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 230-273) is specific to Euro-American societies, and especially Italian society in time. It presents four cultural models of same-sex sexuality which comprise the variety of ways of enacting and framing homosexuality. In this and the following subsection, this historical narrative is retold with a focus on the relevance of the intersection between personal relationships and gender norms throughout different models of homosexuality.

The first two models, dubbed the classic pederastic model and the modified pederastic model, historically involved only men. Before the XIX century, in times in which these models were widespread, in every moment of their lives women could not significantly take part in sexual behaviour only when and most of the times they desired to, were expected to underplay the role of sexual desire in their social lives, and were taught to respect this code of conduct through socialisation and physical and moral intimidation. A small scope of diversity in sexual desire among women could surface to public vision².

The classic pederastic model of homosexual relations revolves around the use of same-sex sexuality between men as the means to express situational domination and hierarchical superiority of one sexual participant on the other. The hierarchical ordering between the sexual participants is based on age difference, as the wide age gap between the two partners in the sexual relation corresponds to a difference in resources, power and status that must be acknowledged. The sexual encounter, *i.e.* the meeting of the two partners in sexual activity, does not require or signal a presence of mutual sexual desire, on the contrary it almost always depends on an asymmetry of desires. The only desire that is framed as truly sexual and counts as the source of the sexual encounter is expressed by the older, more powerful partner. In this respect, the younger and less powerful partner is feminised in his socio-sexual identity, even if just for the duration of the sexual encounter, since the presence of his sexual desire is framed as unnecessary or even detrimental to the sexual encounter. A stable pattern in sexual roles corresponds to the asymmetry in age, power, and desire: the older sexual partner is always engaged in the sexual act as the penetrator, the younger partner as receiver of the penetration in anal or oral intercourse.

²Many examples and historical sources regarding same-sex desire among women are available and were studied (Lupo 1998; Danna 2003; Barbagli 2014). However, in many instances the role of sexual desire in the individual framing of sexual behaviour or attraction remained marginal, as pointed out by the proposal of the historical concept of *lesbian-like* to describe the cases in which women built relevant relationships that were not perceived as sexual, even if they involved sexual contact (Bennett 2000).

Finding its origins in premodern societies, the societal significance of the classic pederastic model is shown by its wide acceptance in European pre-Christian societies and by the subsequent condemnation and repression in Christian Europe of the early modern times. In the peculiar history of Italian homosexuality, attempts at eliminating the practice were relatively soon superseded by a regime of limitation through light penal sanctions³. A relatively wide diffusion of the homosexual pederastic model was practically tolerated, even if in many cases persecution was carried out. The classic pederastic model of homosexuality was the most common during most of the early modern and modern European history, however instances of the modified pederastic model and of the two, more typically late modern European models of homosexuality coexisted with it as expressions of same-sex sexuality.

The modified pederastic model shares with the previous model a focus on inequality between partners in the sexual encounter. The inequality does not hinge on a hierarchical order of authority and age, but on status differences based on social class. The typical homosexual encounter is between a paying older partner that is penetrated and a paid younger penetrator. This model of homosexuality maintains a feminisation of the younger partner, but this feminisation is based on a less coherent set of conditions. The younger partner's sexual desires are framed as non relevant to the sexual encounter, however his motivations to take part in homosexual activity might sometimes be a mix of need for financial and social help and lack of available female sexual partners.

This tension between alternative framings of the sexual encounter is resolved through symbolic ordering of sexual behaviour. The socio-sexual feminisation of the younger and financially needing partner in terms of downplaying of his sexual drive is negated through his sexual role, presenting him as an exclusive penetrator that takes part in same-sex sexuality only because his masculinity is never questioned and the pleasure he takes in these sexual encounters is a shadow of the pleasure that he can draw from different-sex sexuality⁴. The Italian tradition of relative legal and social tolerance of homosexuality led to the emergence of visible instances of the modified pederastic model in the XIX and XX centuries.

In the same historical period, cities in Europe and Italy saw the diffusion of a third model of same-sex sexuality, based on gender inversion. Already thriving in Northern European capitals during the XVIII century, sexual and romantic relationships between two men or two women in which one of the two partners claimed a gender identity of the opposite sex became common in Italy in the following centuries. What distinguishes this model from the pederastic ones is that age, social status, and sexual role did not impinge on the authenticity of the sexual desire of any of the partners involved in sexual activity. Differently from

³ A particularly well-known case is documented for male homosexuality in the city of Florence in the XV century (Dall'Orto 2015: 210-219).

⁴ Differences between what actually happened in these sexual encounters and the public narrative of what happened were hypothesised and described (Aldrich 1993: 65).

individuals that espoused the pederastic models, individuals embracing the inversion model, either feeling that they belonged the gender to which their sex was assigned or to the opposite gender, had strong entitlement and drive towards building relational and social situations in which the sexual desire that was central in their sense of self could be expressed with as little difficulty as possible. Stable sexual and romantic couples and organised meeting and socialising spaces became a distinctive feature of this model of homosexuality.

The cultural and social model of modern and contemporary homosexuality, existing as a marginal experience during the modern centuries, became the most common model of homosexuality through the diffusion of changes in the interpretations and situational framings of same-sex sexuality that were both a small step away and a wide elaboration on the model of inversion. Embracing their sexual desire as central to their experience, same-sex desiring individuals in the XX century felt that this desire did not need to be based on the inversion of their own gender or of the gender of their sexual partner to be validated, expressed and followed.

An array of conditions intertwined with the distancing of same-sex desiring individuals from the cultural strategies of feminisation and masculinisation. Differently from previous expression of a homosexual identity, same-sex desiring individuals focussing on sexual desires directed towards the same sex as independent from other personal characteristics, such as social status and gender identity, created the lesbian and gay identity as the expression of a decision to position themselves in relevant interactions only in ways that would be positive or relatively non-damaging to their sexuality. In Euro-American countries in the XX century the claim to an undoubtedly same-sex-oriented and personally central sexuality faced a hegemonic culture mandating the fundamental importance of different-sex sexual involvement as a criterion in the evaluation of the worth of the individual and her or his social conduct. The newly produced lesbian and gay identities were thus contextually used as means to recognise and be recognised by other likely-minded individuals in order to come together and join forces to constitute ideal and material spaces of commonality in which any individual lesbian or gay man could express and fulfil her or his relational preferences as freely as possible.

The history recounted by Barbagli and Colombo (2007) sees a turning point in the XX century, supported by two processes corroborating the diffusion of communal spaces and imagined communities from which the socio-political lesbian and gay movement emerged: affirmation of scientific and medical control over sexual knowledge, and urbanisation and severance of familial and local ties produced by capitalist economies. In the XIX and XX century, the clear distinction between sexual deviance and sexual norm in the private realm, *i.e.* the perception of deviance as an expression of a deeper individual nature, becomes the normative definition of sexual behaviour, and sexuality is framed as a private realm in which individual choice is possible (Foucault 2013/1976: 97-100; Evans

1993: 91, 97). Following these conceptual transformations, public instances pointed to sexual deviants as mentally ill or criminals (Borrillo 2001: 57-66, 70-76), and some of these individuals, helped by socio-economic resources emerging from differential positioning in the capitalist economy, mobilised in order to contrast such a public definition of homosexuality (D'Emilio 1997; Adam 2002). Already in the first decades of the XX century, the metropolises of Euro-American societies hosted homosexual communities in their residential, cultural, and political forms, geographically distributed and socially composed according to values expressed and resources available to different social classes, ethnic groups, and genders (Chauncey 1994: 355-359; Tamagne 2006: 13). The political upheaval of the first half of the XX century resulted in temporary but almost fatal erasure of these social formations (Benadusi 2005: 195-201, 208-216; Herzog 2011: 63-69, 72).

Again in the second half of the XX century individual choices in mobility towards urban centres hosting homosexual enclaves allowed homosexuals to enjoy enough security and recognition to direct their life courses towards decisive same-sex relationships, participation in public debate, and collective expression of sexual diversity (Adam *et al.* 1999). In this moment of the history of homosexuality, the lesbian and gay movement became a fully-fledged transnational political organisation (Rupp 2011), and the cultural centrality of the lesbian and gay community of the United States shaped the transnational debate (Dall'Orto 2015: 542-548).

Homosexual minorities in Euro-American countries engaged in debate over the place and management of sexual difference in society, focussing on the reformulation of a vision of homosexuality as a form of deviant drive afflicting individuals whose lives could be tolerated as long as no claims to normative recognition was advanced that was embraced by the then politically central homophile movements (Miller 1995: 333-340, 365-370, 384-393, 398-401). The encounter between same-sex desiring individuals' collective action and counter-cultural movements in the 1960s and 1970s, especially gay liberation movements and second-wave feminism, brought about a new phase of public debate (Edwards 1994: 32-35; Podmore and Tremblay 2015), eventually resulting in the epoch-making removal of homosexuality from the list of mental disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychological Association in 1973 (Hammack *et al.* 2013).

Intertwining with the diffusion of the model of modern homosexuality, by the end of the XX century the political and scientific debate on homosexuality focussed on recognition and rights of same-sex couples united by the material and symbolic ties of love, *i.e.* stable emotional and sexual relationships between individuals with a cisgender⁵ identification and ideally equal control over the definition of the interpersonal connection (Kollman 2007). Parallel visions of

⁵ Cisgender is a term used to indicate individuals whose gender identity is aligned with the one they were assigned at birth.

homosexual minorities, expressed in social movements, scientific voices, legal positions or individual reflections contest the inclusivity of this hegemonic framing of same-sex lives in respect to segments of the homosexual minority differing in their geopolitical location, gender identification, social class, public visibility and in respect to other sexual minorities, such as bisexuals and transgender/transsexual people (Wilson 2009).

As testified by activists and observed by social scientists, Italian society witnessed a similar path. Appearance and politicisation of homosexual collective action (Rossi Barilli 1999: 17-18, 47-48; Pini 2011: 91-97, 112-118) was followed by debate over the different directions in the political claims advanced by the homosexual movement (Cristallo 1996: 51-55, 87-92, 118-124; Vannucci 2008; Marcasciano 2014: 16), hegemony of a cisgender, relational and egalitarian norm (Grillini 2005; Santostefano 2008), and continuation of the debate over alternative forms of identity politics and collective claims (Trappolin 2004: 103-114, 131; Gramolini 2008). Across these transformations, the public reach of normative conflicts over explicit and implicit societal management of the homosexual minority widened (Grillini 2008: 71-76, 103, 118, 173-182).

As I discuss in the next subsection, this changing equilibrium between collective claims of the homosexual minority and their presence in the public arena presented social studies of homosexuality with new questions. Observing recent cohorts of homosexuals in Euro-American countries, social scientists described new approaches to sexual communities and identities that troubled the idea that contemporary lesbians and gay men have much to do with their historical predecessors. A historical consideration of these predecessors' engagement with social norms points out that, at a deeper level than identities and communities, continuity of agency and reformulation of its interconnections with changing social milieux link homosexual generations to each other. Fixing our gaze on the unmodified objects of same-sex desiring people's choices giving direction to their life courses, namely relational and gender norms, allows us to carve out the moments in contemporary Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives from which a new generation of homosexuals is breaking out.

1.1.4. Relationships and gender in transforming homosexuality

The sociological works of Stein (1997), Seidman (2002), Cohler (2007), and Ghaziani (2011) in US, Weeks (2007) in UK, and Barbagli and Colombo (2007) in Italy map recent transformation in the contemporary phase of the social history of homosexuality. The Anglo-American works look at the transformations occurred between homosexual generations born in the 1940s and 1950s, in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the 1980s and 1990s. These sociologists' gaze singles out two main aspects of change: the role of sexual communities and the role of sexual identities. They observe that a historical drift towards public and private recognition and

protection of same-sex sexuality, intertwining with the transition from the first to the second generation in which the homosexual community and the homosexual identity spread and empowered same-sex desiring people, shapes the later transition from the second to the third generation together with the emergence of sexual citizenship and the social upheaval and political conflicts stemming from the AIDS/HIV crisis in the 1980s and 1990s (Broqua 2015). In this latter historical transition, same-sex desiring people gradually disinvest in the community and in the identity because they do not need their psychological and material support anymore.

The Italian study does not include the last generation, and thus ends short of the latest evolutions in community and identity. Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 264-267) point to community and identity in the history of homosexuality as 'cultural strategies' adopted by same-sex desiring individuals to overcome homophobic repression. They emerge from, intertwine with, and are based on another set of cultural strategies that same-sex desiring individuals adopt to understand, interpret, and accept their own sexual desire and behaviours. These latter, deeper-level strategies entail relational and gender norms.

The first decisive historical transition brings Euro-American societies from the pederastic models to the inversion model of homosexuality. This transition coincides with the stabilisation of the nuclear family as one of the main cultural and demographic pillars of Euro-American societies in the XXVIII and XIX centuries (Barbagli and Kertzer 2005). In the widely majoritarian heterosexual population, sexuality transformed from a desire that a man would force on a woman to an expression of unity between two desires, the male and the female, that were complementary in their diversity and led to a harmonious mutual respect between partners (Mosse 1988: 97-103). Same-sex desiring people's interpretation of the place of their sexuality changed in unison. They stopped interpreting their sexuality as a means to enjoy or a push towards enforcement of interpersonal inequality, and started interpreting their sexuality as an aspect of a relationship between equals who are distinguished by their gender identification.

The second transition, from the inversion model to the modern model, coincides with the long, winding, and unfinished process of gender equalisation across the XIX and XX centuries (Therborn 2004: 96-99). Increasingly capable of finding a way to escape an only lightly retreating homophobic repression, same-sex desiring individuals keep on seeing sexuality as part of relationship based on mutual understanding, as heterosexuals do, and embrace emerging gender equality as a new norm making away of the necessity of diversity of gender identification between sexual partners.

Same-sex desiring people's engagement with social norms is focussed firstly on norms regarding what has recently been called 'personal life' (Smart 2007: 28). Personal life can be thought of as all those relationships in an individual's life that exert the reality-building force, through the workings of habit and sharing of life experiences, that Berger and Kellner (1964) originally saw in marriage. Despite

marriage having been considered unmatched in its reality-building force in the past, sociologists now recognise that other relationships qualify as part of personal life (Smart 2007: 29).

Opting, as it gradually became normative, to include sexuality in the partner relationships that were part of their personal life, same-sex desiring people in the XVIII, XIX and XX centuries stumbled on another generational question: gender norms. Gender refers to the social attributes distinguishing the sexes (Risman 2004). As initially observed in the sociology of primary socialisation (Chodorow 1978: 205-209), and popularised in the sociology of married life (West and Zimmerman 1987), the social attributes distinguishing the sexes are learned and reproduced in interpersonal settings (Risman 2004).

In the transitions from the pederastic models, to the inversion model, and to the modern model of homosexuality, lesbians and gay men giving direction to their life courses considered how personal relationships and gender sustained each other in their predecessors' lives, and left a generational legacy of relational and gender norms to their posterity. This legacy, once and again reformulated, regained and handed down, consists in the unhinging of individual compliance to relational norms and individual compliance to gender norms, in their mutually supporting interconnection.

As discussed above, in the transition from the pederastic to the inversion model of homosexuality, same-sex desiring people follow change in social norms with their choice to see sexuality as part of positive personal relationships. They also contest the idea that the different genders that the two individuals involved in sexual romance must express are the immutable product of natural and anatomic predestination. In doing so they advance a subterranean norm stating that individuals can change their socially gendered traits in order to invest in sexual and romantic relationships that are beneficial to and negotiated by both partners. In the transition from the inversion model to the modern model of homosexuality, same-sex desiring individuals, by then increasingly embracing the lesbian and gay identity and community, follow changes in social norms regarding the role that the gender of one's partner should have in individuals' readiness to commit to one's stable couple relationship. In doing so, they advance a subterranean norm stating that compliance to socially female or male gendered traits should not decisively influence an individual's availability to negotiate personal relationships with her or his partner if this can be beneficial to both partners. In both transitions, same-sex desiring people show that individuals can choose to follow relational norms against gender norms.

In their generational accounts, Anglo-American sociologists consider the personal lives of lesbians and gay men. However, they do not consider the mutual construction of relational and gender norms, and trace the developments in lesbian and gay relationships back to declining homophobia and destabilised community and identity. They overlook that contemporary lesbians and gay men might have taken up the engagement of their predecessors through the synchronic interaction

of life courses and existence of generations. In doing so, they would reformulate relational and gender norms in the sense of giving priority to relational aims over gender compliance, and carrying this form of agency across their life courses.

In Italy and other Euro-American countries, some aspects of lesbians' and gay men's lives have been analysed in light of the interplay of relationships and gender. The studies reviewed in the next section lack an explicit generational framework, do not focus on the transitions happening as the 1980s and 1990s generations go through their life courses, or bear no insight on the case of Italy. However, they point to three spheres of lesbians' and gay men's lives in which engagement with relational and gender norms and creation of new life courses can be observed: sexual developmental trajectories, stable couple relationships, and parental desires.

1.2. Revisiting lesbians' and gay men's lives in Italy

1.2.1. Sexual developmental trajectories and resilience

Lesbian and gay political instances have for decades relied on a statistical argument in advocating for public recognition and protection of same-sex individuals and relationships from repression and violence (Barbagli 2010): roughly 1 every 10 individuals in any national population experiences same-sex sexual orientation and identifies as homosexual. This estimate is strongly reappraised, if not downright undermined by contemporary estimates of the prevalence of non-heterosexuals in Euro-American countries. Most studies report a prevalence between 1 every 100 and 4 every 100 individuals (Carpenter 2013).

Despite the gap in estimates, social and psychological research and political activism agree that knowledge on the prevalence of non-heterosexuals, and their gender, sexual orientation, and sexual identity distributions is useful for the societal management of the negative effects of sexual minority status (Herek *et al.* 2007). The incidence and scope of these effects are usually tackled in a framework of social exclusion and discrimination. Two European projects, sponsored by ILGA-Europe and IGLYO (Takács *et al.* 2006) and by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA 2013), and an Italian project (D'Ippoliti and Schuster 2011) adopt this framework, measuring the incidence and identifying the social settings of sexual minority individuals' encounters with discrimination caused by sexual prejudice. The three studies stress that the social and psychological vulnerability of sexual minorities to homophobic repression is especially relevant in the pre-adolescent and adolescent phase of individual entry into sexuality.

The retreat of homophobia in Euro-American countries in past decades is observed cross-nationally (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 306-311), with Italy making no exception (Istat 2012b), and is traced back to economic development

and social liberalisation (Andersen and Fetner 2008a; Andersen and Fetner 2008b; Adamczyk and Pitt 2009; Gerhards 2010; Takács and Szalma 2011; van den Akker *et al.* 2012; Kuyper *et al.* 2013). Referring to it as the most impressive socio-cultural transformation in Euro-American countries in the past decades, McCormack and Anderson (2014) highlight its links to changing gender norms.

Euro-American countries, according to Connell (2005: 189-195, 199-203), are characterised by a gender regime of 'hegemonic masculinity'. This regime entails the production of inequality in social standing and decisional power between genders through the equation of masculinity with an active role and femininity with a passive role across social situations. The privilege of maleness is thus continuously reproduced at a collective level, and evaluated and recognised at an interpersonal and individual level through the endeavour of social marginalisation of women and confirmation of their difference from men because they are socially marginal. This pattern is reproduced in sexuality, through the interpretation and enforcement of a marginal role of women's subjectivities in sexual decisions, behaviours, and desires (Connell 2005: 244-251). Following Connell, McCormack and Anderson (2014) see hegemonic masculinity as a source of repression, discrimination, and control not just for women, but also for same-sex desiring people, stigmatised as gender deviants. Adopting a diachronic lens, they observe hegemonic masculinity gradually transforming into 'inclusive masculinity' in Euro-American countries in past decades. Less fixated on the importance of opposition and distance between female and male social attributes, inclusive masculinity marginalises and discriminates women and homosexuals much less than hegemonic masculinity. This transformation is beneficial to same-sex desiring individuals, especially because they are faced with weakening stigma in the pre-adolescent and adolescent phase of sexuality formation.

In similar fashion to the theory of inclusive masculinity, Savin-Williams (2005: 79-81, 167) considers gender norms and homophobia as intertwined social facts. Rather than inquiring into the influence of changing gender norms on homophobia, he sees the experiences of young non-heterosexuals in contemporary US through the lens of the influence of homophobia on gendered aspects of sexuality. He critiques the idea that distinct sexual developmental trajectories characterise differently sexually oriented individuals, in contrast with previous research that interprets differences in patterns of sexual experiences and relationships in individuals' development of sexuality across sexual orientation and sexual identity groups as evidence of a heightened vulnerability of same-sex desiring youth to psychological maladjustment. The similarity of experiences in youth sexualities is revealed by the fact that young non-heterosexual people, once homophobia wanes, abandon gender-oriented sexual identities, such as the lesbian and gay identity, because they do not need to invest psychologically on the relevance of the gender of their preferred sexual partners once there is no need to protect their sexuality from repression. Focussed on the gendered sexual orientation of non-heterosexually identifying individuals, Savin-Williams' account

touches on other contact points between gender and non-heterosexuality when he notes that women display distance from gender-oriented sexual identities and feelings more easily than men because of the bio-socially rooted proneness to romantically-driven sexual interest (Savin-Williams 2005: 169-175, 211-213).

Sexuality research shows that gender norms might shape and differentially promote or repress sexualities in other decisive ways. Presenting the first comprehensive example of non-essentialist sociological theory of sexuality, Simon and Gagnon (1986) state that social norms influence even the deeply internal level of individual sexual fantasies. Inscribing their work in the constructionist tradition of sexual research, Kimmel and Plante (2002) find the influence of gender norms in women's and men's sexual fantasies. Expressed through the motivations, settings, and features of the fantasised sexual encounters or sexual relationships, masculinity and femininity shape women's and men's innermost and original aspect of sexuality. Emerging in female and male minds from childhood (Lamb and Plocha 2014), the imagined and later actualised relationships that involve sexuality are continuously measured against gender norms.

Lesbians' and gay men's engagement with choices that are connected to gendered sexual fantasies have been consistently observed in sexual scripts, *i.e.* the sexual behaviours they adopt and the meanings they see in these behaviours (Hedblom 1973; Schäfer 1976; Schäfer 1977; Hogan *et al.* 1977; Califia 1979; Rosenzweig and Lebow 1992; Coxon 1996; Dowsett 1996). More recently, Chetcuti (2010: 270-275) advanced an in-depth analysis of young French lesbian couples' non-penetrative-centred sexual scripts as expressions of an everyday struggle to undermine gender norms. Together with young lesbians' androgynous presentation in clothing and manners, Chetcuti (2010: 278-281) states, these choices contest one of the central tenets of gendered sexuality: that female sexuality is complementary to male sexuality. Her analysis does not focus on sexual developmental trajectories. Nevertheless, her insight that contemporary individuals adopting homosexual identities can be expected to exert resilience against sexual repression in their sexual choices and everyday interactions lends proof to the continued productivity of an approach to sexual diversity focussed on how individuals interpret their situated interactions (Jackson and Scott 2010).

As reminded by Savin-Williams, sexual developmental trajectories result into sexual identity formation, thus can be expected to involve same-sex desiring individuals' decisive encounters with repression based on gender and relational norm. Additionally, McCormack and Anderson's contribution highlights that resistance exerted by non-heterosexuals against homophobic and repressive gender norms does not necessarily end at sexual identity acquisition. If lesbians and gay men challenge gendered relational norms in the individually decisive moments of sexual developmental trajectories, it is likely they will react to the gendered aspects of the repressive norms they encounter in their life course with transformed strategies and aims.

Chapter 3 focuses on young lesbians' and gay men's changing compliance and resistance to gender norms and their relational injunctions in sexual developmental trajectories, and their influence on other experiences of resistance against homophobic repression. Adopting a generational approach to these matters does not only entail focussing on lesbian and gay individuals' engagement with relational and gender norms they received as a legacy from their predecessors. It also means asking if their agency in face of these norms carries them through changing life courses that result in the creation of a new generation. My analysis is built around cumulative insights on subsequent moments of sexual trajectories, namely emergence of same-sex attractions, coming out to self, coming out to others, and entry into same-sex and different-sex sexual activity. The continued engagement with relational and gender norms displayed by young lesbians and gay men, I contend, does not stop at sexual identity formation, and gives shape to anti-homophobic strategies across their lives. In changing their own lives, lesbians and gay men change the lives of their families, their communities, and other sexual minorities.

From the vantage point of a generational approach to homosexuality, the people making up these families, communities, and sexual minorities go through life courses that are linked to lesbians' and gay men's lives (Settersen 2007). As I discuss in the next subsection, not all lives are equally linked to each other. Stable couple relationships can intertwine individual lives in unparalleled ways, but this social outcome of relational institutions has sometimes been characterised as inaccessible to same-sex desiring individuals. Middle-of-the-road between Chetcuti's attention to intimate couples' sexual scripts and other scholars' interest in the eminently public action of seeking legal recognition of one's couple relationship, same-sex couples' practices offer another window on generational transformations. Tracing the paths of gender norms through the vicissitudes of emerging romantic relationships, this proposition leads to seeing same-sex cohabitation in contemporary Italy as an emerging institution.

1.2.2. Same-sex cohabiting couples and relational institutions

Collecting data on the incidence of same-sex cohabiting couples in Euro-American populations has been a possibility for about thirty years. The 2011 Italian national census provides a figure on the matter for the first time in Italy (Istat 2012a). As reported by the National Italian Statistical Institute, this figure is plagued by many uncertainties emerging from technical and substantive difficulties that were documented in other Euro-American countries with a longer record of statistical data gathering on these relationships (Compton 2013). With the diffusion of legally recognised same-sex relational statuses, a slice of the same-sex coupled population becomes considerably easier to count. In European countries and in the US States that issue same-sex civil union, registered

partnership or marriage licenses, the number of same-sex couples in these legal statuses has been growing (Lee Badgett and Herman 2013).

Despite anti-family and anti-regulatory claims of decades of sexual minority, lesbian, and gay social movements extending up to contemporary years (Brown 2015), Lewin (1998: 246-249) showed that American lesbian and gay couples were embracing commitment rituals that followed the scripts and assumptions of marriage rituals and marital relationships already two decades ago, long before the legalisation of same-sex marriage or similar relationships in US. Contemporary attitudes of lesbians and gay men, especially coupled and cohabiting ones, towards marrying or entering similar legally recognised relationships are the focus of studies on legal consciousness and reception of legal transformations. A common finding in US (Hull 2006: 78-79), France (Rault 2009: 229-232), and internationally with a focus on English-speaking countries (Harding 2011: 61-75) is a diversity of views, from celebration of or desire for a complete assimilation of same-sex unions to the legal statuses available to different-sex couples, to resistance to and rejection of these legal statuses as inadaptable to same-sex desiring individuals' lives or potentially dangerous to their relational freedom. In line with an argument advanced by Lee Badgett (2010: 65-66), these studies do not focus on transformations in the value of marriage and marital-like statuses for heterosexuals caused by national policies advancing recognition and regulation of same-sex couple relationships, since no such influence has been observed in societies where these policies were introduced. At the same time, their focus on sexual minority individuals' experiences, differently from what Lee Badgett (2010: 3-6) envisions, does not encompass the many reasons some lesbians and gay men might be ready to sign up for publicly recognised and regulated coupledness because of an existing or developing convergence between their complex and emergent relational needs and the principles underlying these legal statuses.

Parallel to the development of a sociological account of lesbian and gay legal consciousness, in the late 1990s and 2000s studies in US (Carrington 1999), UK (Weeks *et al.* 2001), Italy (Saraceno 2003c; Barbagli and Colombo 2007), Spain (Pichardo Galán 2009), and France (Courduriès 2011) implicitly or explicitly tackled this latter point. Their qualitative in-depth approach to aspects of coupled and familial everyday life, habits, and aspirations in same-sex couples leads to an appreciation of the widespread role of what Carrington (1999: 176-177, 209-210), in his research focussed on the material construction of domesticity and inspired by earlier sociological contributions on routine housework, called 'myths'. These narrations of partner relationships shape but not necessarily reflect the reality of same-sex relationships. Similar to or different from the relational myths mobilised by heterosexuals, they share with them a decisive influence on relational experiences and destinies.

A recent revisitation of same-sex couples' relationships in UK builds further on and clarifies the importance of myths (Heaphy *et al.* 2013). The authors focus on same-sex couples in civil partnerships in 2009 and 2010. Civil partnership is a legal status available to same-sex partners in UK since 2004, and the only option for same-sex partners in UK until same-sex marriage was legalised between 2013 and 2014 (BBC 2014). Including in their analysis, as previously done in the above cited studies, the division of decisional power between partners, their sexual agreements and disagreements, the importance of everyday communication and once-in-a-lifetime rituals, Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 41-45) frame their findings by noting that same-sex partners conceived of their publicly regulated relationships as same-sex marriages, displaying mythical beliefs by ignoring that they were not in same-sex marriages. These same-sex desiring people mobilised the narrative trope of marriage when they told about their commitment to their partners and explained how they managed their daily relationships, suggesting that the tenets of the marital institution, even without the experience of the incentives and sanctions of this institution, resonated with their coupled life.

Descoutures *et al.* (2008) propose that seeing marriage as an institution requires grasping the ambivalent meaning of this latter concept: a systematic set of norms that gives order to individuals' actions and decisions in a realm of sociality, and the process of creating, vitalising, and reproducing these norms. By keeping in mind that norms can be instituted in the realm of personal life, one becomes aware that institutions such as marriage and other forms of coupledness are rooted and influenced by other, seemingly less easily definable institutions. Among them, the institution of love (Goode 1959).

The institution of love in contemporary Euro-American societies emerged from a centuries-long development centred on the retreat of the influence of families of origin on individuals' marital choices (Illouz 2012: 40-45). Its social bases are the so-called 'marriage markets' in which individuals rate and exchange 'sexual passion, romantic idealisation, affection, companionship, altruism, dependence, attachment, shared experiences, and caregiving' (Coltrane and Collins 2001: 247). The many ingredients of love make it a highly historically mutable institution, as individuals striving to find the right match with a partner that is contextually deserving and willing to receive what one offers and capable and willing to give what one expects look for and create new situations to do so (Bozon and Héran 2006: 31-40). During the XX and XXI centuries, the transformation of the institutional norms of love resulted in the widening of 'dating markets', occupying a growing space in individuals' lives before and during their presence in marriage markets (Rosenfeld and Thomas 2012), and in the rise of divorce and other forms of fateful terminations of relationships, other than death of a partner, that throw willing or unwilling and resourceful or deprived individuals back on the dating market (Coontz 2004: 269-271).

The importance of love at the beginning and at the close of partner relationships is tied to its continued relevance throughout the duration of these

relationships as a stable motivation and measure for partners' behaviours and feelings. As argued by Swidler (2001: 24-29), stable couples are the aptest environment in which to observe a fundamental source of the mutability of love: its two faces of 'prosaic love' and 'mythic love'. Sustaining and modulating each other, the practices and narrations of prosaic love, *i.e.* the everyday routine and cumulating destinies of being devoted to one's partner, and the practices and narrations of mythic love, *i.e.* the rituals and beliefs about being made for each other beyond doubt, shape the other institutions on which partnered life lies (Swidler 2001: 116-117).

In turn, prosaic love, mythic love, and their interaction are shaped by gender norms. How much is asked to each partner in prosaic love (Hochschild and Machung 1989: 196-205; Finch and Mason 1993: 75-76, 117-120; Gershuny 2000: 198-199), how sex contributes or subtracts to the different moments of the love relationship (Elliott and Umberson 2008; Duncombe and Marsden 2014), what age one's partner should be (England and McClintock 2009), what occupational status, earnings, and educational qualification they should have (Drobnič and Blossfeld 2001; Bernardi 2002; Blossfeld 2003) are influenced by how partners are gendered. What happens before and after being in a stable couple in individuals' partnering paths is also gendered. On one hand, women do not have the same entitlement to or wish for no-strings-attached sexual encounters as men (Duncombe and Marsden 2014), and they are more often judged as potential partners on the basis of their looks, sexiness, and other ingredients of an 'erotic capital' (Bozon and Héran 2006: 105-116; Hakim 2010) on whose conditions of production and evaluation they have relatively little control (Green 2013a). On the other hand, relationship terminations tend to damage the well-being of women more than that of men (Barbagli and Saraceno 1998: 84-92; Todesco 2009: 105-114), and finding a new partner tends to be harder for women than for men (Coleman *et al.* 2000; De Graaf and Kalmijn 2003).

At the intersection of these gendered relationships, heterosexual cohabitation emerged as an alternative to marriage in Euro-American countries. Linked to many aspects of renegotiation of the sources, nature, and consequences of female and male contributions in prosaic love and aspirations for mythic love (Nazio 2007: 1-6), it is cross-nationally differentially spread and removed from marriage in duration and rate of dissolution, characteristics of partners and psychological, financial, and material relationships between them, inclusion of partners in kin networks, and presence of children (Nazio 2012). In this respect, from the beginning of the decline of marriage rates and growth of marriage dissolution rates in the 1970s (Istat 2011; Istat 2012c), Italy has followed but not equalled the diffusion of cohabitation and the blurring of its legal and social difference with marriage observed in the Euro-American societal landscape (Kiernan 2002; Perelli-Harris and Sanchez Gassen 2012).

Gates (2013), Banens (2010), and Rupp and Eggen (2010), show that in US, UK, France, and Germany same-sex cohabiting couples have been growing in numbers in past years. These partners' experiences with coupledness are gendered, as different-sex partners' experiences. In their dating markets, same-sex desiring women engage in sex more rarely than same-sex desiring men (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 113-114). Same-sex female partners formalise their relationships more often than same-sex male partners (Carpenter and Gates 2008; Lee Badgett and Herman 2013). Same-sex male cohabiting relationships tend to form between partners with a wider age, educational, and occupational gap than, in descending order, same-sex female and different sex ones (Kurdek and Schmitt 1987; Jepsen and Jepsen 2002; Schwartz and Graf 2009; Verbakel and Kalmijn 2014). Same-sex male cohabiting and married couples often sway from the marital norm of sexual monogamy (Green 2013b). Same-sex female cohabiting and married couples tend to be more egalitarian in distribution of paid work and unpaid work between partners that, in descending order, same-sex male and different-sex ones (Kurdek 2007; Jaspers and Verbakel 2013; Giddings *et al.* 2014). Same-sex female partners, where they can, tend to marry with a prospect of raising children, whereas same-sex male partners tend to do so to pool resources (Aldén *et al.* 2015). Bertone *et al.* (2003b) and Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 203-224) present similar findings regarding same-sex cohabiting partners in Italy. At the intersection of these gendered aspects of love with the institutionalisation of love in stable relationships, a fragility of same-sex couples is observed. Same-sex couples and marriages dissolve at higher rates than different-sex ones (Aarskaug Wiik *et al.* 2006; Lau 2012). More recently, Rosenfeld (2014) presents evidence on the similar longevity of same-sex relationships and different-sex relationships in US.

Rejection of legal recognition of same-sex couples based on the idea that these statuses are essentially inadaptably to same-sex relationships, observed in international studies on lesbian and gay legal consciousness, is also observed in Italy (Bertone *et al.* 2003b). This position could stem from Italian lesbians' and gay men's experience with the gender composition of their relationships, barring them from the enjoyment of resources in experiencing prosaic love, mythic love, and their reciprocal commitment-producing influences experienced by different-sex couples. Same-sex couples would suffer an acute case of the Italian belated institutionalisation of different-sex cohabitation. In Italy and abroad, heterosexual cohabitation, with its sometimes minor incidence when compared to marriage and its nature as a more transient relationship, can be interpreted as a confirmation of the fact that the encounter of clearly different romantic and familial scripts of women and men that usually happens in marriage is the only sound basis of individual compliance to relational commitment (Stanley *et al.* 2004; Stutzer and Frey 2006; Soons and Kalmijn 2009). From this point of view, same-sex cohabiting relationships strike as even less amenable to institutionalisation than heterosexual cohabitations, because they clearly lack gender difference between

partners. Conversely, if lesbians and gay men follow gendered romantic and familial scripts and at the same time aspire to stable and decisive coupled lives, they must reformulate the course of their relationships in the prosaic and mythical aspects that make their and their partners' lives highly interdependent and linked.

Chapter 4 focuses on generational transformations in experiences of same-sex coupled and cohabiting lesbians and gay men. I look at these experiences through the diachronic development of life courses. Lesbians' and gay men's growing embracement of the traditional tenets of mutual couple commitment can be firstly glimpsed in their dating experiences. However, the institution of love encountered through these dating markets is deeply influenced by gender norms for lesbians and gay men, troubling the idea that marital-like institutions can emerge from it. Looking into contemporary Italian cohabiting relationships, I highlight that same-sex cohabitation is linked to the emerging institution of heterosexual cohabitation, *i.e.* a set of norms that gives shape to the aspirations and expectations of romantic partners and that developed through the slow erosion of the boundaries between marriage and other marital-like relationships.

The decisions regarding entry into cohabitation and contributions to the material well-being of the cohabiting couple through labour and resources show that same-sex couples manage and interpret their and their partners' acts of prosaic love to support the institutionalisation of marital-like coupledness. The importance of sexual exclusivity and the various ways same-sex cohabiting couples manage it show how gender composition of couples might profoundly shape a traditionally central aspect of the myth of love and still leave it symbolically undisturbed. The practices of emotional support, communication and exclusivity of care function as a bridge between prosaic and mythic love. They are forms of relational labour that are often cherished because they symbolise mutual irreplaceability between partners. Uniting love and family myths, partners' attitudes towards the idea of marrying clarify that mythic love and prosaic love support same-sex couples when they are not married and growingly shape their willingness to pursue marriage as a narration and a reality: a consciously chosen source of norms and symbols helping them create and sustain prosaic and mythic commitment to each other.

In past decades, daughters and sons have also been a part of same-sex desiring people's relational lives. Relationships with one's own children or desired children are decisively influenced by gender and sexual orientation in Euro-American countries. The next subsection looks at life courses and generations through experiences of unbridled individual narration, arguing that they are as much a part of engagement with relational and gender norms as sexual and couple practices. The relatively evanescent topic of lesbian and gay parental desires allows us to see how generations, before manifesting as individuals who navigate changing life courses, are born in the meanings they hold to their sexually diverse, gendered, relationally linked creators.

1.2.3. Parental desires and the meaning of the child

Same-sex desiring people becoming parents in heterosexual marital relationships, and changing their ties to their children if these relationships dissolved and in line with or in spite of possible judicial injunctions, were the norm in Euro-American countries up to a few decades ago and still constitute a majority of lesbian and gay parents (Telington and Patterson 2008), with Italy making no exception (Lelleri *et al.* 2008). From the 1960s on, the phenomenon of lesbians and gay men becoming parents outside of a heterosexual relationship, sometimes without recurring to heterosexual sexual intercourse to do so, gradually gained public visibility (Biblarz and Savci 2010; Gates 2015).

Challenges encountered when counting lesbian and gay parents in Euro-American societies partially emerge from this gradual transformation of non-heterosexual parenting. Single lesbian and gay parents often present demographers who analyse census, register, or sample data with the challenge of identifying sexual orientation without deducing it from relational or marital status, whereas same-sex coupled parents are difficultly distinguished from individuals living with children and co-resident adults who are not their partners (Compton 2013). Parallel to the demographical effort of counting lesbian, gay, and same-sex coupled parents, research in psychology tackled the question if these parental relationships are significantly different from the ones heterosexuals and different-sex coupled individuals have with their children. In terms of various dimensions in the production of children's well-being, no deficit of lesbian, gay, and same-sex coupled parents has been observed, all other relevant conditions equal (Goldberg and Gartrell 2014). Contextually, this framework was reconsidered, confirming the reliability of the produced results but unsettling the idea that heterosexual parental relationships must be *a priori* considered a benchmark for or at least as functional as non-heterosexual ones (Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

This interdisciplinary interest in lesbian and gay parenthood is roused, on one hand, by the fact that children are widely considered according to terms posed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (OHCHR 1989). On the basis of the concept of the best interest of the child, this framing presents children as deserving of all that society can give them, and thus eminently vulnerable subjects (Bennett Woodhouse and Johnson 2009). On the other hand, it emerges from the fact that the connections between sexually mature female and male bodies, their genetic and epigenetic conditions, and children entailed by conception, gestation, delivery, and upbringing are unparalleled in terms of production of social consequences (Bogenschneider 2013).

The contentious character of different parenting conditions, rooted in the essential vulnerability of the child, was already visible in non-heterosexual parenthood through the experiences of non-heterosexual mothers who were and are denied post-divorce custody of their child and non-heterosexual or same-sex coupled individuals who were and are denied access to adoption and foster care

on the basis on negative legal and judicial considerations of homosexuality (Bottino and Danna 2005: 142-145; Gartrell *et al.* 2011). The foregrounding of the social multi-potentiality of fertile bodies caused by the advent of reproductive technologies such as artificial insemination, *in vitro* fertilisation, and gestational surrogacy, all relying especially on women's procreative potential, deepens this contentiousness, energising the search for normative universals in the field of ethics, legal, and medical theory (Jones and Keith 2006; Cahn 2012; Ferraretti *et al.* 2013). Societal differences and commonalities are difficultly interpreted in this endeavour, and divisive debates abound (Morgan 2003; Hanafin 2013).

Socio-psychological research on lesbian and gay parental experiences stresses the relevant influence that homophobic repression has on them (DeMino *et al.* 2007; Bos *et al.* 2008; Baiocco and Laghi 2013). Engagements with gender norms are another central focus of research on lesbian and gay parenthood, when dealing with the transition to parenthood of non-heterosexual and same-sex coupled individuals and with their parenting practices (Bigner and Bozett 1989; Lewin 1993: 182-184; Dalton and Bielby 2000; Lynch 2004; Mallon 2004: 136-139; Goldberg 2006; Berkowitz and Marsiglio 2007; Moore 2008; Gratton 2008: 42-48; Lewin 2009: 50-53, 156-160; Ryan-Flood 2009: 149, 159, 181-182; Berkowitz and Ryan 2011; Malmquist 2015). As argued in these studies, gender norms influence individuals' relationships with the yet-to-be-delivered or developing child along with dimensions linked to procreative means, family structures, and material and psychological resource differentials.

According to sociological research that builds on and revisits the terms of this interdisciplinary debate, gender norms can be the most important aspect of non-heterosexuals' parental experiences, but these individuals are not necessarily engaged in reformulation of gender norms. Agigian (2004: 167-171) argues that do-it-yourself lesbian alternative insemination outside of the medical system is the scientifically most ignored and socially most innovative feature in the landscape of homosexual parenthood, because it unhinges female procreative potential from patriarchal and public control. Mamo (2007: 157-162) agrees with Agigian but notes the decreasing popularity of this practice. In a similar vein, Danna (2015: 29-31) proposes that women becoming parents of children delivered by other women on their behalf can be seen as 'female fathers', and the lack of attention to these embodied and emotional tunings towards parenthood undermines the comprehension of power and agency differentials in a global human reproductive regime. Once the vulnerability of the child becomes a paramount preoccupation, it can increasingly be argued that in the history of Euro-American countries this regime is built to serve male parental free-riders, who desire children as women do (Fahey 2008) but are less involved in turning these children's vulnerability in positive development (Rosina and Sabbadini 2005; Neuwirth and Wernhart 2008).

In a review of the limited literature on the reasons lesbians and gay men desire to become parents or to remain childfree, Mezey (2013) highlights that in their almost always carefully planned realisation of parental desires, economic,

relational, social, and bodily conditions are all very present. These weavings of choices, Hicks (2011: 212-213) notes, cannot be analysed without taking into account that prospective homosexual parents evaluate the resources they have and the paths they take in light of frames picked off from their socio-cultural milieu. Considering the relevance of gender in lesbians' and gay men's paths through assisted reproductive technologies and adoption, transition to parenthood, and management of the parental relationship, and the highly planned character of their fertility and parental decisions, the argument that gender is central in lesbian and gay parental desires, advanced by Mezey (2013) but underdeveloped in the literature she reviews, is probably close to lesbian and gay experience.

In facing gender norms, Gratton (2008: 238) notes, homosexual prospective parents visualise three distinguishable relationships with the child: biological parenthood, *i.e.* the genetic links between children and parents that participate in their conception and the epigenetic links between children and pregnant mothers; social parenthood, *i.e.* the interpersonally and publicly recognised connections between children and parents that can and must in various capacities be responsible for them; and care-taking parenthood, *i.e.* the everyday relationship between children and those who see to their upbringing, well-being, and emotional needs. The productivity of biological links in terms of social and care-taking ties is a mainstay of the Euro-American historical and contemporary parental landscape (Pocar and Ronfani 2008: 230). However, Nordqvist and Smart (2014: 144-149) show, parents who sway away from the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexual marital procreation often see biological links not as inherently valued, but as metaphors and synecdoches of social and care-taking parenthood. Even if the biological link in itself, differently from its metaphor, cannot be produced anew if it is absent at the child's conception and gestation, the fragmented mutual construction of social and care-taking parenthood is made evident by the vicissitudes of parental custody litigated in courts (Barbagli and Saraceno 1998: 161-164; Smart 2004)

Looking into the changing fertility and parental culture of Italian lesbians and gay men, the interlocking influences of gender norms and of intended biological, social, and care-taking relationships with children must be interpreted in light of the social and material connections between biological, social, and care-taking parenthood. All of these aspects can be found, and interpreted in their reciprocal influences, in individuals' 'symbolic reorganisation of reality in ways that make it complicit in realising more fully their many-layered and sometimes multivoiced wishes' (Simon and Gagnon 1986), *i.e.* in their fantasies and desires.

Chapter 5 focuses on the transformation of Italian lesbians' and gay men's fertility and parenthood desires. Firstly, I locate lesbians and gay men in the long haul of transformations of the social meaning of the child in Euro-American countries that resulted in the foregrounding of ties between children and their care-takers. The changes in the motivations Italian homosexuals give for their desire to become parents are analysed, noting that these motivations are different

among single and coupled individuals and between lesbians and gay men. Interpersonally recognised social parenthood intersects with gender and produces different capabilities in mobilising biological parenthood as a metaphor for and a path to care-taking parenthood. However, the ways lesbian and gay cohabiting couples build their parental desires as a couple project, in terms of their material, biological, and emotional needs point to an unfolding story of relationality as the most important resource in the production of the happiness of the parent-child dyad. Observed in its most internal and freely formulated aspects, contemporary Italian lesbians' and gay men's parental culture reveals an aspect of profound generational engagement with relational and gender norms: the enthusiastic embracement, above all bio-social ties to children emerging from the social management of gendered bodies, of the meaning of the child as an inestimable life that must taken care of by communities of mutually supporting individuals unleashing its positive development.

As I will discuss in the concluding sections of each chapter on the three aspects of lesbian and gay lives presented above, these same-sex desiring individuals' engagement with relational and gender norms carries them through changing life courses. This is one reason why we can talk about generational transformation: contemporary lesbians' and gay men's engagement with social norms cumulates through subsequent moments of transition and results in new directions for individuals' lives (Olagnero 2012). It is not the only reason. As I discuss in the next subsection, generational diachronicity entails not only changing life courses, but also the contextual emergence of new narratives allowing contemporary individuals to look back and interpret the past in new ways. Generational narratives were part of past lesbians' and gay men's engagement with relational and gender norms. Looking at changing contemporary Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives, we can see a new narrative emerging.

1.2.4. *Italian lesbian and gay generations and sexual citizenship*

Narratives are the source of the multifarious lesbian and gay communities. These communities, today as in the past, talk back to public instances that legislate sexual citizenship and question their allegiances. At the incipit of Murray's (1996: 1) 'American Gay', the author writes that the book is his

attempt to make sense of [his] own society – one that continues to imperil [him] for being gay – and to see whether the theories put forth to explain modern society and modern homosexuality make any sense of the changing lesbian lives.

His survey of existing social theories and their explanatory power in regards to lesbian and gay lives, motivated in part by the state of American homosexuals' citizenship in the 1990s, leads him to conclude that these theories overlooked

lesbian and gay 'de-assimilation' (Murray 1996: 4). This term indicates the various ways individuals strive to produce beneficial conditions for themselves against hegemonic social norms. Seeing the various forms of lesbian and gay community, which I recalled in my brief account of the history of homosexuality, as expressions of de-assimilation, Murray (1996: 73-74) underscores that they are rooted in individuals' capabilities to redirect their lives.

At a first look, de-assimilation emerges from individuals' agency through the life course, *i.e.* their ability to react to transitions between different moments of their lives in order to modulate the influence these transitions have on the meaning, likelihood, and frequency of subsequent transitions. However, Olagnero (2012) observes, reinvention of one's position in respect to social norms entails not only agency, but also 'desistance'. The desisting option of altering one's life course by looking into the past and seeing transitions and moments once experienced through new eyes is rooted in individuals' sense of narrative continuity, allowing them to see their present self as connected to past selves, and strategies of narrative innovation, allowing them to find new plots between transitions that were before unobservable.

A current preoccupation with lesbian and gay 'normalisation' is linked to the de-assimilatory capabilities of lesbians and gay men. What is truly haunting in contemporary lesbian and gay normalisation is the prospect of disappearance of lesbian and gay communities as previously known (Duggan 2002). These communities, born of generations of same-sex desiring people's need for protection and resources caused by de-assimilation from relational and gender norms giving new direction to their lives, can be profoundly weakened if contemporary lesbians and gay men do not see the transitions in their life courses as exercises in desistance linking their lives to past generational struggles of same-sex desiring individuals. In this case, their claims to participation to socio-cultural expressions of sexual minorities that share a condition of repression under hegemonic relational and gender norms can be easily countered.

Engagement with relational and gender norms is an historical reality in communities of commonly oppressed sexual minorities, and it supports their function as advocates of sexual pluralism, *i.e.* the liberation of sexual expressions on the basis of public knowledge on their harmlessness to or beneficial influence on the various spheres of human life (Weeks 2010: 90-94). In a world in which sexual absolutism is a constant towering menace, mainly through its normative injunctions fixing relationships and gender to each other (Plummer 2015), sexual minority communities cannot afford to waste their limited resources on individuals who do not share their need to combat it. These communities are interested in learning if contemporary lesbians and gay men are among such individuals, because it is useful knowledge to give direction to the development of sexual citizenship. Such a generational drift of homosexual lives would support the idea that the stasis in Italian sexual citizenship in the past two decades advances sexual pluralism. This stasis could be doing so in two ways. Firstly, by

avoiding empowering life courses and communities that do not contribute to pluralist reformulation of relational and gender norms and thus risk hijacking truly sexual pluralist life courses and communities through appropriation of resources and public attention and diffusion of sexual absolutist consensus. Secondly, by responding to sexual pluralist engagement in lesbian and gay lives that does not ask for empowerment with policies in anti-homophobic education, regulation of same-sex couple relationships, and equalisation of non-heterosexual parental projects to heterosexual ones that have been widely supported from different points of view (Herdt and Kertzner 2006; Lewin 2011; Rivers 2011: 185-188; Lingardi 2012: 116-118) but equally widely critiqued (Carrington 1999: 220-225; Warner 2000: 143-147; D'Aiola 2012; Muraro 2014).

Observing contemporary lesbians' and gay men's reinvention of their life courses through de-assimilation to relational and gender norms, and the consequent solidity of their claims of desistance based on the idea that their lives are a continuation of past same-sex desiring people's struggles, can trouble Italian sexual citizenship in other directions. In this case, lesbians' and gay men's engagement with relational and gender norms and consequent creation of communities through agency and desistance in changing life courses would advance sexual pluralism. Italian sexual citizenship would therefore be stirred towards empowerment of lesbians' and gay men's choices and communities as a sexual pluralist policy.

Questions on same-sex desiring individuals' advancement of sexual pluralism through their life courses and communities necessarily focus on the experiences leading them to enjoy an empowered same-sex sexuality. If, in changing external conditions, they do so by engaging with relational and gender norms as their generational predecessors did, their claims of desistance can be seen as solid, their communities as rooted in sexual pluralism, and their lives as troubling for sexual citizenship in plural regimes. When analysing transformations in sexual developmental trajectories in Chapter 3, the first substantive chapter, I introduce the analyses with an additional in-depth discussion of the changing conditions of lesbian and gay lives in the last twenty years in Italy. This sets the chapter apart from the subsequent two substantive chapters and provides the necessary background to provide an answer to my question on lesbians' and gay men's generational narratives and their relevance to Italian sexual citizenship.

Chapters 4 and 5, focussed on lesbians' and gay men's cohabiting relationships and parental desires, advance ancillary points to this answer. Love, cohabitation, and marital institutionalisation on one hand, and positive attitudes towards human reproduction, parental desires, and envisioned childcare on the other are choices some lesbians and gay men might make. The changing conditions in which they make these choices, influencing sexual diversity only indirectly, are useful to understand why they make them and will be described in the chapters. Generational transformations in these aspects of Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives is relevant to sexual minority communities and political actors in

sexual citizenship because, by reformulating relational and gender norms, lesbian and gay might find their everyday communities through coupledness and parenthood. If lesbian and gay lives advance sexual pluralism, supporting their communities empowers them to do so.

In the concluding remarks to the thesis, I reconsider all examined aspects of generational transformation in contemporary Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives from the point of view of narrative innovation. I argue that through all three spheres of their lives homosexuals build solid foundations for claiming that pasts and futures of sexual pluralism created through reformulation of relational and gender norms give shape to their life courses and communities. I then turn back to the striking decades-long immobility of Italian sexual citizenship that first motivated my research, and ponder on what new lesbian and gay generations mean for the recent record of Italian sexual pluralism.

The next chapter presents the methodology and data of my research. The generational theoretical framework of this study emerged through the experience of data gathering and analysis aimed at answering other research questions. Seeing these previous research questions miss the target and understanding why this was happening through to the difficulties and peculiarities of the research design and implementation led me to look at my data as narrations of lives.

2. Methodology, methods, and data

2.1. Methodology and methods of research

2.1.1. *Digging up a methodological framework*

This study started when, following my interest in a doctoral research project on homosexuality, I met researchers who for 15 years had lived with sociological data on Italian lesbians and gay men in the mid 1990s. As Smart (2014) explains, they had lived with this data in the sense that their proximity to fragments of other people's lives left them with a sense that there was something to be done.

The data these researchers had lived with was the result of the 'Essere Gay Essere Lesbica Oggi in Italia'⁶ research project, to which I refer as 'LGB 1995-96' from now on for the sake of brevity. The products of this research project, stored at the Carlo Cattaneo Research Institute in Bologna, contain data on sexuality, relationships, victimisation and discrimination, health, political leanings and activities, cultural interests, socio-economic conditions, families of origin, places of origin and migration experiences, aspirations of 3362 non-heterosexual-identifying individuals who answered to a questionnaire distributed throughout Italy in 1995-96 and of 136 non-heterosexual individuals answering to biographical interviews conducted in different parts of Italy from 1995 to 2000. As a companion study to a social research project on the impact of AIDS on gay lives, relationships, and communities funded by the Italian National Health Institute and giving rise to studies by Colombo and Schadee (1999) and Colombo (2000), Barbagli and Colombo (2007) designed a research on other aspects of same-sex desiring individuals' lives that had already been of sociological interest outside of Italy. The range of this research, and the centuries-long historical background against which it looked at Italian lesbian and gay lives in the mid 1990s as the emerging result of dovetailing social processes, motivated me to see a follow-up research project aimed at confirming its results as an engaging sociological endeavour.

Designing the 'LGB 2012-13' follow-up study entailed some forced methodological choices. Gathering and analysis of repeated cross-sectional survey and interview data requires attention to comparability. The research instruments used in 'LGB 1995-96' were tuned to sociological reflection on sexual diversity and non-heterosexual individuals' lives of the mid 1990s in Italy. The instruments I designed for 'LGB 2012-13' can be found in the Appendices and prioritised comparability over innovation. As I discuss in remainder of this chapter, implementation of the instruments in the field and choice of an interpretative framework is where methodological innovation happened.

⁶ 'Being gay being lesbian today in Italy'.

Reflecting on the methodological features of the 'LGB 1995-96' research led me to conclude that it can be considered a qualitatively-driven mixed-methods (QDMM) research. The mixing of different methods in sociological research has widely acknowledged advantages as a methodological choice, and sometimes methods are mixed across the quantitative-qualitative divide (Small 2011). Apart from mixing survey methods and interview methods, Barbagli and Colombo's research entailed analysing data on members of sexual minority political and leisure associations in Italy, content analysis of Italian and international guides to lesbian and gay venues published from the 1960s to the 2000s, content analysis of literary, diary, and auto-biographical accounts of Italian same-sex desiring individuals' lives in XX century, and direct observation in lesbian and gay venues and cruising spots⁷ in Italy. If this qualifies the research as mixed-methods across the qualitative-quantitative divide, how the survey was conducted and how the data was interpreted qualifies it as QDMM research.

Mason (2006) points to the essential features of QDMM research, among them 'celebrating richness, depth, complexity, and nuance' and adopting 'a reflexive approach to what it is that data represent and how they constitute knowledge'. An initial methodological choice in the 'LGB 1995-96' research was recruiting survey respondents via convenience sampling in lesbian and gay venues and Pride marches. The choice to recruit the respondents in lesbian and gay venues and Pride marches was informed by a nuanced evaluation of the complex reasons why the homosexual population is difficult to reach when designing social research (Rothblum 2007). On one hand, same-sex desiring individuals in contemporary Euro-American societies have historically been subject to discrimination and repression, thus are often pushed towards clandestinity and negation of their sexual diversity (Herek *et al.* 2007). On the other hand, sexuality, as an aspect of individual lives and conducts, is influenced by an impressive set of conditions, and its expression is continuously negotiated by each one of us according to the interplay of desires, opportunities, sanctions, norms, and rationalities (Simon and Gagnon 1986). Recruiting lesbian and gay respondents in different milieux belonging to the lesbian and gay community assured that these individuals would have had considered sexual desire towards the same sex central enough in their lives to visit a lesbian and gay venue or take part in a Pride march at least once in their lifetime and, to some extent, face the dangers of discrimination and shame that could ensue.

Once I reflected on what to do to preserve the qualitatively-driven features of the survey methodology to produce comparable cross-sectional data and on how Barbagli and Colombo interpreted their diverse data, I realised that theirs could be seen as a QDMM research with an embedded generational theoretical framework. Preserving the methodological and technical choices they had made allowed me to

⁷ Cruising for sex is the activity of walking or driving to a public locality in search of sexual partners. This practice is part of the lesbian and gay community in the XX century (Humphreys 1970; Bullock 2004; Frankis and Flowers 2009; Hammers 2009).

interpret their data and my data with a comprehensive generational framework. Such an approach led to the observation of diachronic transformations in lesbian and gay lives. As discussed in Chapter 1, this resonated with international sociological debate on sexual diversity and its emerging awareness of the unprecedented mutability and multiplicity of contemporary sexual lives, and it also directly spoke to the sociological debate on sexual citizenship. In the next subsections, I discuss how reflections on interpretation and secondary analysis of the 'LGB 1995-96' data and on production of the 'LGB 2012-13' data resulted in the QDMM generational framework of my research and in the research instruments I employed. The following section presents the quantitative and qualitative data that will be analysed in the substantive chapters.

2.1.2. A mixed-methods generational research

An implicit QDMM generational framework is at the core of a fundamental decision taken by Barbagli and Colombo on the interpretation of their cross-sectional survey data in light of the interplay between age, period, and cohort effects⁸. On the basis of qualitative evidence and historical analysis, the two sociologists argue that Italian lesbians and gay men belonging to the cohorts born from the post-WWII period to the post-1968 period experienced changing life conditions and life trajectories because of societal transformations in familial and public spheres sweeping across Euro-American countries (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 277-278). They centre their analysis on same-sex desiring individuals between the ages of 25 and 34 at the moment of survey data gathering, splitting this cohort in half and inquiring into the changes observed between those born in the first half of the 1960s and those born in the second half of the 1960s. The two quinquennial cohorts came of age roughly in the first half of the 1980s and in the second half of the 1980s.

The homosexual organisation Arcigay, that would become the largest component of the highly diverse landscape of Italian sexual minority associations in following decades, was nationally established in 1985 in the city of Bologna in the Northern Italian region of Emilia Romagna, five years after being founded at a local level in the city of Palermo in the Southern Italian insular region of Sicily (Rossi Barilli 1999: 132-137, 158-162). Its national establishment can be seen as a turning point in the process of homosexual de-assimilation rooted in the socio-

⁸ Age, period, and cohort effects are the three dimensions of a model aimed at observing the influence of bio-social processes on life transitions. They refer respectively to corporal and mental ageing and accumulation of experience, the external conditions mutating from one historical moment to the other, and the fields of influences to which each individual's life trajectory is exposed because of being born in a historical moment. As Glenn (1976) explains, age, period, and cohort effects are closely interrelated, so that each effect often deeply modulates the influence of the others on individual life courses and is in turn deeply influenced by the others.

economic upheavals of preceding decades in Italy.

Through social, cultural, and political activities, Arcigay and many other formal and informal associations functioned as empowering communities for same-sex desiring Italians. Along with the societal transformations of values emerging from changing demographic and cultural milieux and inclusion of sexual minority issues in cross-national politico-legal debate recalled in Chapter 1, these associations contributed to the gradual decline of homophobia in Italy. On the basis of the historical observation of these processes, Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 271-277) see the two quinquennial cohorts, together with older and younger cohorts born in a period ranging from the early 1950s to the mid 1970s, as generations of same-sex desiring individuals increasingly empowered to achieve the modern homosexual aim of building meaningful personal relationships with individuals they feel attracted to regardless of hegemonic norms mandating different-sex sexual and romantic involvement.

In the second half the XX century, Italy witnessed the gradual replacement of gender-inverted homosexuality with modern homosexuality and following stabilisation of modern homosexuality. As discussed in Chapter 1, these are subsequent waves of engagement with relational and gender norms allowing same-sex desiring individuals to create sexually empowering environments and defy homophobic prejudice in their social surroundings. Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 96, 193, 211) show that homosexual generations are born of these individuals exercise of agency setting them on new life courses: in these lives, adopting a homosexual identity, coming out to one's family of origin, enjoying a stable couple relationship, and participating to homosexual communities that welcome women and men become more common and easier experiences.

Considering the developments of lesbians and gay presence in the political arena in Italy and the decline of homophobia during the 1990s and the 2000s (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 306-311), I reckoned that in order to reach a comparable population to the one surveyed in 1995-96 the sites of data gathering had to change. I engaged in what McCormack *et al.* (2013) call 'spontaneous innovation' in methods. Following their advice, I took to the streets. As shown in detail in the next section, I reached a majority of my respondents while they also were taking to the streets by participating to Pride marches in the 2012 and 2013 spring-summer period. In 1995-96 only a minority of respondents were participants in Pride marches, and most of them were patrons in leisure-oriented lesbian and gay venues. Same-sex desiring people attending lesbian and gay venues in the mid 1990s can be thought as similar to same-sex desiring people attending Pride marches in the early 2010s in terms of personal, intellectual, and emotional investment on their sexual diversity.

This survey research design was presented to the national office of the Arcigay association and approved for funding⁹. The funding I received was instrumental for printing out about 9,000 questionnaires, of which about two thirds were distributed and about one third compiled and returned to me. Distribution of questionnaires was to be entirely my responsibility, with the help I could find. My first experience on the field, as recalled in the Introduction, was at the National Pride march held in Bologna in 2012. My first ever Pride march, it was as much a personal experience I cherish as a highly rewarding research experience, thanks to the help of Arcigay-Cassero¹⁰ volunteers who helped me distribute and gather questionnaires. Contacting the organising committees of other Pride marches, in all of which I was flanked in data gathering by the most helpful groups of volunteer members of sexual minority associations, I started discerning the role that my status as an outsider in the Italian lesbian and gay community had in my research endeavour. As a gay man who had never before participated in the lesbian and gay community, I was able to navigate the highly fragmented world of Italian sexual minority associations, expressed in Pride marches' organising committees, and carry out my research. I was correctly perceived as belonging to none of the politically- or geographically-based factions that one time or the other in the past twenty years of sexual minority activism in Italy had been opposed (Grigolo and Jörgens 2006; Wikipink 2016), and thus worthy of everyone's help.

Realising this was happening led me to unearth the generational framework of the 'LGB 1995-96' research and the potential generational framework of the 'LGB 2012-13' research. My status as an outsider was useful to my research because the world of Italian lesbian and gay associations is highly fragmented and at the same time capable of organising Pride marches to which diverse crowds take part. Similar conditions, twenty years earlier, had allowed Barbagli and Colombo to observe different generations of lesbians and gay men. The two sociologists were able to gather data on how subsequent cohorts of same-sex desiring individuals reformulated their engagement with relational and gender norms in new conditions because these individuals, despite having different lives, participated in moments of community building and reciprocal visibility. They exercised what Olagnero (2012) calls *desistance*: the generation-creating choice to look at lives and moments experienced in the past as expressions of a commonality that overrode the differences between them. The narrative *desistance* these individuals exercised, Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 232, 272) explain, entailed seeing theirs and past same-sex desiring individuals' personal relationships as preferably formed between persons who had developed a lesbian

⁹ At the beginning of 2013, following the election of a new Arcigay steering committee, the research project underwent a second evaluation to decide if the data gathering could receive new funding.

¹⁰ Arcigay-Cassero is the local Arcigay association of the city of Bologna, in Emilia Romagna. The national Arcigay office is located in the Bologna offices of Arcigay-Cassero.

or gay identity or displayed other clear signs of investing on their sexual diversity enough to prioritise it over other aims that could be harmful to full enjoyment of sexuality.

A generational framework, tuned to observing change in agency and narratives, was embedded in the research design I implemented and the data I was gathering for my follow-up study. I became aware of this only after starting to gather data, and found myself with tools designed to answer questions that had in the mean time changed. In the next subsection, I discuss how the instruments I was using can be used to answer the questions on generational engagement with relational and gender norms that had replaced the questions they were designed to answer at first.

2.1.3. Research design and instruments

In my original research design, qualitative interviews were meant to provide the main evidence on the influence of homophobia on the diffusion of modern homosexuality in Italy through situated and negotiated couple relationships. Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 317-318) conducted interviews focussed on individual biographies of same-sex desiring individuals and interviews focussed on same-sex couple relationships, on two different biographical interview guides dealing with a set of themes that was similar to the one considered in the survey. The two strands of interviewing were conducted with partnered and non-partnered individuals, and interviews focussed on the couple relationship were conducted either with only one partner or with both partners separately. In the 'LGB 1995-96' QDMM study, quantitative and qualitative methods were designed in order to allow an integrated interpretation, as different kinds of evidence to be interpreted one in light of the other to glimpse social facts (Small 2011). Having kept the questionnaire mostly unchanged, I decided to use a mix of the individual interview guide and the couple interview guide used in the 'LGB 1995-96' research, in order to maximise the possibility of integrated interpretation of qualitative and quantitative data. However, the qualitative design was also significantly narrowed in some directions and expanded in others in respect to the 1995-96 research.

The hypotheses guiding interview data gathering were based on Barbagli and Colombo's (2007: 127-136, 212-218) account of the negative influence of homophobia on same-sex desiring individuals' empowerment resulting in a slower aggregate transition from the model of gender-inverted homosexuality to the model of modern homosexuality. I expected to find more gendered roles, gendered division of housework, paid work, and decisional power, and gendered sexual behaviours between stable partners who experienced or had experienced harsher homophobic repression. The interview guide I used can be found in Appendix B and, in line with my hypotheses, focussed on individuals' and couples' experiences

with homophobia, division of housework, paid work, and decisional power, and sexual activities. It also touched upon the themes of romantic involvement and emotional support between partners, parental desires, and past experiences and future plans of ritual, material, and legal commitment between partners to tease out additional insights on same-sex stable relationships and lesbian and gay life courses.

Stable couples qualified for the study if the partners were aged 20-40, had cohabited for at least one year, were childfree, and lived in two main cities in the North of Italy. The first criterion aimed at identifying couples roughly belonging to the cohorts coming after the youngest one studied by Barbagli and Colombo (2007), thus individuals born from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s. The second criterion aimed at selecting interviewees who, having cohabited for some time, could better answer questions regarding the everyday workings of a same-sex stable relationship. Couples and individuals with children were excluded because of the far-reaching consequences of the presence of children in couple relationships (Gabb and Fink 2015: 86-88), prompting to limit the study in order to avoid treating considerably different experiences under a theoretical framework that could not account for these differences. Couples' places of residence were narrowed down to two cities in the North of Italy because of time and resource limitations. The couples were contacted via snow-ball sampling initiated through online pages of sexual minority associations in the two cities.

The two members of cohabiting couples were interviewed separately, one after the other according to the partners' preferred order. Through the interviews, I aimed at producing a mix of 'self narratives' and 'relational narratives'. Self narratives, Stein (1997: 7-9) notes, are 'stories of and about the self in relation to an experience', and are similar to biographical narratives because they often centre on life moments that individuals see as decisive for whom they are, and to personal experience narratives because they revolve around one or a few aspects of the individual's life. My focus on the role of homophobia in individuals' lives profited in depth and scope of gathered information and insight from the choice to put each individual self at the centre of an independent narrative.

The open-ended, biographical interview guide aimed at allowing me and the interviewees to move between self narratives and relational narratives with ease, teasing out how individuals' and couples' experiences of homophobia and the gendered aspects of their relationships could be present in partners' behaviours and attitudes. I let each interviewee expand their narratives according to what came to mind when answering my questions on couple relationships and individual lives, in order to gather additional insights on how the conditions, emotions, and rationalities behind each individual's narrative entered the couple relationship through implicit and explicit negotiation

Cohabiting relationships, as discussed in Chapter 1, are potentially reality-making relationships for the partners. Much of what goes on in couple relationships is seen and interpreted by partners through the lens of

collaboratively built frames emerging from everyday interaction: when partners display their relationship, they do so for themselves as much as for others (Beitin 2008). What the interviewer unveils by questioning the interviewee is often a narration that carries the influence of unspoken rules, power differentials, and common blind-spots between partners (Duncombe and Marsden 1996). By telling couples I would interview both partners, I elicited individual stories in which the other, absent partner acted as a third participant in the conversation, continuously recalled in her or his opinions, reactions, and habits. Once I began interviewing, I noted that the linguistic acts of quoting one's partner in direct or indirect speech swamped the interviews. This performative aspect of interviews, as if they were *mises-en-scène* of the couple's life, allowed me to see how collaboratively-produced narratives helped partners give meaning to their shared experience as a couple (Heaphy and Einarsdottir 2012). The biographical interview guide, leaving room for the flexibility and imagination of respondents' minds and memories to decide what aspects were worthy of attention (Anderson and Jack 1991), allowed me to switch between and combine self and relational narratives during each interview.

Separate interviews allowed me to inquire into aspects of the couple's relationship that were known only to one partner and into disagreement between partners. On one hand, as Carrington (1999: 14) argues, separate interviews are useful to elicit information on what partners see and experience differently from each other. On the other hand, secrets play an important role in close relationships (Vangelisti 1994; Easterling *et al.* 2012), and I did not shy away from asking partners about any information they might have kept hidden from each other or pry into their secrets when they told me they were comfortable with it.

The 'LGB 2012-13' questionnaire, reported in Appendix A, was designed by selecting questions from the 'LGB 1995-96' questionnaire. Considering the different data gathering situations, the limited resources, and the impracticality of paper-and-pen questionnaires in an age of on-line surveys (Rothblum 2007), 48 of the 120 questions of the 1995-96 questionnaire were selected for the 2012-13 questionnaire. The questions were reproduced as they were originally formulated¹¹. Questions on sexual orientation and identity were included to identify lesbian and gay respondents¹². Sexual developmental trajectories and resilience, sexual, romantic, and cohabiting relationships, and parental desires were chosen as the three substantive interests of the questionnaire. These aspects of lesbian and gay lives were originally thought of as indicators of same-sex desiring individuals' freedom from homophobic repression. In line with what had been previously observed and considering the decline of homophobia in past decades, I expected

¹¹ The reproduction of wordings of questions and answers from the 1995-96 questionnaire to the 2012-13 questionnaire had a few exceptions, indicated and discussed in footnotes in the substantive chapters and in Appendix A.

¹² In the following section of this chapter, I discuss the wording of the question on sexual orientation and its rationales.

to see sexual developmental and sexual identity formation trajectories in pre-adolescence initiating at younger ages (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 95, 271), aspirations to form stable relationships in young adulthood spreading (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 205-206), and parental desires being stably avoided because of the unmodified situation of exclusion of homosexuals from the many social and familial norms governing the eminently complex experience of parenthood from the mid 1990s to the early 2010s (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 218-221). Questions on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics (sex, age, place of birth and residence, educational qualifications and parents' educational qualifications, religious affiliations and practice) were meant to function as proxies for different levels of experienced homophobic repression. According to Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 92-95, 98-196), less socio-economically developed regions of Italy, *i.e* the South and Islands as opposed to the North and Centre, families at the low end of the social stratification, and religious families can be expected to be especially homophobic environments. Observing that homosexuals in these milieux in 2012-13 abandon attitudes and behaviours spread among homosexuals in 1995-96 at a slower pace than their contemporaries in other milieux would provide ancillary evidence on the hypothesised influence of homophobia on the continued spread of modern homosexuality.

As I began analysing my qualitative data, I realised that the initial hypothesis on gendered same-sex stable relationships, based on comparison between lesbian and gay lives in 2012-13 who had experienced and experienced different levels of homophobia identified according to the results on lesbian and gay lives in 1995-96, was not supported by my interviewees' stories. Once survey data gathering was finished and I began analysing the data, all of the three hypotheses based on diachronic comparison of survey data were disconfirmed. Most of the ancillary hypotheses, based on comparison between lesbian and gay lives in 2012-13 across differentially homophobic milieux identified according to the results on lesbian and gay lives in 1995-96, were also disconfirmed. By then, my path through data gathering and analysis had led me to understand that I was asking my data the wrong questions.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the three moments of first experience of same-sex attractions, entry into the young adult dating market that for some results in stable and cohabiting relationships, and negotiation of parental desires in light of one's and one's intimate community's needs and prospects could be seen as transitions in contemporary Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives. If lesbians and gay men displayed reformulation of relational and gender norms in the sexual and familial paths they stepped into when facing these transitions, generational transformations of homosexual life courses through individual agency could be observed. If these life courses could support lesbians' and gay men's claims to a narrative that contextually empowered their agentic reformulation of relational and gender norms and linked it back to similar agentic reformulation in the life courses of past same-sex desiring people, generational transformation of homosexual life

courses through desistance could be observed. The QDMM methodological framework through which my data was constructed allowed me to inquire into these generational transformations.

The design of survey and interview instruments allowed me to follow lesbians' and gay men's experiences throughout their sexual and familial paths. As discussed above, the interview guide and the survey questions were almost unchanged from the 1995-96 to the 2012-13 research, thus comparability was preserved. As it will be shown in depth in the substantive chapters, the different aspects of lesbian and gay life courses considered in the survey, initially thought as other dimensions in which the influence of homophobia on the diffusion of modern homosexuality could be observed in line with the three hypotheses regarding same-sex attractions, attitudes towards stable coupledom, and parental desires offered diachronic models of lesbian and gay life courses. The focus of the interview guide on individual life courses and encounters with homophobia allowed me to gather information on each interviewee's background that informed my ability to interpret their narratives regarding couple relationships and familial projects. Personal narratives on these latter themes were prodded with very general questions, originally being marginal interests in the research. This let interviewees free to set the terms, scope, and depth of their accounts about such matters, on which all cohabiting lesbians and gay men talked at length. They all showed to be open to share with me secrets or details, either spontaneously or when I teased them out by setting the right terms of the conversation and allowed them to feel their intimacy and self-esteem was respected.

Extending the QDMM generational framework of the 'LGB 1995-96' research to my research, I integrate survey data and interview data in the same interpretative framework. I look at both types of data seeking evidence of change in the life courses of Italian lesbians and gay men from the mid 1990s to the early 2010s that can be traced back to their engagement with relational and gender norms. As discussed in Chapter 1, each of the three substantive chapters on sexual developmental trajectories, stable couple relationships, and parental desires focuses on the agentic aspect of lesbians' and gay men's reformulation of gender norms, following them through these moments of their life course to see if they are different from their predecessors' life courses. The concluding chapter of the thesis looks back at the entire life course of contemporary Italian lesbian and gay young adults to see how these lives produce a new generational narrative in respect to the their predecessors' narrative centred on personal relationships based on homogeneity of sexual identity. The next section of this chapter presents the procedures I followed to prepare data for analysis, descriptive statistics of the 1995-96 and 2012-13 survey samples and profiles of the 2012-13 cohabiting interviewees, and consideration on how this data is analysed in the thesis.

2.2. Data

2.2.1. Survey data

Respondents' answers to all anonymous questionnaires in 2012-13 were coded and entered in a data matrix by me and student collaborators at the University of Bologna, Italy. Variables produced by each question were coded according to the rules followed for the same question for the 1995-96 data matrix that I received from Carlo Cattaneo Research Institute. When more than one questionnaire had been answered by the same person in 2012-13¹³, the ones she or he had compiled after the first were cancelled from the data matrix.

The two survey samples of lesbians and gay men are compared throughout the substantive chapters. Tab. 2.1 presents descriptive statistics of the two samples¹⁴. In 1995-96, 71.5% of the 825 female respondents and 87.3% of the 2,509 male respondents identified as homosexual; in 2012-13, 67.2% of the 1,133 female respondents and 91% of the 1,776 male respondents did.

As shown in Appendix A, the question on respondents' sexual orientation did not change from the 1995-96 to the 2012-13 questionnaire. The text of the question read only 'You define yourself as:'¹⁵. The 'homosexual' category in tab.

¹³ As shown in Appendix A, the questionnaire distributed in the 2013 spring-summer period asked respondents if they already had answered to the same questionnaire in previous occasions, to minimise and control the occurrence of one respondent answering to more than one questionnaire. Screening for already surveyed respondents was also done in 2012 and 2013 by instructing survey distributors to remind potential respondents not to answer to the questionnaire if they had already done so in previous occasions. I and my collaborators observed potential respondents' initial reluctance to answer to a questionnaire while they were at a Pride march, Pride event, or leisure venue, and this was also expressed in their readiness to say that they had already answered to the questionnaire in previous occasions.

¹⁴ In this and all other analyses, the cases considered refer only to respondents who reported their gender and their sexual orientation. In this and all other analyses, respondents were coded as lesbian or gay if they reported identifying as homosexuals and reported being either female or male. A discussion of the question and coding used for respondents' sexual orientation is presented in this section. Missing cases in all variables considered in each analysis are never included in the analyses. For all questions in which the 'Other (specify)' option was among the possible answers, when respondents wrote down their answers they were inserted in the data matrix, but they were not coded. In some of the following analyses, these cases are treated as missing, whereas in other they are not reported but not treated as missing, either if the respondents specified their answers or not. In either case, it is so indicated in footnote. In only one analysis (indicated in footnote), respondents answering 'Other' are cumulated with respondents giving a different answer. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

¹⁵ The original question reads in Italian: 'Ti definisci:'. The answers to this question I report in this section read in original: 'Omosessuale', 'Omosessuale, e qualche volta ho relazioni eterosessuali', 'Omosessuale, e spesso ho relazioni eterosessuali', 'Eterosessuale, e spesso ho relazioni omosessuali', 'Eterosessuale, e qualche volta ho relazioni omosessuali'. For wording of question

2.1 cumulates those who answered ‘Homosexual’, ‘Homosexual, and I sometimes have heterosexual encounters’, and ‘Homosexual, and I often have heterosexual encounters’. The ‘heterosexual’ category cumulates those who answered ‘Heterosexual, and I often have homosexual encounters’, and ‘Heterosexual, and I sometimes have homosexual encounters’. Sell (2007) advises researchers to be aware of the differences and interconnections between sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual behaviours when asking sexual minority individuals about their sexualities. The question on sexual orientation in my surveys used the label ‘homosexual’, instead of ‘lesbian’ or ‘gay’, to suggest a self-definition that could be rooted in sexual orientation alone or sexual identity and sexual orientation together. It included the option to define oneself as homosexual having different rates of heterosexual encounters to suggest that those who had heterosexual encounters but felt closer to homosexual orientations or homosexual orientations and identities could answer on the basis of their attractions instead of their behaviours. Both choices aimed at being inclusive towards individuals that could for different reasons be less empowered to adopt a non-heterosexual identity or act on non-heterosexual attractions¹⁶.

In 1995-96, 21.2% of the 2,780 homosexual respondents were women, whereas in 2012-13 32% of the 2,378 homosexual respondents were women. All analyses in following chapters are done separately for women and men. In the 1995-96 survey, 27.6% of homosexual respondents compiled the questionnaire during Pride marches, whereas in the 2012-13 survey 78.2% of homosexual respondents did so. The distribution of homosexual respondents in age classes (less than 25 years old, between 25 and 34, more than 34 years old) is different across gender and samples, with the lesbian sample in 2012-13 being particularly skewed towards young ages¹⁷. Analyses are done separately for age classes only when the role of life stage is considered to be especially relevant to the question at hand and must be discerned from the influence of other diachronic processes. Considering the upper and lower age boundaries of 44 and 15 years, from the

and answers, see Appendix A.

¹⁶ These consideration resonate, even if only partially, with what Murray (1996: 34-35) wrote on the United States in the 1990s: ‘Not all societies use sexual behavior to define roles, but in North America roles defined at least in part by sexual behavior exist. These are posited on the assumption that features such as gender identity, sex roles, gender roles, sexual object choice, and sexual identity covary straightforwardly. [...] Outside of the ivory tower, there are at most six role categories: heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, transvestite, heterosexual transvestite, and transsexual. For many members of the culture the last four are conflated, and for some others the last five, leaving only two categories (wrong *vs.* right, queer *vs.* normal, or gay *vs.* boring)’. There is no need to embrace his reductionist vision of sexual identity labels to argue that the widespread social framing of sexuality as a field of conflict between worthy and unworthy individuals has a relevant influence on sexually diverse lives in contemporary US and Italy.

¹⁷ The age of respondents in the 1995-96 sample is calculated by subtracting their reported year of birth from 1995. The age of respondents in the 2012-13 sample is calculated by subtracting their reported year of birth from 2012. For wording of question and answers, see Appendix A.

oldest to the youngest these three age classes capture in 1995 cohorts born in the 1951-1960, 1961-1970, and 1971-1980 periods, and in 2012 in the 1968-1977, 1978-1987, and 1988-1997 periods. In both samples just over 60% of lesbian and gay respondents belong to an annual birth cohort that is not represented in the other sample.

Homosexual respondents in 2012-13 are likelier than homosexual respondents in 1995-96 to be born and live in the South of Italy and in cities with less than 300,000 inhabitants¹⁸. The diffusion of tolerance of homosexuality in Italy is observed at a national level (Istat 2012a). In my experience of survey data gathering, the most successful moments were the National Pride march in Bologna in 2012 and the National Pride village and march in Palermo in 2013. The 2013 manifestation was the first National Pride march in Sicily, where Arcigay had originally been founded, and the first National Pride held in the Southernmost regions of Italy. The fact that such a manifestation was held in Palermo suggests that there is convergence between different geographical regions of Italy in homophobic societal attitudes.

Homosexual respondents are likelier to have a university degree and to have a parent with a university degree in 2012-13 than in 1995-96, in line with the expansion of higher education in Italy (Triventi and Trivellato 2008). The distribution of homosexual respondents according to political orientation observed in the 1995-96 sample is reproduced in the 2012-13 sample: about 87% position themselves as left-wing, with women consistently and slightly more left-leaning than men¹⁹. About 71% of lesbians in 1995-96 and 2012-13 discuss politics at least once a week, whereas about 67% of gay men in 1995-96 and 76% of gay men in 2012-13 discuss politics at least once a week. These latter differences between samples and genders are not considered in my analyses.

¹⁸ Geographical region and population of city of birth and residence are coded on the basis of respondents' answers to open-ended questions on their places of birth and residence. Geographical region of birth and residence is coded according to the system devised by the Italian National Statistical Institute assigning each Region of Italy to the 'North', 'Centre', and 'South and Islands' geographical regions. Population of city of birth and residence in the 1995-95 sample were coded by the 'LGB 1995-96' research team using the Italian National Statistical Institute table on population of Italian cities ('comuni') in 1995, and in the 2012-13 sample by me using the Italian National Statistical Institute table on population of Italian cities in 2012. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

¹⁹ The political orientation of respondents was surveyed using a 10-points scale. For wording of question and answers, see Appendix A.

Tab. 2.1 Descriptive statistics of survey samples of all respondents and of homosexual respondents in 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

		Women		Men	
		1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Sexual orientation	Homosexual	71.5	67.2	87.3	91
	Bisexual	13.6	18	6.1	5.1
	Heterosexual	5.5	5.4	1.9	0.9
	Don't know	7.9	7.2	3.8	1.9
	No answer	1.6	2.2	1.1	1.2
	<i>N</i>	825	1,133	2,509	1,776
		1995-96		2012-13	
Sex of respondents identifying as homosexual	Women	21.2		32	
	Men	78.8		68	
	<i>N</i>	2,780		2,378	
		Lesbians		Gay men	
		1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Setting of questionnaire administration	Lesbian/gay venue	71	16.4	74.2	24.2
	Pride march	29	83.6	25.8	75.8
	<i>N</i>	590	761	2,190	1,617
Age	<25	22.5	33.6	19.6	25.2
	25-34	55.9	43.2	54.5	39.5
	>34	21.6	23.4	25.9	35.4
	<i>N</i>	564	753	2,082	1,592
Geographical region of birth	North and Centre	75.1	61.9	69.8	64.9
	South and Islands	24.9	38.1	30.2	35.1
	<i>N</i>	538	696	1,941	1,486

Tab. 2.1 (cont.)

		Lesbians		Gay men	
		1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Geographical region of residence	North and Centre	83.6	71.5	78.2	76.5
	South and Islands	16.4	28.5	21.8	23.5
	<i>N</i>	554	708	2,027	1,509
Population of city of birth	>300,000	40.7	33.1	38.4	31.2
	<i>N</i>	538	698	1,941	1,486
Population of city of residence	>300,000	45	38	45.5	39.4
	<i>N</i>	554	708	2,027	1,511
Educational qualification	University degree	20.6	34.2	22.2	41.3
	<i>N</i>	567	714	2,086	1,527
Parents' highest educational qualification	University degree	22.8	30.9	15.7	23.3
	<i>N</i>	545	702	1,972	1,473
Political orientation	Left	92	89.5	85.6	86.3
	Right	8	10.5	14.4	13.7
	<i>N</i>	537	658	1,938	1,477
Frequency of discussing politics	At least once a week	70.1	71.8	67.2	76.2
	<i>N</i>	578	758	2,146	1,606

As discussed throughout the substantive chapters in footnotes, in most analyses on the data gathered through surveys in 1995-96 and 2012-13 I teased out insights on lesbian and gay life courses through a reconsideration of what the data could be pointing at. The QDMM generational framework of my research emerges from this attention to the ambiguity of meanings survey respondents communicated through their answers. Respondents rarely interpreted the questions and answers they read as referring to just one dimension of their lives and ideas. Each information they gave could be mapped out on multiple symbolic and experiential fields. Embedded in the choice to contrast the 1995-96 and 2012-13 samples as referring to two generations creating new life courses through the interaction of synchronic and diachronic life courses, this reconsideration of the

meaning of my survey data guides another decisive analytical choice. In their original study, Barbagli and Colombo (2007) analysed some central aspects of homosexuals' lives emerging from the 1995-96 survey data without distinguishing between genders. The centrality of gender in my theoretical framework led me to look at all survey data contrasting and interpreting differences and commonalities between lesbians and gay men. Similar considerations are relevant to the analysis of my interview data, discussed in the next subsection.

2.2.2. *Interview data*

All interviewees were recorded and then transcribed by me. I changed all sensitive information to protect the anonymity of respondents. I analyse 24 separate biographical interviews with partners in 12 cohabiting couples in the substantive chapters focussed on couple relationships and parental desires. The interviews lasted from 1 hour and a half to 4 hours and were conducted in the couples' private homes. Most but not all of the interviewees identified as lesbian or gay. Throughout the chapters I refer to all couples as lesbian and gay couples for the sake of brevity. Tab. 2.2 presents the profiles of these couples and their members. Women make up 8 of the 12 couples. Partners are between 22 and 38 years of age and have been cohabiting for a minimum of 1 year to a maximum of 7 years.

Two thirds of interviewees have a university degree, whereas just below half of respondents to the 2012-13 survey who cohabit with a same-sex partner do. The interview sample is skewed towards the high end of the educational stratification. The qualitative evidence used by Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 320) included literary accounts taken from biographies of lesbians and gay men in the XX century. Relatively high educational qualifications in my interview samples can be seen as reproducing this reliance on the most culturally advantaged strata of the same-sex desiring population when inquiring into linked life courses.

The monthly income of interviewees ranged from no income to about 3,000 Euros. Most interviewees' monthly income fluctuated frequently. As common among young workers in Italy today (Barbieri and Scherer 2009) many among them had precarious contracts and work situations. This could be rooted either in the peculiar position of highly educated adult youth in the Italian labour market, at high risk of precarious work conditions (Murgia *et al.* 2012), or in the socio-economic marginalisation of homosexuals (Lee Badgett 2007; Botti and D'Ippoliti 2012). My quantitative and qualitative data does not allow me to support one interpretation over the other. The many vicissitudes the careers and incomes of my cohabiting interviewees underwent were instrumental in gathering accounts of interdependent and linked lives.

Tab. 2.2 Profiles of cohabiting couple interview respondents in ‘LGB 2012-13’.

Sex of partners	Interview code	Years of cohabitation	Respondent code	Pseudonym	Age	University degree	Income per month (Euros)
Women	L1	1	L1.1	Celeste	26	Yes	1,000
			L1.2	Vanessa	36	Yes	2,000
	L2	2	L2.1	Rita	28	Yes	1,500
			L2.2	Sofia	29	Yes	1,500
	L3	1	L3.1	Chiara	23	No	None
			L3.2	Elisa	36	No	3,000
	L4	6	L4.1	Gloria	32	No	1,600
			L4.2	Daniela	28	No	1,500
	L5	1	L5.1	Anna	28	Yes	3,000
			L5.2	Pilar	28	Yes	1,000
	L6	6	L6.1	Francesca	37	Yes	2,500
			L6.2	Nina	36	No	2,000
	L7	2	L7.1	Giselle	30	Yes	1,800
			L7.2	Stefania	29	Yes	2,000
	L8	7	L8.1	Sara	38	Yes	3,000
			L8.2	Alessandra	36	No	2,000
Men	G1	4	G1.1	Ferdinando	31	Yes	1,000
			G1.2	Pietro	32	Yes	1,500
	G2	1	G2.1	Tito	25	Yes	None
			G2.2	Lorenzo	29	Yes	1,500
	G3	6	G3.1	Carlo	32	No	1,700
			G3.2	Roberto	34	Yes	1,200
	G4	2	G4.1	Bruno	38	Yes	2,500
			G4.2	Emanuele	22	No	1,000

All interviews were conducted in Italian, and I report quotes translated in English in the substantive chapters. I adopt special caution to preserve the anonymity of my respondents when I discuss sensitive topics and report about opinions and facts that interviewees signalled as especially personal. In these cases, I anonymise the quotes completely and cancel all information tracing the quotes to any interviewed couple, except for the gender of respondents.

As discussed in Chapter 1, engaging with the transitions entailed by linked coupled lives and parental projects requires lesbians and gay men to face gender norms that are embedded in relational institutions, procreative ties, and bodies. In Chapter 4, focussed on lesbians' and gay men's stable couples and their negotiations of love and commitment, I show that these relationships are increasingly vitalised. Heaphy et al. (2013: 7) propose this term to highlight how contemporary couples often reconsider many aspects of their relationships in light of new experiences and developing rationalities, wanting to keep true to their deeply felt wish to be held together by love and to collaborate to see this happening. My cohabiting interviewees saw diverse facets of their life together as balancing, unsettling, implying, or supporting each other. Keeping a focus on the differences between genders is necessary to see through these intertwining relational ties. Lesbian and gay partners are profoundly different in some respects, and their negotiations and relationships differ accordingly. Trying to capture the complexity of these linked and sometimes mythical relational lives, I report partners' narrations at length. Couples' experiences, recalled extensively by interviewed partners on their terms, are composed of partners' unexpected connections between moments, uncertainties, narrative arches, and unanswered questions. Preserving these aspects of the partners' interviews allows me see how relational and gender norms are reinvented by lesbians and gay men.

In Chapter 5, focussed on lesbians' and gay men's parental desires, the relational and gender norms that lesbians and gay men engage with display a relatively unmovable core. The interdependence of familial projects between stable partners, emerging from love and commitment discussed in Chapter 4, and the gendered bodies inhabiting parental imaginations seem to leave little space to individuals' reformulation of relational and gender norms. As I will show, contemporary Italian lesbians and gay men engage in this endeavour by symbolically contrasting the whole of parental resources emerging from relational experiences with the whole of parental resources emerging from biological potentialities and similar constructs. Interview data is viewed through this binary model of parental resources, but lesbian and gay partners refer to it through metaphor and allusion and ask once again to be listened to as much as possible.

In the next chapter, I look at bodily experiences as well. I see them through the politics of sexual pleasure that young women and men adopt to unsettle relational and gender norms. Relying only on my survey data, I discuss the main generational transformations that might bring contemporary Italian sexual citizenship closer to bodies and pleasures.

3. ‘What am I to do with this desire?’: sexual developmental trajectories and resilience²⁰

3.1. Introduction

In his contribution to a Kinsey Institute call to elaborate on Alfred Kinsey's insights on sexuality, anthropologist Gilbert Herdt (1990) proposes an integration of the typology of models of homosexuality distinguishing age/status-structured, gender-inverted, and modern homosexuality with a reflection on sexual developmental trajectories. Borrowing from his words, every cultural model of homosexuality demands individuals to unlearn certain ways to respond to their bodies, feelings, and thoughts and learn new ways, or go through developmental discontinuities, sometimes socially controlled, sometimes ignored, sometimes opposed. These sexual discontinuities are marked by emotions and rationalities. If my sexual desires do not get to be told and heard, does that mean that I am alone, or does that mean that I am free? If my sexually flourishing body is celebrated, do I belong to the powerful ones now? How long will it take for me to enjoy sexuality, once people around me start seeing me as a sexual being? Should I keep silent, should I speak, should I just go somewhere else? If I go somewhere else, is that speaking or keeping silent?

Turning back to the matter two decades later, and building on interdisciplinary research on sexuality he and others had conducted in the mean time, Herdt (2010) notes that the emotionally-loaded discontinuities of sexual development appear in life earlier than usually thought. By the age of 10, most people are already responding to the sexual norms they encounter, and to the tightly interwoven gender norms. In turn, he concludes, care-takers are called to alleviate the most upsetting or painful aspects of sexual developmental discontinuities, when individual resources do not suffice to this end.

Contemporary homosexuality entails visible discontinuities for many same-sex desiring individuals. Silence, solitude, fear, estrangement, flight, but also hopefully belonging, forgiving, love, empowerment, home are all feelings that might arise from same-sex sexual desires and might strongly steer individual lives on different routes. As sexual minorities fought to live out more positive lives, research adopted ‘resilience’ as a term for all these responses to hardships and opportunities (Savin-Williams 2001b). The new terminology underscores that, in spite of enormous social pressure and opposition, same-sex desiring people manage to integrate their sexuality in positive biographies. In young same-sex desiring people's lives, resilience comprises the ability to process emotions, hope

²⁰ A version of this chapter was presented in the RN23-Sexuality panel ‘Sexual Citizenship I’ at the ESA Annual Conference 2015 ‘Differences, Inequalities, and Sociological Imagination’, 25-28 August 2015, University of Prague.

and optimism, but most importantly the capability to find social support in one's own life-world, that is an array of connections to other people who cherish the individual's developing sexual desires (Riggle *et al.* 2008; Kwon 2013).

Same-sex desiring individuals aiming for this effective form of resilience are faced with a peculiar kind of developmental discontinuity: how am I supposed to find people who support me, or turn people around me towards supportive attitudes, if I am not capable to recognise, name, and commit to the desire I want them to support? This dilemma is centred in the dynamics between aspects of the social self (Mead 1972/1934: 173-178) that according to classic and contemporary texts constitute individual sexuality (Simon and Gagnon 1986; Jackson 2006). Being imbricated in the moments of sexual developmental discontinuity that individuals must once and for all leave behind if they want to face subsequent hardships with the right spirit, it often becomes visible in same-sex desiring individuals' own stories as a sort of narrative background. This is visible in the stories of lesbian women answering to a question on the experience of feeling for the first time and coming to terms with their homosexuality in a survey on homosexual lives in Italy (GSL 2005).²¹

We need to understand what 'choosing' really means. You can't choose against your deepest feelings, or else you end up in a mental hospital. It's true, feeling is no big choice, but accepting it, putting it at the centre of your thoughts and of the way you see yourself and want to be, that's a choice: it is a political choice.

I never took this decisive choice, it happened in small steps and little moments, little crossroads I encountered in my life where I'd say: ok, I'll go that way, no, I'll go the other way. All these tiny choices brought me where I am now. It's true, many people had the same opportunities I had, and their choices brought them somewhere else.

Wondering if I was homosexual was a punch in the face. [...] I thought, and it's still like that somehow, that I loved women only because I had never met the right man. I wanted to be like all other girls who fall in love with boys.

²¹ The survey and interview research conducted by GSL (Gruppo Soggettività Lesbica) in 2001 differs from other studies on homosexual lives in Italy. Greatest attention is given to capturing and presenting lesbian women's stories in their own words. In this respect, this research is similar to earlier work done in the context of the National Lesbian and Gay Survey (NLGS 1992; NLSG 1993) in UK. All of the quotes from the field reported in this chapter are taken from the GSL study. They all refer to lesbian women and their lives. When respondents to this research are quoted in this chapter, it is assumed or observed that lesbian and gay experiences are similar in respect to the examined themes. Unfortunately, I found no other study focussing on lesbian and gay youth in Italy reporting such a wealth of first-hand stories, therefore not all themes examined in this chapter will be displayed through qualitative, in-depth data. In all chapters, when I quote directly from works that were published in languages other than English, I translate from the original language to English.

These Italian lesbian women talk about the choice of listening to one's own desires, and the necessity to reformulate one's own position in respect to sexual norms mandating that each gender is made to sexually desire the other gender. In her reflections on the interplay between same-sex desiring individuals' development and social norms, Tolman (2006) underscores that homophobic devaluation of same-sex desires is not alone in making discontinuities visible and conflictual, and the norms of 'gender complementarity' play an equally decisive role. As Tolman explains, the cultural centrality of difference between women and men results in the framing of women and men as sexually complementary beings by mandating the widespread relevance of gender sexual inequality, the idea that male sexuality is to be valued and female sexuality is almost always a form of deviance.

As the first quote I reported from personal stories of same-sex desiring women reveals, setting oneself on a path of resilience entails a sort of politics of self and everyday life. Resisting the repressive force of the culture of gender complementarity calls for forms of embodiment of sexual desire, *i.e.* individual ways to interact with others in order to produce and protect a self-defining account of how the individual is positioned in respect to social norms (Green 2008; Tolman *et al.* 2014). By resisting these social norms through their deepest feelings or their everyday choices, same-sex desiring individuals can achieve personal positive judgement of their own sexuality, production of interactional situations in which the sexual desire is recognised, and diffusion of the capacity to consider one's own same-sex desire as worthy of emotional and decisional investment.

By focussing on the social and historical contextualisation of contemporary sexual lives, social research showed that lesbian and gay identities continue to hold an essentially political meaning (Coleman-Fountain 2014: 114-120) to the individuals that adopt them, as they support same-sex desiring individuals' claims to free sexuality against the contrary push of repression. Socio-psychological research also pointed out the historical and contextual mutability of the interrelation between repressive sexual norms and individual strategies of confronting these norms (Cohler and Hammack 2007). Individuals adopting a lesbian or gay identity, showing an aspect of everyday political engagement against homonegativity, can be expected to consider the potentialities of other practices of embodiment of sexual desire in their functions of protection of same-sex desire against repression, and to transform these practices in light of changing landscapes of repressive norms.

In this chapter, I argue that contemporary Italy, as a context in which declining homophobia and continued relevance of gender sexual inequality are observed, offers a unique opportunity to inquire into these transformations in same-sex desiring individuals' sexual development, discontinuities, and resilience. The next section (3.2) discusses how the contemporary cultural norms of gender sexual inequality emerged together with modern sexual agency, *i.e.* the social

injunction to trace all human sexuality back to individual desire. These norms made the diffusion of modern sexual agency possible by framing female and male sexualities as different desires that are differently expressed by women and men holding the complete agentic capacity to interpret and act on these desires. The peculiarities of the Italian sexual regime in the evolution of the repression of same-sex desires and in the management of the sexual difference between women and men are presented. The Italian path in sexual politics foregrounds that the two sets of norms of homophobia and gender sexual inequality result in different forms of disempowerment of same-sex oriented sexualities. A description of the evolution of sexual inequality between women and men in Italy in the decades of declining homophobia is offered, in order to argue that its relative weight in respect to homophobia in the set of repressive norms faced by same-sex desiring individuals has been growing. At the same time, young sexualities present aspects of dissidence from hegemonic sexual norms that open avenues for same-sex desiring individuals to claim their sexual agency.

In the third section (3.3) sexual developmental trajectories of lesbians and gay men in Italy are analysed, comparing experiences of developmental milestones across genders, cohorts and time periods in the 1995-96 and 2012-13 survey samples. Incidence, timing and context of first same-sex sexual attraction, first same-sex sexual contact, first different-sex sexual contact, first experience of coming out to self as homosexual, and first experience of disclosure of same-sex attractions are considered. The results point to a convergence between trajectories of sexual development of lesbians and gay men that can be traced back to new forms of embodiment of sexual desire among female and male same-sex desiring individuals aimed at overcoming obstacles to free sexuality posed by the repressive norms of gender sexual inequality.

The fourth section (3.4) presents further analyses of the empirical evidence on the changing nature of sexual desire in lesbians' and gay men's biographies. Strategies of exit and strategies of voice are distinguished, and they are analysed in the choices lesbians and gay men make when faced with homonegativity in the family environment in which they grew up and in the imagined community of religious faith. Lesbians and gay men put their changing sexual desires at the centre of transformed forms of confrontation and modification of unjust and unfavourable conditions. In past and contemporary decades, desires and strategies that feed into and are supported by lesbian and gay identities produce the homosexual community. This community is as a set of actual and imagined spaces that function as means through which same-sex desiring individuals combat homonegativity in their lives by spreading necessary capabilities for other same-sex desiring individuals to do so. The influence of changing desires on this strategy of voice is examined by checking if the limits this voice encounters have moved: the profile of bisexuals partaking in the lesbian and gay community has changed strikingly, pointing to the decline of internal divides in the community connected to the gendered norms of sexual inequality.

The concluding remarks (3.5) recall the conflictual dynamics inherent in the injunction of modern sexual agency to claim one's own sexual freedom laying at the root of same-sex desiring individuals' struggle against homonegative norms. The Italian sexual regime foregrounds the relevance of homonegative injunctions rooted in gender sexual inequality. Observing how these repressive norms are confronted by same-sex desiring individuals at a historical moment in which homophobia knows an unprecedented decline becomes possible. The homophobic aspects of traditionally gendered sexual cultures emerged in Euro-American countries where modern sexual agency became the normative framing of sexuality, and same-sex desiring individuals outside of Italy might also face them through their life courses.

3.2. Same-sex desires and shifting homonegativity

3.2.1. Homophobia and gender sexual inequality

In contemporary Euro-American societies, the set of social conditions resulting in anti-homosexual responses, or prejudice and discrimination against same-sex sexual desires and behaviours, cuts across social divides between the individual and the institutional levels, presenting strong examples of interrelation between everyday practices and collective arrangements (Borrillo 2001: 6-7). Different terms for these social conditions have been proposed and used in social science research. As Trappolin and Gasparini (2012) note, in public debates homophobia is the most widely used umbrella term for all anti-homosexual and anti same-sex sexuality responses, while in socio-psychological research it usually denotes 'the emotional or affective dimension [...] the experience of fear, disgust, anger and discomfort' that produce such responses.

When the meaning of homophobia is narrowed down, any instance of discrimination or prejudice against same-sex sexuality, be it expressed by individuals or institutions, might be termed homonegativity (Trappolin and Gasparini 2012). Compulsory heterosexuality and the presumption of heterosexuality can be thought of as expressions of homonegativity through more or less explicit sanctions, ranging from extermination to forced invisibility or harmful indifference. The systematic and widespread reproduction of hierarchies between lived lives promoting different-sex sexual desire as the expression of a greater humanity that must be respected at all times by agentic human actors, named heteronormativity, is backed up by justifications originated both in homophobia and in gender sexual inequality (Roseneil 2000; Jackson 2006; Seidman 2009).

In the course of modern and contemporary Euro-American history, the cultural and social change that originated in the transformation of sexuality in an

aspect of widespread individual self-evaluation and self-reflexivity resulted in dynamic processes internal to gender sexual inequality, as social conditions in the distribution of human capabilities linked to sexuality intertwined with the distribution of the need for reformulation of such social conditions and of the resources that might be put to use in order to pursue this objective (Simon and Gagnon 1986). The modern vision of gender sexual difference emerged together and spread through the diffusion of modern sexual agency, the liberal framing of sexuality as an arrangement of desires striving to be expressed by the human subject in positive interactional settings (Herzog 2011: 15-19).

In the originally authoritative formulation of the difference between gendered sexualities offered by classic sexological science, the sexual essence of the two genders is alternatively cast as men being sexually predatory and women being sexually predated, or men being sexually rational and women being sexually irrational (Weeks 1985: 81-88; Babini 1986). These allegedly innate patterns of desire-induced behaviours, in the first formulation characterising men as biologically forced to be anti-social actors when their sexual desires are not satisfied, and in the second formulation characterising women as being anti-social actors when their biologically forced sexual desires are not held in check, implies an additional level of difference between genders (Jackson and Scott 2008). According to both interpretations, in order to be agentic sexual subjects men need to be empowered to express their desires, either in virtue of the social value of masculinity or in virtue of the social value of rationality, and women need to be sexually available, controlled and oblivious to their own sexual feelings.

The winding road of sexual modernisation allowed same-sex desiring individuals' and women's sexual desires to be partially unshackled from these chains, by virtue of the possibility to empower repressed forms of sexuality by showing that they are firmly rooted in desire (Weeks 2010: 124-129). However, the two heteronormative sets of norms of homophobia and gender sexual inequality repress free same-sex sexuality according to different logics.

Homophobic norms are based on the disqualification of same-sex sexual behaviour because it is seen as unholy, unordered, unclean, or unsafe. Thus, they lead to conclude that in a society in which same-sex sexual behaviour can be expressed without fear of too much retaliation, individuals who wish to do so and follow a life course that supports this choice are free to hurt themselves as long as they do not hurt the general well-being. Gender sexual inequality qualifies the capacity of individuals expressing same-sex oriented desires to acknowledge these desires and the possibility that they could be central in individual life courses. This form of repression is based on the promotion of a hegemonic interpretation of same-sex oriented sexuality in which the actual or imagined sexual encounter of similarly gendered individuals happens in conditions that foreground the uncontrolled biological origin of male sexuality and the ultimate biographical unimportance of female sexuality. A man enacting or imagining sexuality with other men directs his strong biological sexual drive towards an easy satisfaction,

and a woman enacting or imagining sexuality with other women directs her sexual services where they have no drive to satisfy and end in no real satisfaction of her aspirations. In both cases, the hegemonic cultural framing to which individuals converge is that their sexual drives towards the same sex should be considered empty of the human quality of active individual choice, making them nothing more than a fleeting lapse towards an incomplete individuality (Hyde and Jaffee 2002; Richardson 2010).

Examples of this sexual developmental discontinuity can be found once again in stories of the lesbian respondents to a survey on lesbian lives in Italy (GSL 2005).

I had huge difficulties grappling with my homosexuality since I was a little kid. [...] They'd call me lesbian even if I had never had any relationship with a woman.

Sometimes, it happened to me too, sometimes you can be unaware of your deepest desires, you can fall in love with men and then find out, the first time you get involved with a woman, that that's your true essence. [...] For the first time in your life you're happy you were born.

I started feeling like something was wrong when I was 8, what I mean is I realised they expected me to be someone I was not and feel something I didn't feel. I remember that when I played with my sister I always wanted to impersonate boys. They gave me a book for my First Communion and I was completely fascinated with a male protagonist, he was a total asshole, I see it now, and I always wanted to be him and my sister always wanted to be like the women [...] A running joke in the family was 'you're a boy with something missing' [...] It was a way to talk about my exuberance, the determination other girls didn't display.

The coexistence of the contemporary model of homosexuality, where same-sex desiring women and men do not feel the need to identify with the opposite gender, with the diffusion of a period of gender non-conformity in behaviour and identification in lesbian and gay pre-pubertal stage (Bailey and Zucker 1995; Rieger *et al.* 2008) speaks to the power of gender complementarity and gender sexual inequality in producing eventful and emotionally loaded discontinuities in same-sex desiring individuals' lives. This power goes a long distance, as supported by the observation that same-sex desiring individuals often engage in different-sex sexual behaviour they perceive as undesirable or they later recognise was not based on their own sexual desires (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 53). In the realm of sexual development, same-sex desiring individuals might face this discontinuity many times. Each time, they might try to overcome its undermining force by contesting the gendered frames of sexuality that push them to see different-sex sexuality as the only true and complete form of sexuality because it plays out as an encounter of a dormant female sexual availability and an

uncontrolled male sexual drive. Same-sex desiring women might mobilise their feelings in order to claim that their sexual desires plays a decisive role in their life experiences, and same-sex desiring men might do the same in order to claim that their sexual desires have a better chance to be fully satisfied if they are lived out in positive relationships based on some level of relevance given to the sexual partners' feelings regarding the sexual encounter.

As discussed in the next subsection, contemporary Italian society is characterised by conditions in the social regulation of sexuality that might result in visible opposition to the repressive force of gender sexual inequality in lesbian and gay lives. Same-sex desires in lesbians and gay men could thus be observed to become more similar to each other. This does not necessarily mean that same-sex desiring women become more masculine than different-sex desiring women, or same-sex desiring men more feminine than different-sex desiring men, nor that same-sex desiring women and men become likelier to identify as belonging to the opposite gender. It would however support the idea that Italian lesbians and gay men take part to the transformation of sexual cultures that, in some societies such as the Scandinavian ones, the Anglo-Saxon ones, or France results in relatively small differences in young female and male sexual lives (Billari *et al.* 2007a). The view that social interventions supporting same-sex desiring individuals' struggle for free sexuality are not needed and potentially harmful has spread in Italian public debate, moving from the observation of the decline of homophobia in Italy. This contention implies an interpretation of the role of heteronormativity in the lives of Italian same-sex desiring individuals in which the weight of gender sexual inequality is ignored. At a closer look, the importance of Catholic visions of gender sexual inequality in informing the position of the contemporary Italian society in regards to homosexuality resulted in a form of heteronormative regime that foregrounds the importance of gender sexual inequality.

3.2.2. *Historical paths of homonegative repression in Italy*

In the Italian history of homosexuality, 'repressive tolerance' holds a central role. This term indicates the strategy of the Catholic Church in managing the presence of same-sex sexual behaviours by avoiding repressing such behaviours too harshly, framing them in traditional visions of female sexuality as essentially void of biographical and individual meaning and of male sexuality as fundamentally biologically driven (Dall'Orto 1988; Polo 2007). This approach to homosexuality spread from Catholic milieux to other public instances of management of sexual diversity of different confessional and political creeds, being differentially critiqued according to its rootedness in traditional and accepted visions of gendered sexualities (Fabeni 2009; Paternotte 2016). In such a social context, same-sex behaviours in women and men that to a certain extent oblige to the push of heteronormativity strengthen cultural and behavioural gender

sexual inequality and at the same time repress same-sex desiring individuals' capabilities to be empowered in their life courses by supporting framing of same-sex desires and behaviours as not truly rooted in either same-sex orientation, sexual desire, or either.

Diverse paths in the history of the management of homosexuality in Europe were described by Banens (2010) as pertaining to distinct traditions in the inclusion of diversity in society and citizenship. Traditions of legal universalism, originated in the Napoleonic Code, treated sexual behaviour as part of the private sphere of the individual, resulting in an early historical wave of decriminalisation of homosexual encounters and equalisation of the legal age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual encounters between the XVIII and the XIX centuries, as it happened in Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Spain. A later wave of decriminalisation of homosexuality and equalisation of the age of consent from the 1930s to the 1970s involved nations where the universal principles of the Napoleonic Code did not shape the legal culture, such as UK, Germany, and Scandinavian countries, and a differentialist view of homosexuality as pertaining to a subcultural community of individuals, whose interests had to be evaluated as compatible or incompatible with national interests, was hegemonic. This distinction emerged once more from the 1980s on to contemporary decades, during subsequent waves of recognition of same-sex couple relationships. Universalist countries opted for legal dispositions that were accessible to different-sex and same-sex couples alike (such as PACS in France, registered partnership in the Netherlands, and marriage in Spain), whereas differentialist countries opted for legal dispositions that could be accessed only by same-sex couples (such as the various forms of registered partnership statuses in UK, Germany and the Scandinavian countries)²². As Banens notes, traditions in the link between sexual minorities and political and legal discourses can be still expected to inform national paths of sexual regimes.

Italy stands out as a country of universalist tradition in which the State readily adopted the strategy of repressive tolerance of homosexuality of Catholic origin (Winkler and Strazio 2011: 73-77). In the most recent Italian political debate over the protection and recognition of non-heteronormative lives, public voices argue that the contemporary decline of homophobia in Italy has reached a stage at which individuals in whom same-sex sexual desire occur are free to acknowledge them, express them and direct their biographies in light of them, therefore social interventions supporting the centrality of same-sex sexuality in lives are unjustified attempts at pushing the need of such centrality in individuals that would not independently express this need and would not experience any

²² In the meantime, what had changed was the development of a strongly influential social movement that advocated relational rights for sexual minorities and shaped the international political debate, resulting in decisive steps towards equality between sexually diverse individuals before the law signalled by recognition of marriage equality in countries of universalist and differentialist tradition (Kollman 2007).

encumbrance to sexual freedom (Bernini 2014). Supported by the fact that in Italian society individuals in puberty and pre-puberty are often not considered to be in moments of the life course in which sexual desires are present (Rossi and Ruspini 2010), the policy conclusion is that exposure to homosexuality or other non-heteronormative examples at young ages, either in the family or in the public space, must be limited as much as possible (Selmi 2015).

These positions rely on arguments systematised in the widely spread work of French clergy (Anatrella 2003; Anatrella 2012). In French public debate, opposers of the recognition of individual and relational rights of homosexuals relied on describing a danger of anomy caused by the toppling of gender sexual difference, rather than on the characterisation of the homosexual community as culturally and socially unsuited to receive protection of healthy sexual development and relational aspirations (Brustier 2015). The latter argument would have had weaker credibility in a universalist country such as France, because of the traditional all-encompassing idea of citizenship, the history of loose communitarianism in sexual minorities, and the lack of a virulent political struggle between a homosexual community aiming at liberal reforms and the agents of public order (Gunther 2008: 2-4). Departing from the times in which homophobia could be based on uncommented religious teaching, such as the few lines regarding homosexuality found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1993: 2357), the diffusion of these strategies of repression of homosexuality of Catholic origin resulted in a renewed guise of public homonegativity that proved to be much more effective in the Italian debate than on the other side of the Alps (Garbagnoli 2014).

In past decades, Italian same-sex desiring individuals engaged with a form of repression of homosexuality by means of institutional silence based on widespread everyday heteronormativity. The strategy of repressive tolerance weakened the development of national lesbian and gay social movements in Italy (Nardi 1998), which gained political momentum first from revolutionary ideologies in the 1960s and 1970s, again and with larger social reach as the HIV/AIDS epidemic and related moral panic first touched Italy at the start of the 1980s, and finally with national reach by 2000 (Rossi Barilli 1999: 228-236; Holzacker 2010). At its arrival in Italy, the AIDS epidemic encountered a newly stabilising lesbian and gay community built by individuals choosing to make same-sex orientation and sexuality crucial in their lives. As Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 232, 272) note, the thriving homosexual community of the second half of the XX century stemmed from two relevant and intertwining actions of engagement with repressive norms. On one hand, the widespread diffusion of adoption of a lesbian or gay identity signalled and strengthened individual commitment to a sexuality that was rooted in personal feelings and desires. On the other hand, the adoption of a lesbian or gay identity facilitated, directly and through the promotion of communal spaces and cultures, the gradual diffusion of the decision to build meaningful private relationships of choice, such as stable romantic coupling, with other individuals who identified as lesbian or gay.

Homogamy of sexual identity, *i.e.* the fact that same-sex desiring individuals entered sexual relationships with individuals adopting a homosexual identity, supported the resistance to the repressive framing of homosexuality as a sexual trick, void of the biographical and personal heft of heterosexual desire.

Once homophobia declines, lesbian and gay identities might lose much of their usefulness, as contended on evidence of the contextual pluralisation and loss of personal relevance of sexual identities among same-sex desiring individuals (Savin-Williams 2005: 207-210): same-sex desiring individuals, free of the accusation of inhumanity and moral uncleanness, have an easier time in living out their desires, thus each same-sex desiring individual is facilitated in finding sexual and romantic partners sharing a positive framing of homosexuality. However, if gender sexual inequality does not waver as much as homophobia, same-sex desiring individuals, when experiencing the developmental discontinuity of imagining and seeking same-sex sexual encounters, might still face the widespread and internalised conviction that the gender of their preferred sexual partner is proof of personal helplessness in respect to biological drives to sexual satisfaction for men or irrational unresponsiveness to true sources of sexual satisfaction for women. In Italy, the most vocal homonegative positions relying on the repressive force of gender sexual inequality, such as those expressed by Catholic institutions, have a strong footing in the fact that gender sexual inequality has not receded as strongly as homophobia. Traditional religious views of sexuality rooted in Catholicism influence the contemporary belated and differential spread of sexual behavioural modernisation and sexual cultural modernisation by backing up the stability of values mandating different judgements on female and male sexual agency (Barbagli *et al.* 2010a).

The next subsection argues that, when contextualised in the contemporary transformation of the Italian sexual regime, Italian young sexualities are a site of ambiguity towards hegemonic cultural and social norms, in which avenues for reformulation of gendered sexualities are open to same-sex desiring individuals. The strategies adopted in the past by Italian same-sex desiring individuals in order to overcome the repressive and undermining effect of the peculiar heteronormative regime they faced can be expected to change in light of the new configuration of homonegativity, and youth is a moment of lesbians' and gay men's life courses in which this could be happening.

3.2.3. *The Italian sexual regime and young sexualities*

A historical trend towards more equal cultural views of female and male sexuality has been observed in Italy²³, in line with European and international trends (Haavio-Mannila *et al.* 2002: 202-204; Bajos *et al.* 2008; Barbagli *et al.* 2010a; Mercer *et al.* 2013). However, the traditional double sexual standard still influences Italian women's and men's sexual lives (Bertone 2010).

Values that link sexuality to the protected realm of the romantic couple are indicators of the gendered aspects of sexual regimes. According to heteronormative norms, men's sexuality is considered a necessary drive that should not be shackled by preoccupations about the interpersonal framing of the sexual act, thus relatively loosely tied to monogamous relationships and consensual behaviour. Women's sexuality is considered as a site of danger for the women themselves, thus an experience to be avoided as long as possible and that can be justified only as a necessary concession to the male sexual drive, better if in relationships in which female sexuality is contextually devalued as a desire and traded for other forms of existential security and dignity that compensate in excess for what women give away when engaging in sexual behaviour and following men's will. Consequently, women are socialised to stronger values of sexual restriction and romantic involvement as a fundamental aspect of sexuality.

As reported by Bertone (2010), in the Italian population 16% of women belonging to the 1937-1946 birth cohort think that engaging in sex when no romantic involvement with the sexual partner is present is acceptable, while 41% of men belonging to the same birth cohort do so; in the 1983-1989 birth cohort, 30% of women and 70% of men see this behaviour as acceptable. In this respect, liberalisation of sexual values spread faster among men than among women. The trends in sexual behaviours of Italian women and men corroborate the idea that the cultural norms mandating sexual inequality among genders regulate sexual lives. Similarly, data regarding the total amount of sexual partners in a lifetime does not point out convergence between women and men: men belonging to the most recent birth cohorts in the XX century report a considerably higher amount of sexual partners than their predecessors, and a considerably higher amount of sexual partners than women that are their age-peers, even if across generations women report an increase in the amount of sexual partners.

The initial steps of sexual lives of Italians partially shift away from the stable gender differentials characterising the previously considered aspects of sexuality.

²³ The following data and interpretations are taken from and cite various research studies, based respectively on: a representative sample of the Italian population between 18 and 69 years of age in 2006-2007 (Barbagli *et al.* 2010b); a qualitative study on 100 young male and female Italians in 1998-1999 (Garelli 2000); a representative sample of University student in the first and second year of Statistics and Economics in Italian State Universities in 2000-2001 (Dalla Zuanna and Crisafulli 2004); an international study on representative samples of different University student populations in nine countries between 2001 and 2003 (Billari *et al.* 2007b); a representative sample of the Italian population between 18 and 30 years of age in 1996 (Buzzi 1998).

Across birth cohorts, men tend to experience their first sexual contact earlier than women, but the gap narrows down. Data analysed by Caltabiano (2010) shows that, starting from the 1960s, growing portions of the female and male population experience their first sexual contact during early adolescence. The percentage of women who had their first sexual contact before reaching the age of 16 is 4.5% in the 1937-1946 birth cohort and 18.2% in the 1983-1989 birth cohort. This tendency was weaker for the male population, in which the percentage of individuals who had their first sexual contact before reaching the age of 16 went from 14.1% in the 1937-1946 cohort to 24% in the 1983-1989 birth cohort. Girls and boys increasingly find their sexual partners in peer environments, where equality between partners in romantic involvement or pleasure-seeking is expected and likelier (Buzzi 1998: 22-25) and a great part of the socialisation to sexuality happens (Caltabiano 2010).

The gendered trends in the experience of first sexual encounter in the Italian population result in an equal median age of 18 years at first sexual intercourse for Italian young women and men, higher than the median age observed in most other comparable countries (Billari and Ongaro 2004). This situation differs from contexts in which a younger median age at first sexual intercourse for men signals a strong gender inequality in sexual empowerment, such as the Italian context in the first half of the XX century, and from contexts in which an even younger and equal median age for women and men, or a younger median age for women than men signal the diffusion of a culture of sexual equality between genders, such as in contemporary UK or Scandinavian countries (Billari *et al.* 2007a).

The coexistence of behavioural transformation and cultural traditionalism as a site of potential but subdued conflict in youth sexuality is made more visible by the role of Catholic dogma in contemporary young sexual lives. Belonging to the Catholic faith does not result in significant postponement of first sexual intercourse among Italian girls and boys (Dalla Zuanna and Mancin 2004). Still, it corroborates young people's readiness in espousing traditional values of gender inequality in sexual matters, especially among women (Rizzi 2004). The drive towards sexual realisation is restrained by Catholic obedience, but this restriction also results in individual strategies of liberation from religious obedience, as pointed out by the circular relation between early sexual initiation and desertion from mass (Caltabiano *et al.* 2007).

Garelli (2000: 21-30, 36-43) argues that the configuration of values and behaviours in Italian young people's sexualities display a complex coexistence and interdependence of traditional and liberalising trends. Young Italians' sexual values are sometimes bound to age norms, sometimes espoused as conflictual stances towards hegemonic morality, sometimes presented as forms of respect for traditional sexual culture that are truer and sounder than those adopted by older generations. Barbagli (2010) interprets data regarding the variance of gender orientation in adoption of sexual behaviours and in expression and acknowledgment of sexual desire in individual life courses as pointing to a

liberalising trend involving homosexuality in youth. He observes a drop in behavioural homosexuality in the whole population and a drop in behavioural heterosexuality in the homosexual-identified population, indicating that those who feel homosexual desires have become increasingly capable of acknowledging their desires and behaving according to them thanks to the waning of homophobia. This transformation results in heterosexual-identified individuals and homosexual-identified individuals increasingly becoming two distinct populations, each one with its pattern of gender-oriented sexual behaviours based on a norm of individual free sexuality that can be expected to spread. However, the norms repressing same-sex sexuality that originate in gender sexual inequality might still influence youth in Italy, because young sexualities that are lived in contexts of potential gender equality coexist with the framing of female and male sexualities as different existential and emotional domains.

The relative weight of gender sexual inequality in backing up heteronormative repression of homosexuality in Italy, already decisive and actively counteracted by same-sex desiring individuals in the past, has been growing by effect of the decline of homophobia and of the positioning of homonegative actors as explicit supporter of arguments based on such norms. Lesbians and gay men can be expected to rely on the possibilities presented by the transformations in young sexualities in order to confront the repressive force of gender sexual inequality.

Sexual developmental trajectories present fundamental moments of embodiment of sexual desire, leaving room for the reformulation of the gendered aspects of this desire. The next section presents an analytical framework based on psychological and sociological reflection, applied to my data on Italian lesbian and gay individuals' sexual developmental trajectories. Newly embodied desires feed into sexual identity formation as one among other threads of actions and judgements that the individual might adopt to interpret and protect her or his sexuality. The fourth section presents the changing nature of the choices lesbian and gay men make in order to produce a better life for themselves as same-sex desiring individuals, arguing that these choices undergo transformations depending on the reformulation of the gendered aspects of desire and at the same time support its anti-heteronormative potential.

3.3. Lesbian and gay sexual developmental trajectories

3.3.1. Observing change in gendered desire

As Peplau and Garnets (2000) argue, the gender differences in sexual behaviour and sexual desire are fundamentally expressed in the fact that women are likelier to frame and live their sexuality as stemming and being fulfilled in

romantic relationships and men are likelier to frame and live their sexuality as stemming from biological drives and being fulfilled in any sexual encounter regardless of its relational context. Baumeister (2000), reviewing an extensive socio-psychological, historical, and biological literature, proposes that this difference is strongly influenced by the socio-cultural norms of gender sexual inequality. Borrowing the terms used by him and by Diamond (2008: 3), female sexual desire and behaviour are more fluid, that is more often activated or repressed by interpersonal conditions, partly because they are more plastic, that is shaped by socio-cultural norms in order to be responsive to the male sexual drive.

Research on lesbians' and gay men's sexual developmental trajectories in Italy and other Euro-American countries points to some situations in which same-sex desiring individuals show a strong engagement with gender norms in expressing, presenting and embodying their sexuality. These moments, usually named sexual developmental milestones (Savin-Williams 2005: 14), include first same-sex sexual attraction, first same-sex sexual contact, first different-sex sexual contact, first experience of disclosure of one's own same-sex attraction, and first occasion of identifying oneself as lesbian or gay.

The chronological order and the interactional settings in which these moments happen in female and male biographies point to the influence of gender sexual norms on same-sex desiring individuals. Savin-Williams and Diamond (2000) and Bertone *et al.* (2003a) observe that the normative developmental trajectory for women leads from same-sex sexual attraction to different-sex sexual contact, disclosure of same-sex attraction, same-sex sexual contact and as a last step definition of oneself as lesbian, whereas the normative trajectory for men leads from same-sex sexual attraction to same-sex sexual contact, different-sex sexual contact, definition of oneself as gay and as a last step disclosure of same-sex sexual attraction. The different position of different-sex sexual contact and definition of oneself as lesbian or gay, along with the observation that different-sex sexual contact is more common among lesbians than it is among gay men and that same-sex sexual contact is more common among heterosexual-identified women than it is among heterosexual-identified men, highlights that women tend to oblige to heteronormative norms mandating heterosexual sexual involvement and heterosexual self-identification more than men do.

The interactional settings characterising the developmental milestones in female and male trajectories enrich these accounts of lesbian and gay sexuality. First experiences of same-sex sexual attraction, different-sex sexual contact, disclosure of same-sex attraction and same-sex sexual contact in lesbians' trajectories often all involve the same-sex desiring woman and others that share with her a strong and emotionally-loaded relationship between peers in age and authority. Gay men's trajectories are characterised by first same-sex sexual attraction, same-sex sexual contact and different-sex sexual contact with others who are not involved in mutual feelings of romance or trust, and first disclosure of same-sex attraction with others who are not peers in age or authority. These

differences point to the greater female tendency to experience sexuality as dependent on romantic involvement and to direct romantic involvement independently from a sense of a non-normative sexual self, another aspect that can be linked to gender sexual norms socialising men to be sexually driven and women to downplay their sexuality.

If Italian lesbians and gay men engage with heteronormativity in order to overcome its power in smothering their sexual autonomy, in times of declining homophobia they can be expected to display changes in embodiment of sexuality that challenge norms rooted in gender sexual inequality. The trajectories and interactional contexts of their sexual developmental milestones offer a window of observation on such changes.

3.3.2. *'Do not ask me to remain the same': gendered trajectories*

Cultural factors, among them the cultural norms regulating how gendered individuals should experience and manage sexuality, exert an influence even on emergence of same-sex sexual attractions, an initial moment of sexual development, despite it being often thought of as the outcome of biological commonality (Herdt and McClintock 2010). Women report systematically higher ages at first same-sex attraction than men, a regularity that has been traced back to the recalled socially influenced centrality of romantic interest and attachment in female sexuality (Diamond 2008: 45).

Comparing the median age at first same-sex attraction in my samples²⁴ (tab. 3.1), we see that the median age for men rises from 12 to 13, closing the gap with the median age for women going from 12.5 to 13. This convergence points out that same-sex sexual desires are perceived at their onset in the context of a romantic framing for both women and men.

The trajectories followed by the survey respondents in 1995-96 end with first same-sex sexual contact at 18 for lesbians and with first disclosure of same-sex attractions at 18 for gay men. The last steps in the trajectories of survey respondents in 2012-13, first same-sex sexual contact for lesbians and first same-sex sexual contact together with first disclosure for gay men, happen at a median age of 17. Among lesbians the experiences of coming out to self and first disclosure are anticipated by one year of age (from 17 to 16), whereas the experience of different-sex sexual contact happens at a stable median age of 16.

²⁴ In tab. 3.1 and tab. 3.2, I consider respondents aged between 16 and 30. Lower and upper age boundaries are useful to control the influence of age of respondents on variation of age at and incidence of sexual milestones, and the two boundaries at 16 and 30 years of age rule out the possibility that individuals belonging to the same cohorts are analysed in the two samples. For lesbians aged 16-30 in 1995-96, mean age=25.1, median age=25; for lesbians aged 16-30 in 2012-13, mean age=24.1, median age=24; for gay men aged 16-30 in 1995-96, mean age=25.6, median age=26; for gay men aged 16-30 in 2012-13, mean age=24.6, median age=25.

For gay men, the experiences of coming out to self and first different-sex sexual contact are antedated by one year of age (from 17 to 16), whereas first same-sex sexual contact is stable at a median age of 17.

Various aspects in the timing and sequence of lesbians' and gay men's trajectories point to a convergence that, visible throughout the different moments of sexual development from pre-adolescence to post-adolescence, can be traced back to changing individual framings of emerging desire. By effect of the anticipation of first same-sex sexual contact in lesbians' trajectories and of first different-sex sexual contact in gay men's trajectories, these two experiences now happen at the same median age for the two populations. A stronger investment in sexual drive in lesbians' sexuality is pointed out by the anticipation of same-sex sexual contact. The link to romantic framing of sexual desires, already mentioned when interpreting the convergence of median age at first same-sex attraction observed for gay men with the median age observed for lesbians, is also behind the convergence between median ages at first disclosure of same-sex attraction and first same-sex contact for gay men.

Tab. 3.1 Median age at first same-sex attraction, coming out to self, first disclosure of same-sex attraction, first same-sex sexual contact, first different-sex sexual contact for lesbians and gay men aged 16-30, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
First same-sex attraction	12.5	13	12	13
<i>N</i>	316	492	1,117	816
Coming out to self	17	16	17	16
<i>N</i>	299	480	1,083	801
First disclosure of same-sex attraction	17	16	18	17
<i>N</i>	288	466	989	756
First same-sex sexual contact	18	17	17	17
<i>N</i>	302	470	1,080	802
First different-sex sexual contact	16	16	17	16
<i>N</i>	222	311	591	412

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

The decrease in the percentage of lesbian women aged 16 to 30 that had a different-sex sexual contact (tab. 3.2), going from 71.8% in 1995-96 to 64.8% in 2012-13 and getting closer the stable percentage between the two samples

observed among gay men aged 16 to 30 (53.9% in 1995-96 and 51.5% in 2012-13) can be linked to a decline in the plasticity of young female sexuality resulting in obedience to heteronormative experiences. Among women, sexual fluidity retreats, as far as it is an expression of the production of a silent female sexual desire in gender sexual inequality. However, among young Italian same-sex desiring people, neither women nor men shy away from sexual fluidity in the gender of their sexual partners, as an aspect in the embodiment of sexuality as a site of biological drives and an expression of relationally framed interests towards sexual partners.

Tab. 3.2 Percentages of lesbians and gay men aged 16-30 who had same-sex sexual contacts, different-sex sexual contacts, and that disclosed their same-sex attractions, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Disclosure of same-sex attractions	95.9	98.6	93.4	97.6
<i>N</i>	320	495	1,127	829
Same-sex sexual contact	95.6	96.9	97.2	97.6
<i>N</i>	316	485	1,111	822
Different-sex sexual contact	71.8	64.8	53.9	51.5
<i>N</i>	309	480	1,096	814

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

This form of sexual fluidity, often comprising sexual experiences with partners of the different sex, does not encumber the willingness and capability of lesbians and gay men to seek the realisation and affirmation of same-sex sexuality. Across the two decades, stable or growing percentages of young lesbians and gay men have had same-sex sexual contacts (95.6% of lesbians and 97.2% of gay men in 1995-96, 96.9% of lesbians and 97.6% of gay men in 2012-13) and have disclosed their same-sex attractions (95.9% of lesbians and 93.6% of gay men in 1995-96, 98.6% of lesbians and 97.6% of gay men in 2012-13).

If lesbians and gay men react to heteronormative obstacles to their free sexuality by growingly embodying their same-sex desire in discordance to gender sexual norms, this could be observable not only in timing, ordering, and incidence of sexual milestones, but also in the contexts and interactions in which they experience these milestones. In the following subsections I analyse data regarding contexts of first disclosure and first same-sex sexual contact.

3.3.3. 'Your silence will not protect you': desire and disclosure

Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 69) note that

when lesbians and gay men decide to break the silence about an aspect of themselves that is often considered immoral or wrong, the choice of the person to whom to disclose their homosexual orientation for the first time is guided by two contrasting criteria. On one hand, those who wish to come out look for someone who is close, emotionally available, familiar. On the other hand, they fear the possibility of rejection by loved ones. Therefore, first disclosure happens more often in the context of relationships of choice than in the context of family relationships.

The distinction between relationships of choice and family relationships can be observed among respondents in 1995-96, and still holds true in 2012-13 (tab. 3.3). Lesbians and gay men choose a friend as the person to whom to tell for the first time about their same-sex attractions more than twice the times they choose a relative²⁵. The difference between the two choices narrows in lesbians' trajectories, by means of a diffusion of the choice to disclose to a relative (29.5% of respondents in 1995-96, 37.4% in 2012-13) and the stability of the choice to disclose to a friend (85.8% in 1995-96, 86.5% in 2012-13). Gay men's trajectories show no change, as they see a first experience of disclosure with a relative for 28.4% of the respondents in 1995-96 and for 31.8% in 2012-13, and a first experience of disclosure with a friend for 83.8% of the respondents in 1995-96 and for 85.1% in 2012-13.

Choosing a friend or a relative for one's own first experience of coming out is not just a matter of closeness and fear of rejection. As Bertone *et al.* (2003a) point out, gender differences are at play. Often, in lesbians' trajectories first disclosure of one's same-sex attraction involves a friend, because the sexual desire is framed by the person who expresses it as an exceptional romantic infatuation towards someone of the same sex, be it the person who receives the confession or someone else. When gay men choose to disclose their same-sex attractions for the first time, they usually intend to let someone who is important in their everyday life know about an aspect of their sexual desires that they perceive as decisive for whom they are. Therefore, when they cannot tell a relative for fear of rejection, they choose a friend in which they hope to find as much comprehension for the importance that their non-normative sexuality has to them as possible. A

²⁵ In tab. 3.3, the category 'friend' cumulates all cases of respondents who answered that a heterosexual friend or homosexual friend was among those to whom they first talked about their same-sex attractions; the category 'relative' cumulates all cases of respondents who answered that their brother, sister, mother, father, or other relative was among those to whom they first talked about their same-sex attractions. In tab. 3.3 and tab. 3.4, respondents who chose the answer 'Other' when asked to whom they talked about their same-sex attractions for the first time are not treated as missing. For wording of question and answers, see Appendix A.

systematically lower level of homophobia can be expected in peer relationships with homosexual friends than in peer relationships with heterosexual friends.

Tab. 3.3 Percentages of lesbians and gay men who chose a friend or a relative as the person to whom to first disclose that they have same-sex attractions, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Friend	85.8	86.5	83.8	85.1
Relative	29.5	37.4	28.4	31.8
<i>N</i>	549	739	1,977	1,561

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Note: Multiple answers were allowed.

Tab. 3.4 Percentages of lesbians and gay men who chose a heterosexual friend or a homosexual friend as the person to whom to first disclose that they have same-sex attractions, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Heterosexual friend	67.9	70.5	62.1	71.6
Homosexual friend	31.2	33.6	35.1	28
<i>N</i>	549	739	1,977	1,561

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Note: Multiple answers were allowed.

Tab. 3.4 shows the percentages of lesbians and gay men surveyed in 1995-96 and in 2012-13 that disclosed their same-sex attractions for the first time to a heterosexual friend and to a homosexual friend. Among respondents in 1995-96, more gay men (35.1%) than lesbians (31.2%) choose a homosexual friend, whereas more lesbians (67.9%) than gay men (62.1%) choose a heterosexual friend. This is no longer the case in 2012-13: more lesbians (33.6%) than gay men (28%) chose a homosexual friend, and gay men (71.6%) chose a heterosexual friend as often as lesbians (70.5%). Change in contexts of first disclosure of same-sex attractions in lesbians' and gay men's trajectories points out that the meaning

that lesbians and gay men give to their desire at the moment of first disclosure changes across the decades. The differences between women and men in the embodiment of sexual desire become less salient, as gay men increasingly frame their emerging sexuality as the expression of a romantic attraction and lesbians frame their sexuality as the expression of a sexual drive towards persons of the same sex that is deeply felt and thus more liable to be framed as non-normative.

The influence of gender norms are usually observed in the contexts of first same-sex sexual contact among lesbians and gay men. Since first sexual experiences in young Italian women's and men's biographies are observed to undergo particularly profound changes in contemporary decades, analysing this aspect of lesbians and gay men's trajectories might offer additional insight.

3.3.4. *'I was too polite to ask': same-sex sexual contact*

In contemporary decades, sexual contacts have become more common in young Italians' lives. It is reasonable to think that lesbians and gay men experience increasing ease in finding a first sexual partner, both of the same sex and of the opposite sex. The analysis of incidence and timing of milestones pointed out that lesbians seem to take advantage of this opportunity especially for same-sex sexual experiences, happening for the first time at a younger age than before, and less so for different-sex sexual experiences, becoming rarer. At a first glance, gay men's attitudes towards same-sex sexual contact in their sexual developmental trajectories do not seem to change: the median age at first same-sex sexual contact remains stable. Gay men's attitudes towards different-sex sexual contact are ambiguous: incidence of different-sex sexual contact in their biographies does not change across decades, however the median age at which they have their first different-sex experience lowers. The growing availability of female sexual partners in adolescence and young adulthood seems to make it easier for gay men to experience different-sex sexuality at earlier ages, however the incidence of behavioural sexual fluidity among gay men does not seem to be influenced by this opportunity.

Women show to be more influenced by sexual plasticity not only by being likelier than men to have sexual encounters with people of a gender that is inconsistent with the sexual orientation or identity labels they express, but also by framing different-sex and same-sex sexual encounters in relationships in which romantic involvement is paramount more often than men, with or without an individual footing in a gender-oriented sexual orientation or identity label (Diamond 2008: 45, 62-70). If change in the centrality of sexuality in lesbian and gay development is underway, it should also be observable in the situations in which lesbians and gay men experience their first same-sex sexual contact.

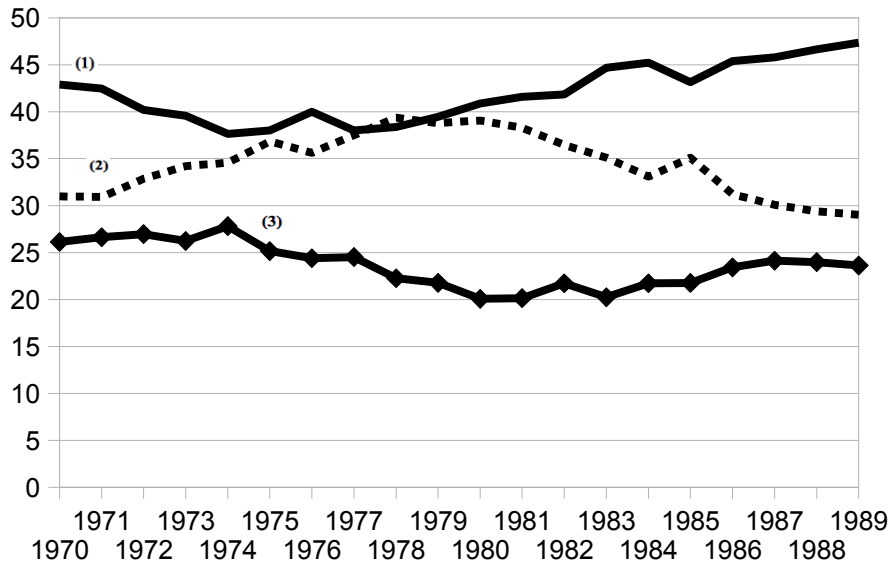
Fig. 3.1 maps out the percentages of lesbians born in each year between 1970 and 1989 that had known their partner in first same-sex sexual contact from

different amounts of time²⁶. Lesbians who were born at the start of the 1970s had their first same-sex experience with someone they had just known (42% for those born in 1970 and 38% for those born in 1974) more rarely than with someone they had known for less than a month, less than a year or over a year. From the cohort born in 1975 onwards, the incidence of first same-sex sexual experience with a partner that had just been met increases, whereas first same-sex sexual experiences with a partner that had been known for over a year and, from the 1979 cohort onwards, first same-sex sexual experiences with a partner that had been known for less than a year or less than a month become rarer.

The last cohorts considered, born in the second half of the 1980s and having had their first same-sex experience mostly between the end of the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s, see the highest incidence of first same-sex sexual experience with a partner that had just been met (47% in the 1989 cohort). First same-sex sexual contact with a partner that had been known for over a year becomes slightly more widespread in the cohorts born in the second half of the 1980s. However, the diffusion of the drive towards early realisation of a sexual contact with the desired partner is likely to be behind the incidence of partners that have been known for less than a year or less than a month in the last cohorts, as opposed to obedience to an injunction towards expecting a strong and tested romantic relationship to enact sexual desire that was behind the incidence of the same kind of situations in the first cohorts. The cumulative incidence of partners that have just been met and partners that have been known for less than a year or less than a month reaches 75% in the last cohorts.

²⁶ In the analysis of the context of first same-sex sexual experience in fig. 3.1 and fig. 3.2, the two samples are merged, following two considerations: 1) the period in which individuals experience their first same-sex sexual encounter is especially relevant compared to the individual's age at which this encounter happens, because, as it will be shown, the availability of different spaces in which to meet sexual partners has a relevant influence on the features of first same-sex sexual experiences of lesbians and gay men; 2) merging the two samples allowed to have a sufficient number of cases for each cohort in the analysis. The lower and upper boundaries of the cohorts considered are set in order to consider all cohorts for which a sufficient number of cases is present. Given the small number of cases for each cohort, I apply a moving means smoother to the time series of cohort percentage values in order to clean out erratic variability. The moving means method calculates means of values in fixed subsets of a historical series, and connects this average to the averages calculated on subsequent subsets obtained by excluding the value at the lower boundary of the previous subset and including the value observed just after the upper boundary of the previous subset in the historical series. The years indicated in fig. 3.1 and fig 3.2 refer to the central year in the subsets considered. Respondents reporting that they did not remember how long they had known the same-sex partner in their first same-sex sexual encounter are excluded from the analyses. For wording of question and answers, see Appendix A.

Fig. 3.1 Percentages of lesbians born in each year from 1970 to 1989 that had their first same-sex sexual experience with a partner that they had just known (1), that they had known for less than a month or less than a year (2), or that they had known for more than a year (3), Italy (values for each year smoothed with moving means method, window: 8 years).



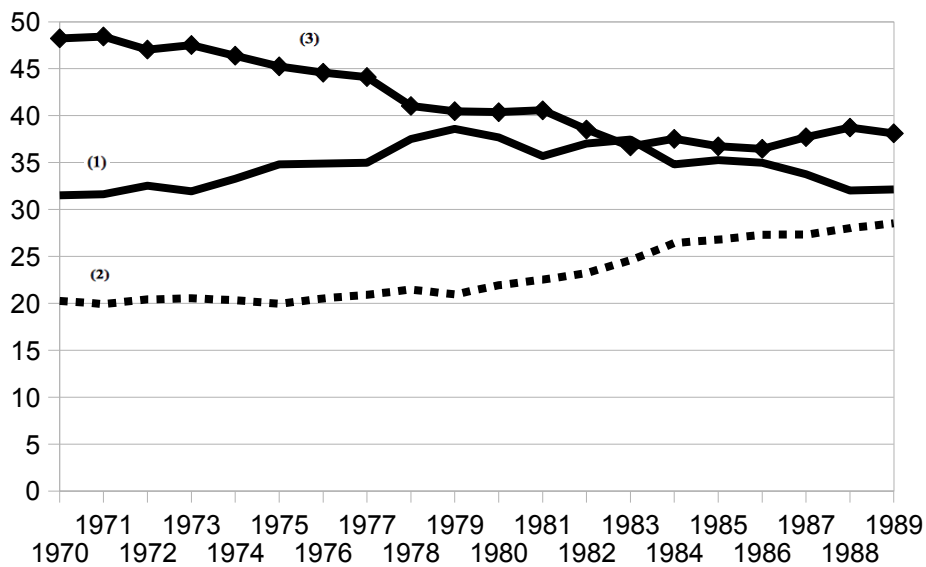
Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Fig 3.2 maps out the percentages of gay men born in each year between 1970 and 1989 that had known their partner in first same-sex sexual contact from different amounts of time. Having had a first same-sex sexual experience with someone who had just been known marks a strong drive towards satisfaction of sexual desire. For gay men in the first cohorts this is also the case for having had a first same-sex sexual experience with someone who had been known for over a year or less than a year: these experiences involved male partners that were usually friends and participated in a sexual activity that they did not see as based on a desire oriented towards the same sex, but only on a sexual drive. Experiences in which the drive towards sexual satisfaction trumps the drive towards framing of sexuality as part of a romantically meaningful relationship involve about 80% of gay men born between 1970 and 1980.

As the years in which these cohorts of gay men have their first same-sex sexual experience unfold (for the majority of them between the second half of the 1980s and the second half of the 1990s), first same-sex sexual contact with a partner that had just been met becomes more widespread and first same-sex sexual contact with a partner that had been known for over a year or less than a year

becomes rarer, as it can be expected when considering the spread of sexual opportunities, the success of sexual venues and the growth of their publics in the Italian gay community.

Fig. 3.2 Percentages of gay men born in each year from 1970 to 1989 that had their first same-sex sexual experience with a partner that they had just known (1), that they had known for less than a month (2), or that they had known for more than a month or more than a year (3), Italy (values for each year smoothed with moving means method, window: 8 years)



Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

When the cohorts born after 1980 enter their same-sex sexually active life course, sexual partners that had just been known start becoming rarer at the advantage of partners that had been known for less than a month. For the last cohorts considered, a slight increase in the previously dropping incidence of partners that had been known for over a year or less than a year accompanies the continuing diffusion of partners that had been known for less than a month. These kinds of experiences cumulatively amount to 65-70% the first same-sex contacts of the cohorts born at the end of the 1980s, and point out the diffusion of a preference towards sexuality as an integral part of a romantically framed relationship. Gay men, in their sexual developmental trajectories centred on adolescence, prefer having their first sexual experience after having had some time to get to know their partners, and being convinced that these partners recognise that their sexual encounter is at least more meaningful than a release of

sexual tension for lack of a preferred female partner. The contexts of first same-sex sexual contact point to the process of overlapping in gendered modes of embodiment of sexual desire in lesbians' and gay men's sexual development trajectories that can be observed in timing and ordering of milestones and contexts of first disclosure of same-sex attraction.

The social malleability of sexual desire, whose boundaries are periodically revisited in scientific debate (Epstein *et al.* 2012) but encompass a great part of sexuality (Baumeister 2000), can be put to use in order to interactionally empower individual choices in sexuality. This contention was originally advanced by the constructionist sociological accounts of sexuality. The theory of sexual scripts focussed on the variability of situated sexual behaviours (Simon and Gagnon 1986) that are easily conceived as modulated by each person but difficultly mobilised and interpreted by those who participate in sexual encounters as confirming or disconfirming individual capabilities in interpreting one's own desire (Rubin 1984; Plummer 2003; Dworkin and O'Sullivan 2007). As shown in this section, sexual trajectories, interactions, and choices are also open to individual reformulation aimed at changing one's own and one's surrounding's interpretations of diverse sexual desire.

Same-sex desiring people's newly shaped desires feed into lesbian and gay identities, continuing to be one of the possible identities or choices that people adopt to empower a potentially oppressed same-sex sexuality at the individual level. In the struggle to adopt a lesbian or gay identity and protect their same-sex sexuality, same-sex desiring individuals set out on life paths in which they challenge their heteronormative surroundings by words and actions, by fleeing and leading. In the next section, I examine how the choices that make up these paths have changed in light of transformations of desires responding to the gender norms at the root of homonegativity.

3.4. Individual and collective resilience

3.4.1. Strategies of exit, strategies of voice

The wider incidence of suicidal inclinations in lesbians' and gay men's lives than in heterosexuals' lives, observed in scientific analysis of the negative outcomes of the struggle with acknowledgment and disclosure of same-sex desire (Remafedi *et al.* 1991; D'Augelli 1996; Garofalo *et al.* 1998), foregrounds the fact that, in facing homonegativity, homosexuals' confidence in their ability to live a fulfilling or bearable life might be deeply undermined. Similar interpretations have been proposed for the wider diffusion of alcohol and drug consumption behaviours among young lesbians and gay men than among their heterosexual age peers (Greenwood and Gruskin 2007).

The focus of socio-psychological accounts on negative outcomes in lesbian and gay lives was criticised as a form of self-fulfilling prophecy, arguing that, since it is difficult to assess that the pressure that homophobic norms exercise on individual well-being is stronger than and independent from other encumbrances that the individual finds in her or his social environment, same-sex desiring individuals risk being portrayed as psycho-biologically more fragile than other individuals (Savin-Williams 2005: 179-183). The framework of resilience was proposed as a corrective to this approach (Savin-Williams 2001b). Looking for resilience in lesbian and gay lives sensitises to the fact that same-sex desiring individuals facing homophobia in their environments often find ways to escape or overcome its negative influence and live happy lives. Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 103-104) note that

those who feel same-sex sexual desires and live in unfavourable environments [...] may react in different ways. Two kinds of reaction have particular relevance: desertion and protest. They can abandon the unfavourable environment or they can try to change it [...]. The first choice might seem the easiest one; however, desertion might take a material and psychological toll as much as protest.

They trace the two ideas of desertion and protest back to the concepts of strategies of exit and strategies of voice developed by Hirschman (1970) and usually applied to the study of political behaviour. This framework recognises the politics of the everyday in lesbian and gay biographies, and widens the understanding of conflictual dynamics by pointing out that, in personal life, desertion and protest are always pondered with and often accompanied by potential or actual suffering.

The material and psychological toll that forced choices caused by homonegative norms take in lesbians' and gay men's lives are documented in the international sociological and psychological literature (Herek *et al.* 2007). When analysing historical change in the role of heteronormativity in lesbian and gay biographies, keeping true to the central tenet of the framework of resilience without erasing the relevance of potential or actual suffering in the ways lesbians and gay men give direction to their life courses calls for a contextual look at different strategies of desertion and protest. The ways in which same-sex desiring individuals face changing norms depend on the influence that suffering has on any strategy of exit or voice considered in respect to other possible ones, and in the toll that any of such strategies, when played out, actually takes.

In the first two following subsections, I look at the interplay between outness in the family environment and mobility in search of a new home, and loss of religious obedience and internalised homophobia. The transformations in these dimensions of lesbian and gay lives lead to two observations. On one hand, changing gendered desires influence the choices of lesbians and gay men according to the unequal terrain of repression of sexuality, leaving some relationships unchanged, others newly troubled. On the other hand, when

strategies of empowerment include suffering, they transform this suffering in the force of new strategies of voice, speaking to the individual that deploys them and to others by legitimising paths that would before be untraceable. In the third following subsection, I show the influence of changing gendered desires of homosexuals on the construction of new conditions for other same-sex desiring individuals to be empowered, looking at experiences of bisexuals partaking in the lesbian and gay community.

3.4.2. *'Escape velocity': origin tales and refuge*

Savin-Williams' (2001a: 199-203) extensive study on young lesbians' and gay men's coming out practices in their families of origin in US points to two main findings. Firstly, lesbians and gay men manage their outness to family members with a considerable amount of rationality, navigating through levels of secrecy, denial, privacy and emotional detachment. Secondly, and as a consequence of the strategic aspects of outness, situations in which only one or a few of the members of the family are knowledgeable or have been told about the sexual diversity of the same-sex desiring individual are common. Regardless of their gender, same-sex desiring individuals are likelier to come out to their mothers than to their fathers, because they expect their mothers to accept them as homosexuals more than their fathers could, and because emotional detachment from the parent that almost universally in contemporary Euro-American cultures adopts a nurturant and caring role is more difficult.

Bertone *et al.* (2003a) and Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 81) find similar patterns in the Italian context. Both studies highlight a trend towards growing ease in coming out in the family across cohorts that can be expected in contexts of decreasing homophobia. Bertone *et al.* (2003a) note that first negative reactions from parents faced with the disclosure of the homosexuality of their child still characterise the coming out process for most homosexuals. These reactions are usually followed by a process of reparation in familial ties, variably lengthy, requiring an amount of psychological effort from all members of the family involved (Beeler and DiProva 1999), and often leaving long-lasting marks of psychological distress in the same-sex desiring person (LaSala 2000). Strategies of avoidance and management of the grieving-like aspects of coming out in the family can still be expected to be present in the lives of lesbians and gay men, along with the continued relevance of familial support as a factor of well-being. As one Italian lesbian woman states (GSL 2005):

Somehow I understand them. They raise you, they care for you, they educate you and what do you do? At the end of adolescence, when they were expecting to finally have a nice, polite, studious daughter, what I mean is when they thought they were finally done with their 'duty' and had done it well, you stab them in the back. It's like they discovered that a crazily expensive product they were counting on stops working the moment the guarantee expires!

This picture is confirmed with great consistency across periods and genders. Tab. 3.5 shows the prevalence of lesbians and gay men in 1995-96 and in 2012-13 whose mothers and fathers either know about their child's homosexuality, know about it but employ denial and avoidance strategies in order to cope with an unwanted reality, never showed signs of awareness of it, or are unaware of it. In 1995-96 and in 2012-13 mothers are likelier to be aware of their child's homosexuality than fathers. 49.2% of mothers of lesbians and 45.9% of mothers of gay men in 1995-96 know, 69.1% of mothers of lesbians and 70% of mothers of gay men in 2012-13 do; whereas 35.7% and 35.1% of fathers in 1995-96 and 56.3% and 56.8% of fathers in 2012-13 do. A growing outness in families of origin is observed. However, in 2012-13 more than one fourth of mothers and almost half of fathers are not told about or choose to be oblivious to their child's homosexuality.

Tab. 3.5 Percentages of lesbians and gay men whose mother and father know about their homosexuality, know but avoid acknowledging it, do not show any sign of awareness, or positively do not know, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians				Gay men			
	1995-96		2012-13		1995-96		2012-13	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Knows	49.2	35.7	69.1	56.3	45.9	35.1	70	56.8
Knows but avoids	12.6	12.9	12.1	14	12.7	11.5	8.6	10.4
No sign of awareness	17.6	15.3	8.1	12	18.9	16.2	11.4	13.7
Does not know	20.6	36.1	10.7	17.7	22.7	37.2	10	19.1
<i>N</i>	533	426	727	649	1,991	1,638	1,504	1,362

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Considering the role of buffer with the family that mothers play for lesbians and gay men, it is not surprising that they come to know about their child's sexual diversity when she or he tells them directly more often than fathers do. As shown in tab. 3.6, 44.9% of lesbians and 43.6% of gay men in 1995-96 came out

spontaneously to their mother, whereas 32.3% of lesbians and 37.5% of gay men did so with their father. After two decades, lesbians and gay men spontaneously come out to their parents with growing ease, but differences still count: in 2012-13, 58.3% of lesbians and 59.6% of gay men came out to their mother, 51.6% of lesbians and 49% of gay men did so with their father. Coming out to one's own mother by frankly talking to her can be considered the first step that lesbians and gay men tend to take in their path towards disclosure when they become convinced that the risk of rejection does not weigh out the necessity of sincere relationships in their intimate life-world. It is a step lesbians and gay men strongly aspire to, but that is taken after careful consideration of homophobia in one's own family and if and how it can be overcome or must be avoided or escaped.

Tab. 3.6 Percentages of lesbians and gay men whose mother and father know of their homosexuality because they decided to come out to them, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians, spontaneously came out to their...		Gay men, spontaneously came out to their...	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
1995-96	44.9	32.3	43.6	37.5
<i>N</i>	383	235	1,307	843
2012-13	58.3	51.6	59.6	49
<i>N</i>	614	471	1,199	936

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

When the family cannot be considered a safe haven from rejection, putting distance from oneself and one's family becomes a viable option, and geographic mobility an effective way to pursue this aim. Lesbian and gay populations have a long history of a peculiar form of lifestyle migration, in which the traditional push factors and pull factors of contemporary human migration are intertwined with conditions in the place of origin and destination that hold specific meaning for homosexual individuals and their imagined lives.

In research on intranational migration of lesbian and gay individuals, pull factors are often the focus (D'Emilio 1989; Weston 1995; Black *et al.* 2002; Wimark and Oesth 2014). Such factors are connected to the cosmopolitan, tolerant and diverse social make-up of large urban environments opposed to small, provincial or rural cities: across countries, lesbian and gay individuals flock to large cities in search of well-being and freedom from stigma. Analysing data from a wide Internet survey of lesbians and gay men in France, Blidon and Guérin-Pace (2013) show that lesbians and gay men choose to find a new place of residence for

a wide array of reasons, and their migration trajectories are not always based only on the dream of a sexually tolerant city. As Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 103) note, sometimes escaping from harm and suffering can be as important or more important than searching for the sense of opportunity that a wide lesbian or gay community can give.

Tab. 3.7 Percentages of lesbians and gay men who migrated because of their homosexuality if they came out to their mother or not, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians, migrated because of homosexuality		Gay men, migrated because of homosexuality	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Came out to their mother	33.3	39.7	32.4	36.3
<i>N</i>	45	136	170	284
Did not come out to their mother	41.3	45.9	36	41.7
<i>N</i>	60	85	214	175

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Tab. 3.7 reports the percentages of lesbians and gay men in 1995-96 and 2012-13 that feel that living their homosexuality freely was a factor in their decision to migrate, if they spontaneously came out to their mother or not²⁷. Lesbians and gay men are likelier to feel that their migration was a step away from repression if they did not think that their mother could be told directly about their homosexuality than if they felt secure from harm enough to spontaneously come out to her, in 1995-96 (33.3% of lesbians among those who told their mother, 41.3% among those who did not; 32.4% of gay men in the first case, 36% in the latter) as in 2012-13 (39.7% of lesbians among those who told their mother, 45.9% among those who did not; 36.3% of gay men in the first case, 41.7% in the latter). As the two decades that separate our samples pass, lesbians and gay men seem to become readier to migrate because of their sexuality regardless of the homophobia they fear to encounter in their families. This is probably a combined effect of the growth of the likelihood of internal migration across generations in

²⁷ In tab. 3.7, I consider only respondents who answered to the question regarding their motivations to migrate and reported different places of birth and residence. I aim at screening for migration trajectories that can be thought of as more decisive and permanent, entailing the respondent's perception that her or his place of residence is where they feel their everyday life and perspectives are based. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

Italy in the last decade (Bonifazi *et al.* 2014) and of the changing composition of those who migrate because of their homosexuality. Lesbians and gay men experiencing a level of familial homophobia that would have not produced an active response two decades ago now choose this course of action, given the decreasing acceptability of homophobia and the awareness that places where to live free from homophobia multiply.

The contextual consideration of coming out in the family and lesbian and gay migration points out that, despite change in the landscape of homonegativity, the everyday politics that Italian lesbians and gay men increasingly employ to overcome the repressive force of gender sexual inequality does not result in changing patterns in the necessity for homosexual individuals to assure, develop and protect healthy fundamental relationships in their familial life-world. Homosexual women and men respond to renewed homonegativity by embodying their sexuality in new ways, but through decades of transformation coming out in the family remains a first step in the assurance of support that must be rooted in awareness and acceptance of sexual difference, influencing lesbian and gay individuals' well-being independently and more profoundly than the generic familial support that they might receive (Doty *et al.* 2010).

Bertone and Franchi (2014) argue that a decisive aspect in Italian families' struggle in supporting a same-sex desiring child towards cherishing her or his sexuality as inherently good is the influence of the homonegative Catholic tradition. Obedience to religious values and norms, in its different forms of belonging to a community, belonging to a faith, or following moral imperatives can be expected to shape the capability of lesbians and gay men to enact strategies aimed at building their well-being. The next subsection examines the changing influence of religious obedience on lesbians' and gay men's internalised homophobia.

3.4.3. 'Come inside': internalised homophobia and religiosity

A common consequence of being unable to overcome homophobia in one's own intimate life-world is internalised homophobia. This concept is described by Herek *et al.* (2007), citing Maylon (1981) extensively, as

the self-hatred that homosexuals sometimes manifest [that] involves an intrapsychic conflict between who people think they should be (*i.e.*, heterosexuals) and how they experience their sexuality (*i.e.*, as homosexual or bisexual). [...] Internalised homophobia is based on 'the mythology and opprobrium which characterise current social attitudes toward homosexuality' which are internalised by 'the incipient homosexual' during the course of socialisation.

This definition of internalised homophobia highlights three features. Firstly, same-

sex desiring individuals develop a sense of loathing for their own sexuality or for themselves as individuals with sexual desires by accepting the idea that their life would be better if they had a different sexual orientation. Secondly, this idea is presented to them as valid by their social surroundings, by virtue of stigma, negative experiences, and prejudice. Thirdly, these experiences are likeliest to produce internalised homophobia when the same-sex desiring individual faces them while struggling to reach the capability to live out her or his life in accordance to her or his sexual freedom and desires, thus the moments of sexual development and sexual identity formation are especially crucial.

An additional observation that, although originally advanced in the psychological sciences as most of the knowledge on the matter, depicts markedly social processes adds to the understanding of internalised homophobia. As Gonsoriek (1988) notes, the most common form of internalised homophobia is covert, *i.e.* expressed by individuals that, despite having completed their personal history of sexual identity formation and having relied on their resilience to overcome social stigma, still feel regret and deprecation for what their desire for the same sex meant and means in their lives. On this basis, Meyer (2007) notes that

although it is most acute during the early coming-out process, it is unlikely that internalised homophobia completely abates even when the person has accepted his or her homosexuality. Because of the strength of early socialisation experiences [...] internalised homophobia remains an important factor in the gay person's psychological adjustment throughout life.

Internalised homophobia and its consequences in regretting one's own homosexuality last longer than the process of sexual identity acquisition and the exposure to forceful expressions of stigma. By virtue of the resilience of same-sex desiring individuals carrying them through the hard choices of escape and protest often needed to claim sexual freedom and psychological well-being, the greatest suffering caused by internalised homophobia is located in those who do not manage to express or accept their same-sex desires at all, but the greatest quantity of this suffering is spread across a larger number of individuals who managed to break the shackles of homophobic surroundings.

The ambivalent legacy of resilience, forced on same-sex desiring people by the reality of homonegativity, is recognised in the study of the relationship of lesbian and gay people with religious faith and religious obedience. A level of cognitive dissonance between aspirations to a positive and free sexuality and repression of sexual diversity in religious teachings is common among same-sex desiring people belonging to non-affirmative religions (Rodriguez 2010). Internalised homophobia caused by this cognitive dissonance is commonly avoided by integrating strategies aimed at reinterpreting the message of religion in ways that make it less condemning of one's own sexual desires and choices, but these strategies often entail distancing oneself from religious authority, religious

community, and religious practice (Mahaffy 1996; Yip 1997; Yip 2002; Wilcox 2002; Kubicek *et al.* 2009; Ruard Ganzevoort *et al.* 2011; Levy and Reeves 2011). Comparing the two historically Christian nations of France and UK, Gross and Yip (2010) highlight that in France, where belonging to Christianity is often equivalent to belonging to the Catholic faith, this process of individualisation of religion or reconsideration of one's own commitment is more demanding and difficult for lesbians and gay men.

Some evidence of similar experiences among Italian homosexuals can be found in the stories of lesbian respondents in an Italian survey (GSL 2005).

God never said love between persons of the same sex is wrong. I have a spontaneous form of faith based on tolerance and understanding. When people lack spiritual depth they produce intolerance.

When I realised I was a lesbian, I was 17-ish, I never doubted once that loving someone like me was no sin. Well, I was already very far from obedience to the Church [...] However, I've always had this sort of nostalgia of belonging in me.

I was offended, my love for women was offended because they told me I could love but not have sex. [...] I'm in conflict with religious institutions, I'm in conflict with people. I'll never be in conflict with the God I love.

As already discussed, Italian culture and society have a historical bond with the creeds and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church. The multifaceted religious experience has undergone profound changes in the past decades throughout the modernised and secularising Euro-American world (Norris and Inglehart 2012: 243-247). Despite earlier scientific disagreement on the trends of mass attendance, an aspect of religious experience that is usually considered significant for the presence of a strong and continued socialisation of individuals to values of religious origin, Vezzoni and Biolcati-Rinaldi (2015) show that this aspect of religious experience becomes rarer in Italians' lives, as it does cross-nationally in most Euro-American countries. The decline of mass attendance in Italy is part of a peculiar change of the place of religion in Italian society.

In his research and analysis, Garelli (2014: 3-8) shows that religion in Italy is still largely rooted in belonging to the traditional confession of Catholicism, despite a growing religious pluralism. The choice not to belong to a religious denomination does not spread in large sections of the population made up of individuals who see religiosity as a deeply personal endeavour, as it happens in other countries in Europe. Instead, it remains confined to the relatively small group of Italians who choose atheism, agnosticism, and other forms of secularism and active distancing from religious experience. The result is the diffusion of a Catholic pluralism in which a varied and majoritarian public of disenchanting believers, convinced of the necessity of the Church for the godly presence and

teachings to guide the society of citizens but flexible in respecting the rituals and rules of Catholicism in their everyday life, stands beside a significant population of strong believers and practitioners of the faith and its ritualistic tenets and moral teachings. Despite these divides between Catholics, flexible Catholics, and areligious, Garelli (2014: 71) highlights that a wide majority of the contemporary Italian population still undergoes a period of socialisation in Catholic milieux during formative years, and that most of those who started questioning their faith or their commitment to religious practice and teachings passed down in these milieux did so between adolescence and young age.

Tab. 3.8 Percentages of lesbians and gay men identifying as Catholic, and who identify as Catholic and went to church at least once in the previous 12 months, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Catholics	83.3	75.8	92.6	74.9
<i>N</i>	275	397	1,182	892
Catholics who went to church at least once in the last 12 months	66.2	57.1	72.3	61.6
<i>N</i>	228	298	1,080	661

Source: ‘LGB 1995-96’ and ‘LGB 2012-13’.

Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 105) note that ‘abandoning the Catholic Church is a common experience among those who identify or are coming to identify as homosexuals’. As Italian lesbians and gay men become increasingly aware that homosexuality deserves to be lived as a positive aspect of one’s own biography thanks to the decline of homophobia, they also become likelier to abandon a faith that does not make space for them, either by losing their faith or vacating the praying stall²⁸ (tab. 3.8). In 1995-96, lesbians were significantly less likely to identify as Catholic than gay men (83.3% and 92.6%), pointing to a greater capability of men in accommodating their faith and their sexuality. In 2012-13, lesbians and gay men are equally likely to identify as Catholic (75.8% and 74.9%). Among gay men, a sexual desire that is increasingly embodied as inherently relational and stemming from interpersonal romantic feelings results in a decreasing readiness in accepting that a repressive religious faith can coexist with a positively framed individual sexuality. A similar transformation is not

²⁸ In tab. 3.8, respondents who chose the answer ‘Other’ when asked to what religion they belonged are not treated as missing. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

observed in attendance to mass among Catholics²⁹, even if lesbians and gay men become less likely to have gone to church at least once in the previous 12 months (66.2% and 72.3% in 1995-96, 57.1% and 61.6% in 2012-13). However, obedience to rules and rituals of a religion that to some extent endorses homophobia and gender sexual inequality might assume a different repressive force for lesbians, striving to frame same-sex sexual desire as a source of direction in their life courses regardless of heteronormative religious norms, and for gay men, increasingly open to frame their same-sex sexuality as developed in the context of interpersonally negotiated and widely valued relationships.

Tab. 3.9 Percentages of Catholic lesbians and gay men who would choose to be born homosexual again, if they went to church at least once in the previous 12 months or not, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Catholic lesbians, would choose to be born homosexual		Catholic gay men, would choose to be born homosexual	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Went to church	70.4	83.3	64.5	67.3
<i>N</i>	135	156	709	382
Did not go to church	79.2	74.4	68.6	72.5
<i>N</i>	172	117	271	236

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Tab. 3.9 reports the percentages of Catholic lesbians and Catholic gay men in 1995-96 and 2012-13 that would choose to be born homosexual if they could, if they went to church at least once in the previous 12 months or never went to church in the previous 12 months. Observed differences point to the fact that in two decades, the weight of religion on Catholic gay men's capability to accept themselves is slightly lifted, among those attending mass (64.5% would choose to

²⁹ In tab. 3.8 and tab. 3.9, respondents who went to church in the previous 12 months are identified by considering answers to a question on having done so in the previous 12 months and a question regarding how many times they have done so. If they report having gone to church in the previous 12 months and report doing so at least for special occasions, such as Christian holidays or celebrations, they are considered as having gone to church in the previous 12 months. If they report not having gone to church in the previous 12 months, or having gone to church in the previous 12 months and having done so 'never or almost never', they are considered as not having gone to church in the previous 12 months. The coding aims at distinguishing Catholic lesbians and gay men who deliberately distance themselves from churchly rituals. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

be born homosexual in 1995-96, 67.3% in 2012-13) and those not attending mass (68.6% would choose to be born homosexual in 1995-96, 72.5% in 2012-13). Those who abandon the Catholic rites maintain that homosexuality is a desirable feature of their life more than those who obey, even to a small degree, to the Catholic rule of mass attendance. With puzzling ambivalence, among Catholic lesbians who went to church in the previous year, acceptance of one's own homosexuality is a decisively growing attitude (70.4% in 1995-96, 83.3% in 2012-13), whereas among those who deserted mass a retreat of this attitude is observed (79.2% in 1995-96, 74.4% in 2012-13).

Intertwining influences of the role of religion-based advocacy of homonegativity on the basis of gender sexual inequality, with its proclivity to erasure of female sexual empowerment, and the transformation in female same-sex desire explain these trends. On one hand, the growing investment in sexual desire experienced and embodied by lesbians results in an increasing ability to carve out a place for one's sexual self in the religious experience: among the Catholic lesbians facing weaker stigma or enjoying greater personal resources, being lesbian and participating in religious life on one's own terms becomes a growingly viable option. On the other hand, given the unbalance between the sexual empowerment that same-sex desiring women strive for and see as attainable and the continued repression of female sexuality in Catholic sexual and gender norms, the choice to abandon religious obedience because of homonegativity that cannot be overcome or endured spreads even among Catholic lesbians with a strong and decisive original bond to religion. Forced to choose between a religion to which they feel they should belong, but that represses them with pernicious force, and their sexual empowerment, some of these women bear the mark of existential deprivation and regret. A religious tradition characterised by greater tolerance and weaker negative prejudice towards female sexuality would have protected these same-sex desiring women from suffering.

As the women who find ways to keep a bond to religious tradition by contesting its homonegative aspects, and those who move away from homophobic milieux without bearing strong marks of suffering, same-sex desiring women bearing the marks of the choice to abandon a homonegative religion see conditions in which their sexual empowerment is threatened as unacceptable. These choices exemplify how strategies of escape and strategies of protest often intermingle. Finding ways to avoid repression spreads the knowledge that doing so is possible, while also allowing to advance projects of individual and collective sexual liberation. The voice of the homosexual minority broke down the heteronormative walls of silence through these choices, and its empowering potential is likely to be changing with lesbian and gay lives and desires.

3.4.4. *'Surface to air': bisexuals in the community*

The homosexual community and culture are visible expressions of the diffusion of empowerment of same-sex desire (Murray 1996: 73-74). Lesbian and gay identities advanced the capability to build positive discourses and spaces for same-sex desiring individuals, so that through the representation and shared experience of same-sex desire as a valid aspect of life this desire could thrive where before it would have withered. However, the conditions of access to the benefits of partaking in the homosexual community have been influenced by repressive norms. The stigma suffered by bisexuals crosses the boundaries between heteronormative society and homosexual community, and the dynamics of marginalisation in the two contexts intertwine (Barker 2004).

Stigma experienced by bisexuals is usually presented as enforced invisibility, a repressive strategy that might be better characterised as the undermining of sexual agency by means of misinterpretation of desire. In heteronormative societies, bisexuals endure the double burden of erasure by trivialisation of their sexual orientation based on the characterisation of its aspect of same-sex desire as irrelevant, and of stigmatisation suffered by any same-sex desiring individual. In the lesbian and gay community, bisexuals' experiences of erasure through characterisation of their sexuality as inauthentic, repressed, undeveloped, or uncontrolled go hand in hand with the idea that they should not be given access to the benefits of solidarity among similarly oppressed sexual minorities (Rust 1993; Barker *et al.* 2012). Considered incapable of understanding their own desires, bisexuals face a set of repressive norms that is similar to the culturally heteronormative characterisation of female sexuality as incapable of naming itself.

The force of homonegative injunctions in keeping bisexuals out of the homosexual community should be gradually decreasing, as a consequence of the everyday politics of sexual desire and sexual identity that lesbian and gay individuals put into action in order to confront heteronormative gender sexual inequality. Individuals making up the lesbian and gay community increasingly embody sexual desire as a matter of incontestable centrality in individual lives and as inextricably dependent on individual emotional states and relationships. They are readier to see any kind of claim of gender-oriented desire as dependent on individuals' interpretation of their own desires. This transformation should result in the increasing capability for bisexuals to see their sexual empowerment supported by shared meanings, practices, spaces, and experiences, and in the strengthening of anti-heteronormative change that favours lesbian and gay lives through the diffusion of positive lives in which same-sex desire is decisive.

The numbers of bisexual women and men in the two samples analysed are much lower than those of lesbians and gay men. This difference speaks to the centrality of lesbian and gay identities in the shared spaces that have been built around same-sex desire. Bisexuals need additional investments and energy to access these spaces, thus the small numbers gathered in my research are more

indicative of the characteristics of bisexuals that manage and want to gain access to the lesbian and gay community than the characteristics of a population approximating those who identify as bisexual in Italy. The change observed across the two samples point to transformations in the relationship between bisexuals and the lesbian and gay community.

Tab. 3.10 Percentages of bisexual women and men partaking in the homosexual community who never had same-sex sexual contact and never had different-sex sexual contact, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy. Incidence of bisexual women and bisexual men in the samples of non-heterosexual women and non-heterosexual men in the 1995-96 and 2012-13 samples.

	Bisexual women		Bisexual men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Never had same-sex sexual contact	9.2	14.5	6.7	5.9
<i>N</i>	109	200	150	89
Never had different-sex sexual contact	3.7	14	9.5	20.2
<i>N</i>	109	199	147	88
Incidence in the sample of non-heterosexuals	16	21.1	6.5	5.3
<i>N</i>	702	965	2,342	1,707

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Tab. 3.10 reports the percentages of bisexual women and bisexual men partaking in the homosexual community in 1995-96 and 2012-13 that never had same-sex sexual contact on never had different-sex sexual contact, and the percentages of bisexual women and bisexual men among all female and male non-heterosexual respondents in the two samples.³⁰ The marginalisation of bisexuals is often practiced through the silencing of their sexual identity, considered a delusion or a mask that the individual holds despite her or his real sexual desires. In the space of two decades, bisexuals who participate in the community do so with growing ease even when their sexual experiences do not support the authenticity of their sexual identity and orientation. 9.2% of bisexual women partaking in the homosexual community in 1995-96 never had same-sex sexual contact, and 3.7%

³⁰ In tab. 3.10, non-heterosexuals are all respondents who reported identifying as homosexual or bisexual. Respondents reporting they identified as heterosexual, do not know how they identify, or not answering to the question on sexual orientation are left out of the analysis. For wording of question and answers, see Appendix A.

of bisexual women and 9.5% of bisexual men never had different-sex sexual contact; in 2012-13 these percentages rise respectively to 14.5% among women for same-sex contact, and to 14% among women and 20.2% among men for different-sex contact.

This trend is not observed for same-sex sexual contact among bisexual men: similar percentages, 6.7% in 1995-96 and 5.9% in 2012-13, never had a sexual experience with someone of the same sex. This difference among bisexual women and bisexual men can be traced back to the parallelism between the homonegative repressive influence of norms of gender sexual inequality on women and bisexuals. Gradual dispelling of the influence of gender sexual inequality on judgements that lesbians and gay men produce on their own and others' sexual desires partially frees bisexuals from the weight of trivialisation and negation of their sexual orientation in the homosexual community, and does so more for bisexual women than for bisexual men because heteronormative norms dictating irrelevance of sexual drives for individuals weigh on women more than men. Trends in the incidence of bisexual women and men in our samples support this interpretation. In the 1995-96 sample, a greater share of bisexuals among women (16%) than men (6.5%) is observed. By 2012-13, despite the decrease of lesbian sexual fluidity, the incidence of bisexual women in the homosexual community increased (21.1%), whereas the incidence of bisexual men remained stable (5.3%).

The Italian lesbian and gay community increasingly accepts bisexual identities at face value, and this transformation is more marked for bisexual women because they can do away with the heteronormative silence on sexual desires contextually as bisexuals and as women. In the space of two decades, the community became more open to same-sex desiring people that do not adopt lesbian and gay identities or do not express an exclusively same-sex directed desire. The new forms of embodiment of sexual desire emerge as strategies aimed at counteracting the heteronormative repressive force that gender sexual inequality exerts on same-sex desiring individuals' trajectories of sexuality development. They then reverberate on the choices and possibilities of lesbians, gay men, and other same-sex desiring individuals, transforming the world in which institutional actors aiming at promoting and protecting sexual rights ponder their actions.

3.5. Conclusions

In their study on lesbians' and gay men's lives in Italy in the mid 1990s emerging from these individuals' generational engagement with reciprocal visibility as same-sex desiring people, Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 95) observe that each cohort of lesbians and gay men experiences first same-sex attractions at a lower median age than the preceding ones. Banking on the previous generations'

de-assimilatory community building and on the ensuing spreading capability to face homophobia, these cohorts growingly embrace their same-sex attractions in their personal identity. The continuation of this trend is not observed from the mid 1990s to the early 2010s. My data shows that young same-sex desiring people born from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s experience same-sex attractions at a later median age than their predecessors.

New forms of lesbians' and gay men's engagement with relational and gender norms lie behind this new aspect of same-sex desiring individuals' sexual developmental trajectories. Homosexuals strive to obtain interactional framing of their sexuality as based on a deeply held desire, the most widely accepted standard for privately and publicly produced judgments on the freedom that individual sexuality should enjoy. This cultural standard derives directly from the creation and diffusion of modern sexual agency, the idea that free sexuality should be granted to all of those whose desires and behaviours are not a potential threat to themselves or others. The emergence of modern sexual agency gave momentum to the claims that building lives guided by same-sex sexual desire could be just as possible and valuable as building lives guided by different-sex sexual desire, but its diffusion as a cultural standard was based on to a differential empowerment of female and male sexualities. Once homophobia declines, same-sex desiring individuals' must face the repressive force gender sexual inequality exercises on their sexualities.

Same-sex desiring women face the gendered framing of their sexual desire as irrelevant in their relationships, and thus in their sense of self. This results in a slight rise of the median age at first same-sex attraction. Engaging with this norm, women that would have not before lent ear to their emerging sexual desires in which same-sex attractions play a part now do. Same-sex desiring men face the gendered framing of sexual desire mandating the experience of sexuality as an uncontrolled urge that seeks the most adaptive object among the available ones, with women being the best option that can be desired. This results in a more marked rise of the median age at first-same sex attraction. Engaging with this norm, men lend ear to their same-sex desires as positively experienced in interpersonally meaningful encounters.

Lesbians and gay men carry these new embodiments of their desires through the sexual developmental trajectories and their experiences of resilience against homonegative repression. Lesbians' and gay men's sexual developmental trajectories converge in the timing, ordering, and interactional settings of sexual milestones such as first disclosure of same-sex attractions, first coming out to self, and first same-sex sexual contact. More individually controlled female sexual desires and more interpersonally negotiated male sexual desires do not influence same-sex desiring individuals' need to see their sexuality cherished in their intimate and familial life-world. They result in a stronger negative influence of acutely heteronormative cultural beliefs on same-sex desiring women, such as religiously invested Catholic lesbians who need to abandon the tenets of their faith

to be sexually empowered as women and as same-sex desiring individuals. At the same time, they produce a community that is more open to seeing sexuality as an individual endeavour that is interpersonally negotiated, accepting non-homosexual same-sex desiring people with greater ease than before.

As recalled in Chapter 1, for centuries before the beginning of the modern era of global capitalism that between the XVII and the XX century caused major upheavals in socio-cultural regimes in Euro-American countries, the pederastic model of homosexuality was the most widespread. Same-sex relationships were modelled on unequal sexual encounters in which one partner's sexual desire was negated, cancelled, or irrelevant. Moving from the pederastic model to the gender-inverted model in the modern centuries, homosexuals mobilised their positioning in respect to gender norms to abandon unequal relationship based on sexuality as a power structure and embrace equal relationships based on sexuality as the encounter of two confluent desires. They did so because, in times in which same-sex relationships were easily controlled by communities and harshly repressed by societies, gender identification functioned as a cultural strategy of protection and interpretation of their sexual desires. This generational narrative is still unfolding, as same-sex desiring individuals' increasingly abandon the gendered aspects that would be forced on their sexuality by social norms in order to understand, interpret, and experience their desires towards the same sex.

Navigating their life courses, Italian lesbians and gay men show that they take up the legacy of their predecessors, unhinging relational and gender norms, and do so with a renewed agency aimed at responding to changing conditions in which this individual engagement with norms can happen. The fact that Italian same-sex desiring women's and men's sexual developmental trajectories converge does not necessarily mean that lesbians become generally more similar to men and gay men become generally more similar to women, or same-sex desiring women and men become likelier to see themselves as belonging to the other gender. In very diverse manners, homosexuals might experience multiple tensions arising from internal and external opposing forces to conform to gender norms, as emerging from stories captured in the Italian GSL (2005) survey.

I prefer wearing men's clothes because they're more comfortable. [...] Women in Northern Europe, for example, often have a masculine look even if they're not lesbians. I think it's because in those cultures women are more emancipated than here in Italy. [...] Besides that, I think there is no big difference between the way we lesbians dress and the way straight women dress, the real difference is that straight women wear so-called 'make-up' when they date men. We don't wear the stage clothes, we don't need it.

I remember my look was explicitly androgynous when I was young. Explicitly because I wanted to avoid male attention, I wanted men to know that I wasn't interested in them, but it didn't work every time.

When I was very little I wanted to be a man. My love for my mother, fear of hurting her and letting her down made me put this desire aside. When I was 6 I told her I wanted to be a woman because I was afraid of losing her love.

When I was 15 or 16 I had my first relationship with a schoolmate. I was running up the stairs at her complex and a man stopped me and asked me if I was a woman or a man. I was surprised and hurt by this question. I had a big bosom, I had long hair, I had all of the 'right' features. I felt like someone was telling me I had to stop being a woman if I wanted to love a woman. I felt like my inner self could be erased.

Gender sexual inequality is present in Euro-American countries that went through the historical diffusion of the cultural norm of modern sexual agency, and it is likely to shape same-sex desiring individuals' experiences just as homophobia and its decline shape them in Italy and outside of Italy. The resilience against homonegativity based on gender sexual inequality explains why, despite the expectation that homosexual identities would become useless once the decline of homophobia led to same-sex desiring individuals being able to skip the developmental discontinuities setting them apart from heterosexuals (Savin-Williams 2005: 207-210), lesbian and gay identities seem to stick around and help same-sex desiring individuals recognise and support their sexuality as a positive aspect of their life (Rosario *et al.* 2009; Russell *et al.* 2009).

As much as young lesbians and gay men disobey to gender norms in sexuality, their life course can be decisively influenced by them in forms. Different-sex and same-sex partner relationships display many aspects of engagement with gender norms. Partners' negotiated choices and reciprocal attentions transform these relationships in linked lives whose directions and vicissitudes are sometimes more easily faced with the help of marital and marital-like institutions. The next chapter discusses how lesbians and gay men revisit relational and gender norms to build up new ways to cherish, commit to, and promise their love to their stable partners.

4. ‘Thick skin and an elastic heart’: same-sex cohabiting couples and relational institutions

4.1. Introduction

Marriage has been the bedrock of personal relationships in the history of modern Euro-American societies. At times singled out as the institution in relational lives of women and men that could influence the material basis of collective life (Greif 2006; Greif, Tabellini 2010), it figures in Euro-American minds as one of the main plots in their serialised screenplay. Considering its uncountable ramifications, its rules reading as if they were written to be disobeyed, its sanctions so tightly intertwined with its rewards as to become undistinguishable from them (Coontz 2004: 281-284), the cultural supremacy of marriage seems to be a colossal concession to those who argue that humans value variety and drama over sparseness and order. It should come as no surprise that social scientists giving voice to zealously tainted same-sex desiring individuals would portray them as rationally striving to revise such a mess of an institution in its foundations, or else abandon it once and for all (Hopkins *et al.* 2013).

According to Barbagli (2013: 15-16), transformations in the realm of family unfold in the analytically distinct precincts of family structures, *i.e.* the material and symbolic boundaries of the family unit, internal relations, the obligations and ties shaping behaviour between members of the family unit, and kinship systems, the roles covered by family members in its intergenerational network. Weeks *et al.* (2001: 191-195) portray lesbians and gay men in UK as actively reconsidering the internal relations of the nuclear and romantic cohabiting couple. Their contention that same-sex cohabiting couples reinvent coupledness in their daily practices and life courses is revised by Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 152-153). The more recent study argues that same-sex couples appropriate traditional relational norms in their family practices, moving away from the inherently unequal norm of the life-long, universal marriage dominating Euro-American relational biographies in the central decades of the XX century together with the surrounding heterosexual population (Cherlin 2004; Liefbroer and Fokkema 2008). In this interpretation, contemporary same-sex couples are similar to different-sex couples in their fundamental symbolic and material aims and experience similar difficulties. Regardless of their gender composition, Gabb and Fink (2015: 112-113) write, stable couples experience

pressure exerted on relationships [that] can stretch a couple to the breaking point. However [...] stressors can also serve to consolidate relationships if couples have the necessary spatio-temporal, emotional and financial resources to negotiate [...] practices through which they give meaning to, and sustain, their relationships together over time.

This chapter analyses changes through two decades in formation, perceptions and functioning of same-sex cohabiting couples. The aim of the chapter is examining how strongly same-sex cohabiting couples integrate into the contemporary culture of stable partnership, as presented by Coontz (2004: 20).

There is a general agreement on what it takes for a couple to live 'happily ever after'. First, they must love each other deeply and choose each other unswayed by outside pressure. From then on, each must make the partner the top priority in life, putting that relationship above any and all competing ties. [Partners], we believe, owe their highest obligations to each other. [...] Couples should be best friends, sharing their most intimate feelings and secrets. They should express affection openly but also talk candidly about problems.

This definition of the ties of marriage and marital-like relationships blend aspects of prosaic love and mythic love (Swidler 2001: 116-117). In the relational culture received by previous generations, love's narrations and practices feed into a commitment to one's partner that is supported by clear distribution of duties and characterisation of needs that different-sex partners have historically enjoyed through the institution of heterosexual marriage (Soons and Kalmijn 2009). The fixed and gendered aspects of these practices and narrations, despite being revisited by contemporary heterosexuals inside marriage and in newly devised parallel relational institutions such as cohabitation (Barbagli 1990: 27-34), can result in same-sex coupled individuals rejecting marital-like commitment as undesirable or unattainable because of their distance from the gendered aspects of love and coupledness.

The next section (4.2) asks how romance emerges in contemporary lesbians' and gay men's dating markets, through their sexual encounters and love affairs. Despite some transformation, lesbians and gay men display highly gendered scripts in looking for and finding their romantic partners. Analysing the experiences of my interviewees, I show that, even if the meeting of two differently gendered romantic and sexual scripts on which the institution of love among heterosexuals is based is absent among lesbians and gay men, committed same-sex couples interpret their experiences of falling in love and finding the right guy or girl similarly.

The third section (4.3) turns to how prosaic love is mobilised by same-sex cohabiting partners to sustain their relationships. The paths leading to the decision to share a home and to the agreements and disagreements regarding the division of unpaid work, paid work, and financial resources are highly diverse among same-sex couples. At the same time, these features of same-sex relationships indicate that cohabitation functions as an institution among lesbians and gay men. Homosexuals are involved in the redefinition of the boundaries between marriage and other marital-like relationship that is also observable among Italian different-sex couples.

The fourth section (4.4) moves from prosaic love to mythic love in cohabiting relationships. Sexual monogamy and the management of jealousy are practices of emotional attention that are tightly linked to the traditional narration of love. Despite lesbians and gay men following profoundly different and gendered norms in these matters, the gender composition of their couples does not unsettle the idea that sexual agreements are a meaningful aspect of the partner relationship and contribute to well-being and mutual commitment. The practices of exclusivity of care and attention between partners point to a strong commitment to the couple relationship as emotionally central and symbolically unparalleled by other social ties. Finally, the role of the ritual, narration, and legal benefits of marriage for same-sex cohabiting couples is examined. Despite not being allowed to marry, Italian lesbians and gay men aspire to this possibility. In line with the blurring of the boundaries between marriage and other marital-like relationships, they see marriage as a useful and carefully planned relational choice that can lead to reconsidering the highly variable blend of prosaic and mythic love they reached with their stable partner and shoring up their relationship.

The concluding remarks (4.5) discuss how, from dating markets to marriage wishes, same-sex stable couples are creating new linked life courses. They reformulate relational and gender norms by continuing the legacy of prioritising love over marriage they received from their generational predecessors. The ways they relate to each other through practices and narrations allow them to find the right girl and the right guy, fall in love, and engage in making that relationship last and grow.

4.2. Sex and romance in same-sex emerging couples

4.2.1. 'We're not strangers to love': looking for partners

In the past twenty years, dating markets in Euro-American countries were taken by storm by the advent of the Internet (Ben-Ze'ev 2004: 149-153, 228, 243). However, as Rosenfeld and Thomas (2012) and Hakim (2012: 259-263) note, the new online meeting places, courtship cultures, and romantic experiences are still structured according to sexual orientation, gender, and age divides observed in traditional offline ones.

Comparing the different incidence of the preference for a stable relationship in online dating profiles of lesbians and gay men in eight European countries, the recent study by Potârca *et al.* (2015) supports the idea that the more tolerant and respectful of homosexuality societies are, the greater the numbers of lesbians and gay men capable to express interest in stable loving relationships. Same-sex couple relationships in Italy enjoy growing social visibility and viability: public displays of affection have become more common for lesbian and gay couples (tab.

4.1). Kissing and hugging often in public was rarer in 1995-96 among coupled lesbians (28.1% of lesbians kissed often, 52.4% hugged often) and gay men (17.2% and 30.3%) than in 2012-13 (respectively 43.4% and 71.4%; 26% and 41.2%).

Tab. 4.1 Percentages of lesbians and gay men who often kiss their same-sex partner in public, often hug their partner in public, are less than 3 years older or younger than their partner, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians who have a partner		Gay men who have a partner	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Often kiss their partner in public	28.1	43.4	17.2	26
<i>N</i>	334	369	834	642
Often hug their partner in public	52.4	71.4	30.3	41.2
<i>N</i>	330	374	843	646
<3 years older or younger than partner	30.2	44.6	27.5	32.9
<i>N</i>	351	388	870	671

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Low age homogeneity in homosexual couples partly emerges from the ghettoisation of lesbian and gay lives caused by homonegativity (Schwartz and Graf 2009). Everyday environments tend to be structured according to age and advancements in educational and work career, thus support the formation of age homogamous couples (Kalmijn and Flap 2001). Conversely, the more or less subcultural world of sexual and romantic meet-ups, that as recalled in the recollection of the history of homosexuality is a feature of the homosexual world, gathers a diverse crowd in terms of age and life moments, resulting in less age homogamic coupling. Age homogeneity rises between same-sex stable partners (tab. 4.1), especially among lesbians³¹. In 1995-96, 30.2% of coupled lesbians and

³¹ In all analyses on same-sex couples and cohabiting couples, coupled lesbians and gay men are coded as all respondents reporting that they have a stable relationship with a same-sex partner and cohabiting lesbians and gay men as all respondents reporting that they have a stable relationship with a same-sex partner and living with their same-sex partner and no other person. No information regarding couple and cohabiting relationships between respondents was gathered. In tab. 4.1, differently from respondents' age which was calculated on their reported year of birth (see Chapter 2), respondents' partners' age is reported by each respondent by answering to a direct question on the questionnaire. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

27.5% of coupled gay men had a partner less than three years older or younger than themselves, in 2012-13 these percentages grew to 44.6% and 32.9%. The steeper rise in age homogamy among lesbians is likely be influenced by the general decline of homophobia and the higher acceptability of female same-sex affection than male same-sex affection in public spaces observed in the Italian context. However, diverging age homogamy in couples between lesbians and gay men is also an aspect of the influence of gender norms on partner-seeking practices supporting different cultures of emerging love.

In some central aspects of sexual life, lesbians and gay men are separated by the same gender divides observed in heterosexual populations. Lesbians tend to have fewer sexual partners than gay men across the life course, as it is the case for heterosexual women and men (Laumann *et al.* 1994: 197-198; Bertone *et al.* 2003b; Bertone 2010), and as it is observed in my Italian samples (tab. 4.2). Among lesbians in 1995-96, having had more than ten different sexual partners in one's life was more common the older they were (8.5% under the age of 25, 24.4% between the ages of 25 and 34, 41.1% over the age of 34), as it was among gay men (48% under the age of 25, 70.7% between the ages of 25 and 34, 85.4% over the age of 34). In two decades, the likelihood to have had more than ten different sexual partners grows among lesbians younger than 34, especially in the youngest age class (23.3% of lesbians younger than 25 and 34.1% of lesbians between 25 and 34 have had at least ten sexual partners). Nevertheless, in 2012-13 lesbians over 34 years old are only slightly likelier to have had a high number of sexual partners than younger lesbians.

Gay men in 2012-13 are likelier to have had multiple sexual partners the older they are. In the two youngest age classes, they remain just as likely to have had multiple sexual partners (49.9% and 70.4%) than two decades before, whereas the oldest gay men in my samples become slightly less sexually adventurous (79.1% had at least ten sexual partners). Across genders and two decades later, age seems to lead lesbians and gay men towards a decreasing number of sexual partners. Lesbians have multiple sexual partners at a younger age than before, but always in smaller proportions than gay men.

The idea that the gender difference in sexual experience is connected to differing attitudes to sex are confirmed when looking at the networks and venues in which lesbians and gay men find their sexual partners³² (tab. 4.3). Gay men seem to find more sexual partners because they explicitly look for them. Across

³² In tab. 4.3, respondents are coded as having found at least one sexual partner in everyday networks if they found their last, second to last, or third to last partner at a friend's house, at a political meeting, or at work, at school, or in college. They are coded as having found at least one sexual partner in sexual venues if they found their last, second to last, or third to last partner in a gay/lesbian sauna, in a dark room in a gay/lesbian pub or venue, in a gay/lesbian cinema, or in a cruising spot. The option of having found one's last, second to last, or third to last sexual partner in Internet sites for sexual encounters was added to the questionnaire in 2012-13. Respondents who chose the answer 'Other' when asked where they met their last, second to last, and third to last sexual partner are not treated as missing. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

age classes and across decades, over 50% of lesbians have found at least one out of their last three sexual partners (with whom they do not have an ongoing stable relationship) in everyday social networks such as school, university, or work environments. Gay men, of any age and in both samples, are less likely than lesbians to find sexual partners in everyday environments (from 30% among the youngest to 19% among the oldest). Even if homophobia declines in the public space, no variation in gay men's likelihood to find sexual partners in everyday networks is observed across the decades. The gender imbalance is reversed when looking at the likelihood to find partners in sexual venues such as cruising spots or dark rooms: gay men are consistently likelier to have found at least one partner in these contexts than lesbians, with the exception of those under 25 in 2012-13.

Tab. 4.2 Percentages of lesbians and gay men who have had more than 10 sexual partners in their life, according to age class, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians			Gay men		
	<25	25-34	>34	<25	25-34	>34
1995-96	8.5	24.4	41.1	48	70.7	85.4
<i>N</i>	106	299	112	358	1,074	513
2012-13	23.3	34.1	29.7	49.9	70.4	79.1
<i>N</i>	245	314	165	383	607	531

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Younger lesbians in 2012-13 are likelier to have found at least one partner in sexual venues than older lesbians (8.2% among the youngest, 2% among the oldest), a difference that was not observed in 1995-96. Gay men become likelier to have met a partner in sexual venues as they age, in 1995-96 (from 34.3% in the youngest age class to 63.2% in the oldest age class) and, with a deep drop in all age classes, in 2012-13 (from 7.6% to 34.8%). Conversely, older gay men across the decades are consistently less prone to finding sexual partners in everyday networks (about 19% when they are over 34 years old) than younger gay men (about 30% when they are under 25 years).

Where do gay men find their multiple sexual partners today? In Internet sites aimed at sexual rendezvous, an option that was not available two decades ago. In 2012-13, these sites have almost completely replaced sexual venues for gay men under 35. Lesbians use them too, but across all ages are less likely than gay men to have met a sexual partner through them. When lesbians are between 25 and 34 years old, in the central ages of sexual maturity and experimentation, they are likelier to have found a sexual partner through digital means than if they are under

25 (15.8% against 9%), but no greater investment in these kinds of encounters is observed among the oldest lesbians in our sample (12.6% of them met a sexual partner through Internet sites). A similar pattern across age classes is observed among gay men: a greater likelihood to have met a sexual partner through the Internet in the central age class (49.5%) than among youngest and oldest respondents (about 37%). All in all, lesbians' proclivity to find sexual partners in everyday environments, where the search for a sexual partner is not supported by an explicit aim of those involved, is confirmed through the decades. Younger lesbians become slightly likelier to meet partners in sexual venues and timidly approach the digital world of sexual apps and sites. Gay men's likelihood to look for partners for sexual encounters is confirmed as well, even if older gay men become slightly less interested in high numbers of sexual encounters with different partners.

Tab. 4.3 Percentages of lesbians and gay men who met at least one out of their three last sexual partners with whom they have no ongoing relationship in everyday networks, in sexual venues, in Internet sites for sexual encounters, according to age class, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians						Gay men					
	1995-96			2012-13			1995-96			2012-13		
	<25	25-34	>34	<25	25-34	>34	<25	25-34	>34	<25	25-34	>34
At least 1 partner in everyday networks	51	59.4	55.8	58.5	52.2	53	30.3	23.7	19.6	29.2	25.1	19
At least 1 partner in sexual venues	4.2	5.4	4.8	8.2	4.7	2	34.3	48.8	63.2	7.6	12.1	34.8
At least 1 partner in Internet sites for sex. enc.	-	-	-	9.7	15.8	12.6	-	-	-	37.8	49.5	36.8
<i>N</i>	96	278	104	207	278	151	356	1,056	506	315	547	500

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Potârca *et al.* (2015) note that, in their sample, lesbians are less likely than gay men to express interest for stable relationships. This finding contrasts with previous literature on the matter, interpreting same-sex desiring women's greater interest in stable relationships as an expression of the different sexual and romantic norms attached to femininity and masculinity (Bertone *et al.* 2003b; Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 113). My findings regarding lesbians' and gay men's attitudes towards stable relationships are in line with this latter account. Italian single lesbians' and gay men's likelihood to prefer stable relationships over occasional encounters varies between different age classes (tab. 4.4). In 1995-96,

just over 90% of single lesbians younger than 35 years of age preferred stable relationships, whereas 78.1% of single lesbians older than 34 years of age did. The same pattern was observed among gay men: just under 90% of those younger than 35 preferred stable relationships, 77.9% of those older than 34 did. Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 205-206) interpret this difference as a central feature of generational affirmation of the model of modern homosexuality: each generation of lesbians and gay men feels that finding a stable lesbian or gay partner is more important than what its predecessors thought, as a confirmation of one's rightful interpretation of the same-sex desire she or he feels.

The observed decrease in young lesbians' and gay men's preference for a stable romantic relationship over occasional encounters from 1995-96 to 2012-13 is likely to emerge from lesbians and gay men enjoying growing freedom to live young adulthood as a moment of relational and sexual experimentation, as it has become normative for the heterosexual population in Euro-American countries (Illouz 2012: 52-58, 60-66), intertwined with the continuing differences between lesbian and gay sexual ethos. In two decades, the percentages of single lesbians and gay men younger than 35 preferring stable relationships decrease to just above 80%. An increase of ten percentage-points is observed among lesbians older than 34, whereas similar shares of gay men older than 34 and younger gay men prefer stable relationships. Single lesbians and gay men older than 34 do not respond alike to the growing freedom to experience romantic involvement: once gone through young adulthood, same-sex desiring women's perceived need for stable relationship grows, whereas older gay men recount enjoying no-strings-attached relationships as much as younger gay men.

Already in times in which the force of homophobia did not allow for much freedom in the choice to commit to a stable relationship, lesbians' and gay men's sexual ethos displayed the effect of the influence of gendered sexual norms (tab. 4.4). In 1995-96, single lesbians' likelihood to have had at least two sexual partners in the previous 12 months decreased with age (50% had had at least two partners among lesbians younger than 25 years of age, 35.5% among lesbians older than 34), whereas single gay men's increased with age (73% had had at least two sexual partners in the younger age class, 89.1% in the older age class). Unlike lesbians, gay men tended to take advantage of the growing independence that comes with age to find sexual partners. In the space of two decades, single gay men did not change their sexual ethos (76.1% of the younger ones and 85.7% of the older ones have had at least two partners). Single lesbians' sexual ethos through the life course follows a changing pattern. At younger ages, when the desire to form a stable couple is lower, lesbians' inclination towards sexual encounters grows with the independence granted by age (55.1% of single lesbians younger than 25 and 60.7% of single lesbians between 25 and 34 years of age have had at least two sexual partners). Once the desire to settle down with a partner sets in, lesbians' sexual ethos centres on some degree of avoidance of sexual encounters (31.2% of single lesbians older than 34 have had at least two

sexual partners in the last twelve months). The diversity in sexual ethos between genders and life-moments emerges in the use of Internet sites specifically aimed at finding sexual partners³³ (tab. 4.4). The variation in the use of these Internet sites follows the same pattern observed for single lesbians' and gay men's likelihood to have had at least two sexual partners in the previous year: growing with age for gay men (34.6% of gay men younger than 25 often use social networks for sex, 53.8% of gay men older than 34 do), and falling when maturity is reached among lesbians (9.5% of lesbians between 25 and 34 years of age often use social networks for sex, 1.9% of lesbians older than 34 do).

Tab. 4.4 Percentages of single lesbians and gay men who prefer stable relationships over occasional encounters, who have had at least two sexual partners in the previous 12 months, who often use Internet sites for sexual encounters, according to age class, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Single lesbians						Single gay men					
	1995-96			2012-13			1995-96			2012-13		
	<25	25-34	>34	<25	25-34	>34	<25	25-34	>34	<25	25-34	>34
Prefer stable relationships	93.5	90.9	78.1	81.8	81.9	87.9	88.6	86.3	77.9	81.2	82.2	78.7
<i>N</i>	46	110	32	121	149	66	237	629	276	251	332	244
Two sexual partners in previous year	50	47.3	35.5	55.1	60.7	31.2	73	84.8	89.1	76.1	82.7	85.7
<i>N</i>	44	112	31	98	140	61	233	625	275	230	294	230
Often use Internet sites for sex. enc.	-	-	-	3.4	9.5	1.9	-	-	-	34.6	49.6	53.8
<i>N</i>	-	-	-	119	147	53	-	-	-	260	347	240

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

The desire and realisation of stable coupledness influence and are influenced by gendered attitudes to sexuality. Lesbians have become likelier to experiment with multiple partners when they do not feel that it is the right time for settling down or that the right partner has come about. As age grows, they retreat from this form of sexual and relational experimentation, even when the right partner has not come about. Gay men's attitudes to no-strings-attached sexuality has not changed

³³ In 1995-96, the questionnaire did not include a question on respondents' use of Internet sites for sexual encounters. The question was added in 2012-13. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

as much as lesbians'. They do not see the desire for sexual flings as an alternative to the desire for a stable relationship, even if, across the decades, they become slightly less likely to have had a high number of sexual partners in their life. As shown in the following subsections through analyses of survey and interview data, same-sex romantic relationships emerge from finding the right girl or the right guy in these gendered dating markets, and feed into gendered blends of prosaic and mythic love in same-sex cohabiting couples. If lesbians, when using impersonal means to meet partners with a highly personal relationship in mind, probably retreat when the potential partner is in just for sex, gay men tend to use impersonal sex as a means to meet partners for highly personal relationships and often go through impersonal sexual encounters with a wish in their hearts.

4.2.2. *'You know the rules and so do I': falling and staying in love*

Gay men's hope to find a romantic partner in highly sexual dating markets seems to be usually well-placed. In three out of four gay cohabiting couples interviewed the two partners had known each other through apps and Internet sites for sexual encounters. In these three couples and in the remaining one sex ensued immediately or almost immediately after meeting for the first time. Looking for sex and looking for love are not alternative intentions: only in one case there was a relatively long gap between the first sexual encounter and the beginning of the stable relationship. Carlo and Roberto's narratives of the beginnings of their relationship provide a thorough look into the initial steps in gay romantic couples.

Carlo: We met on an Internet chat, a site for gay men. He sounded like an interesting guy. But he wouldn't send me a picture, so I didn't trust him: he wouldn't even send me a picture! We exchanged phone numbers, I procrastinated. Then he said something that sparked my curiosity, that he was going to cook Japanese chicken for me. Me and Roberto met because we really love cooking. That's why I decided to ignore the problem with the picture and told him 'Invite me for dinner'. That's when he said no. Then we agreed on a first date in a pub. [...] We ended up in his car late in the night kissing, and didn't care about spending the whole night there even if I had to go to work the day after. Well, we moved in together right away. (G3.1)

Roberto: We got in touch two days after our first date [...] he spent the night at my place and afterwards we got together, no big decision, no deep reflections. To me, he was someone I could trust from the first time I saw him, it was the first time in my life I realised I could have a normal relationship. (G3.2)

The first steps in Carlo and Roberto's contacts with each other display fine-grained negotiation in the commitment to an occasional encounter with a stranger. Roberto's decision not to send a picture of himself put Carlo in an uncomfortable position: how is he going to decide if this rendezvous is worth it, if he does not know if he fancies the guy or not? However, when Carlo dispels these doubts, Roberto tones down Carlo's plans for a first meeting, in the spirit of a cool-headed planning of a rendezvous. Once they meet and like each other, few days pass till they have sex and become a couple

Ferdinando and Pietro did not plunge into a serious relationship with similar haste. They saw sex as the focus of their relationship since the first time they talked on an Internet chat. For a brief period, they got to know each other while enjoying their sexual affinity.

Luigi: Could you tell me about the beginning of your relationship?

Pietro: It all started with a sexual fling, a pseudo-one-night-stand, organised on an Internet site. I had been out of a serious relationship for quite a long time but, I don't know...maybe two months earlier I had terminated that relationship, so I wasn't...I wasn't looking for a new serious relationship, you know what they say, it was a time in my life in which I took what was coming and had fun with whomever happened to be there, it was all done with much lightness of heart. Well, in that...in one of those situations we started talking on that site, I don't remember precisely if I contacted him or the other way around, we met one evening, so it wasn't even a date, it was all about sex and that's exactly what happened. A sexual encounter. Yeah, but...well, I won't say I felt a spark already, well, I know how he is, I know he had already decided he wanted to see me again. And paradoxically we started hanging out after the first date. [...] It's that kind of upside-down order gay men usually follow. (G1.2)

Luigi: How did your relationship begin?

Ferdinando: I'll tell you what I remember, he's going to tell you a different story for sure. We hooked up for a fuck on a site for sexual flings. I was in a phase...I had ended a relationship a few months before, I didn't want to start a new one at all. I was just looking for fun, I found Pietro on this site, we chatted on cam, I won't tell you what happened, after that we met in person and we just kept on seeing each other. There's been no interruption of any sort.

Luigi: Was there a moment in which you said 'Ok, we're together now'?

Ferdinando: No, because we were...I mean, it's obvious that from a point on...but we didn't actually say it...we had this great chemistry between us, just sheer fucking luck, I don't know...I personally never felt like we were feeling differently on what we were doing. It's happened to me often, being the one in a relationship that's a little less in love, a little less interested than the other, I don't know. This time it was different, we always had the feeling we were staying together with no overbearing expectations from each other. We want to be together, after two years we want to live together [...] I would've never imagined I would live with my partner. (G1.1)

In Pietro's words, the upside-down order of dating is common among gay men: first comes sex and then dinner, instead of the other way around as heterosexuals do. Nevertheless, in both gay couples quoted above the partners stress that sex and love developed together between them, and use emotionally-loaded language to do so: from finding the right person to be with for the first time to finally being as into their partner as he is into them.

Differently from these gay men, lesbian interviewees met for the first time through work or friends networks, sometimes overlapping with the lesbian and gay sociality, especially when one of them worked in a sexual minority business or association. They usually experienced a period of mutual courtship before falling into each other's arms. The way Gloria recalls it, her and Daniela's beginnings are a paradigmatic case.

Gloria: There's this dance club, I hung out with my girlfriend at the time there. That summer we broke up and I went back home to be with my friends for a month or so. While I was there a friend of mine calls me and tells me some lesbians are hitting on my ex, they asked him her phone number, I said 'You didn't give them her phone number, did you?' He told me he hadn't, but he had, because he wanted me and her to stop thinking about each other...what an asshole...so, when I came back I wanted to get to know these girls, one of them was Daniela [...] and I made friends with her! [...] I started playing silly and I could see she would respond with shyness, that kind of shyness that's all that I'm not, you can feel there's something behind it and it drives me crazy [...] and then I moved step by step in her world, and in the end, at my ex's birthday party, I didn't talk to my ex at all and neither did she, we talked all night, just the two of us. Then we met almost every night at the dance club, one of those nights she asked me to dance, it was a romantic song and we danced. We danced close to each other and something clicked...after that we met at another club, I asked her number and after that, 3 or 4 days later, we got in touch with text messages but...I asked her out for a drink, that drink became a dinner, the dinner became an evening together, and we kissed till morning came and we talked sitting in the car. And that's how it all started. (L4.1)

Highlighting the relevance of previous relationships in the initial attitudes and steps of the ongoing relationship with a stable, cohabiting partner is a common theme between lesbians and gay men. My interviewees, all aged between 23 and 38, are involved in the hop-in hop-off culture of courtship and romantic relationships leading to the formation of a lasting bond with one carefully chosen partner that has become the norm among heterosexuals in Euro-American societies. Gay men, as Ferdinando and Pietro above, often remember that a previous relationship either haunted them for a few months, feeding into their desire for a comeback with a better chosen partner, or left them with an itch to scratch with a few months of carefree and no-strings-attached hook-ups eventually resulting in a new partner. Lesbians' previous partners tend to be more physically present and relationally central in the initial steps of their new relationships,

usually because lesbians' relatively long periods of courtship ignite and evolve among friends and acquaintances. While they get to know each other, lesbian prospective stable partners do not seem to rush into sexuality. Celeste and Vanessa are a partial exception. They had known each other for a few months before dating, but they both stress the strong physical attraction pulling them to each other from the start.

Celeste: I don't like using the phrase 'love at first sight' because I think it's silly, it's a childish thing. But that's how it happened. We hadn't had the chance to meet, we had heard about each other from other people. Afterwards, we met before and after a festival we were both involved in. We began talking to each other, one evening we were at this festival and we had dinner and it was plain to see, I suppose that was the beginning for me and for her too, and I mean I suppose we both felt physically attracted to each other, that's what gets you at first, it's all about who you like at a physical level in the beginning, at least for me. I was completely aware of the influence this person had on me. We went dancing, me and her. She talked to other people the whole night, and then we went at her place. Nothing happened that night because we were in an absurd situation, a friend of hers was sleeping with us, all in the same bed (L1.1)

Vanessa: I already knew who she was before meeting her and I avoided her with outmost conviction because I knew I liked her. But it was very difficult to ignore each other and it was love at first sight.

Luigi: Why were you avoiding her?

Vanessa: Because I'd just had a very long and difficult relationship and I was in a moment of my life in which I had no intention to have new ties to someone, I was experimenting a lot. You could say it was a period of whoring around. Creating a connection with someone I liked was dangerous, with someone I could build something with, I knew I wasn't ready.

Luigi: How did your relationship start?

Vanessa: Our relationship started from a physical attraction and from being incapable of staying away from each other and ignore that feeling. [...] I didn't want to get involved in a relationship, but she's stubborn.

Luigi: So she was the one taking the first steps and making it into a relationship?

Vanessa: I'd say so, because I was dating five women at the same time, I kicked one out of my flat saying 'Ok, maybe I'll be with you but right now I don't feel like it, get out of my house, I need to make a phone call'. Celeste knew. She told me 'I like your *savoir faire*, kicking someone out just to have me come at your place.' After a week we'd been going out together she told me 'I have no problems accepting that you've got this kind of life, I've been observing you and I know who you are and I know what you're doing, you'll see for yourself and I'll see for myself if I can accept being one of the five women you date, but I'll let you know that I don't like it, you'll have to make a choice, I like you and that's very rare, you're fucked.' [...] In a week or so I had started rejecting dates. I wasn't actually enjoying the life I was leading. (L1.2)

Vanessa recalls that she had been dating multiple partners at the beginning of her relationship with her current lover, and her partner Celeste went through a period in which she hopped across multiple attractions while dating Vanessa. Celeste talks of this as a game she had set up in order to make Vanessa a bit jealous and test Vanessa's attractions and commitment to her, while also deciding how much she could let herself follow her attractions and commitment to Vanessa. She also recalls that the game stopped abruptly, once the two lovers opted for the mutual commitment that led them to cohabitation. This mutual commitment took a long time to emerge, but Celeste and Vanessa talk of a growing feeling of attraction and love from the first time they met, indicating that even before deciding they could be relationship material they knew something pulled them together. As for the gay partners quoted above, love is presented as a strong emotion that guides lesbians and gay men regardless of their sexual and intellectual choices, and that they must negotiate with themselves to understand where their emotional well-being truly lies.

Romantic involvement between lesbians and gay men emerge from different dating markets and sexual habits. However, it serves lesbians and gay men equally in finding someone to whom commit at some level. The incidence of cohabitation among coupled lesbians and gay men³⁴ is similar or slightly growing between 1995-96 and 2012-13 (from about 26% to about 30%), with little difference between genders (tab. 4.5). Across two decades, same-sex cohabitation seems to meet an unchanging set of relational needs and aspirations of Italian homosexuals. If lesbians and gay men fall in love similarly across the decades, how they stay in love shows signs of change, but also a continuing influence of gender. Ongoing cohabiting relationships lasting longer than four years are more common among cohabiting gay men (40.4% in 1995-96, 50% in 2012-13) than cohabiting lesbians (29.7% in 1995-96, 42.4% in 2012-13). Across genders, cohabiting relationships last longer in 2012-13 than twenty years earlier, suggesting that commitment to these relationships is growing. Data on the incidence of formalised relationships among cohabiting same-sex couples supports this interpretation³⁵, as formalisation of cohabiting relationships becomes more common from 1995-96 (33.6% among lesbians, 52.1% among gay men) to 2012-13 (52.1% among lesbians, 46.1%

³⁴ In tab. 4.5, respondents choosing the answer 'Other' when asked about their household composition are not treated as missing. Respondents reporting living with their same-sex partner and other people and respondents reporting living with their same-sex partner and children (an option that was not explicitly included in the answers, and that respondents reported by choosing to answer 'Other' and specifying their answer) are not considered as cohabiting with their partner in the analyses. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

³⁵ In 1995-96 and 2012-13, the question on formalisation of cohabiting relationships read: 'Did you and your cohabiting partner formalise your relationship in any way?'. Respondents were coded as having formalised their relationship if they answered either 'Yes, we organised a celebration and invited friends and family' or 'Yes, in other ways', regardless if they specified the other ways they had formalised their relationship or not. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

among gay men). Twenty years ago lesbians formalised their cohabiting relationships less often than gay men. In 2012-13, even if their cohabiting relationships do not last as long as gay men's, lesbians formalise them more often than gay men.

Tab. 4.5 Incidence of lesbians and gay men in same-sex cohabiting couples among coupled lesbians and gay men, percentages of formalised relationships among cohabiting lesbians and gay men, percentages of individuals who have cohabited for more than 4 years among cohabiting lesbians and gay men, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Coupled lesbians		Coupled gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Cohabiting	29.4	30.2	25.8	28.1
<i>N</i>	367	411	932	711
	Cohabiting lesbians		Cohabiting gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Have been cohabiting for more than 4 years	29.7	42.4	40.4	50
<i>N</i>	107	117	231	191
Formalised their relationship	33.6	52.1	42.4	46.1
<i>N</i>	101	118	228	196

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

The trends in duration and formalisation of cohabiting relationships, the first one more pronounced among lesbians, the second among gay men, speak of the daily and ritual practices behind Italian homosexuals' growing fondness of stable, public, marital-like relationships. Looking at dating markets, we saw that the encounter of two different gendered scripts of love is lacking in lesbians' and gay men's dating markets. This might also be true for their cohabiting relationships: lesbians' formalised but relatively short-lived cohabitations and gay men's relatively long-lasting but not formalised cohabitations can be signs of a lack of institutionalisation of their cohabiting relationships. Lesbians and gay men seem to have a difficult time mixing prosaic and mythic love. Following gender differences in love, lesbians might see too much mythic love in relationships that are not rooted in the prosaic understanding of each other's needs and thus are

fragile, whereas gay men might skip on mythic love in their everyday prosaic agreements and thus lack appreciation of their partner relationship as evidently different from and prioritised in respect to other interpersonal ties. The next sections delve into aspects of prosaic and mythic love that make up the everyday reality of Italian same-sex cohabiters, contextualising them in the recent developments of marital and marital-like institutions in Italy in order to see how far couples' gender composition goes in individuals' capabilities to relate to their stable partners with a clear idea of what making a life together entails.

4.3. Cohabitation as a lesbian and gay institution

4.3.1. 'Commitment is what I'm thinking': first steps into cohabitation

In their classic study on married and cohabiting different-sex couples and cohabiting same-sex couples in US in the 1980s, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983: 321) direct their concluding musings to the question if cohabitation, for heterosexuals and homosexuals, might be thought of as an institution the way marriage is. Their answer, argued upon a contextual consideration of the meanings and rules of intra-couple relational and extra-couple social norms, is negative.

Before cohabitation can become an institution, its proprieties must be clear to any schoolchild. It must be seen as legitimate. Both partners must have the same level of commitment (or lack thereof) to the future. At the present time, we think that because there are so many possible permutations of cohabitation, partners may have trouble knowing they want the same things out of the relationship. [...] Couples who want to create an institution should be aware of what an awesome task they have taken on. [...] After all, it has taken a long time for Western marriage to evolve the features that it has. Institutions are not made or redesigned overnight. Moreover, we think it will be hard for cohabitation to become an institution while the traditional model of marriage still exists.

In a sense, and with relevant differences across Euro-American countries, time has proven the two American sociologists wrong. The three critical points they see in the institutional nature of cohabitation, namely its internal consistency in terms of relational norms, its external differentiation from other relational institutions, especially marriage, and its relevance in terms of proportions of individual lives in which its presence or absence make a difference have not changed in unison but have led to a loose institutionalisation of cohabitation. Despite not undergoing the legal recognition of unmarried cohabiting couples or the widespread diffusion of cohabitation as a *de jure* and *de facto* alternative to marriage in permanent or temporary couple relationships that has been observed in other Euro-American countries in the last decades, Italy takes part in this transformation of family

(Perelli-Harris, Sánchez Gassen 2012; Vignoli *et al.* 2014).

At the end of the same decade in which Blumstein and Schwartz's study was published, Barbagli (1990: 27-34) observed that couples in Italy could be in an unmarried cohabitation for three different reasons. Firstly, the impossibility to marry, as in the case of heterosexual couples in which one partner had separated from her or his previous married partner or homosexual couples willing to marry but legally barred from marriage. Secondly, a value-laden rejection of the institution of marriage. Thirdly, the partners' preference for a trial time for the couple before entering a legally binding marriage contract, or, as a special case of trial relationship, from one partner's necessity to assure that conflictual aspects of coupled and married life would be managed with both partners' preferences in mind (in heterosexual couples typically the woman's need for a clear understanding that housework would be shared). Almost three decades later, in a context of rising cohabitation rates (Istat 2012a; Gabrielli and Vignoli 2013), Salvini and Vignoli (2014: 73) report that heterosexually cohabiting Italians tend to see cohabitation as a choice based on partners' decision to preserve continuous negotiation of the terms of the relationship. At the same time, they do not always draw a clear line between the commitment mobilised by and the possibilities open to cohabiting and married couples (*e.g.*, childbirth or home ownership), and might even say that continuous negotiation is in some cases a better foundation for commitment and life-changing choices than certitude of roles and interpersonal duties. These observations point out that cohabitation is being institutionalised by effect of the blurring of its boundaries with marriage, making the two forms of coupledness variations of a single institution of familial commitment between partners based on both partners' freedom to redraw the nature of the relationship (Treas *et al.* 2014).

Marriage, in its traditional XX century form, could be described as an institution that contextually bound partners in an essentially unequal relationship and marginalised those who did not embrace it as a fundamental turning point of their relational biographies (Therborn 2004: 295-297). Rising gender equality outside and inside marital relationships, divorce rates, and re-marriage rates point to a blurring of the boundaries between marriage and other relational statuses (Lesthaeghe 2010). However, Italian lesbian and gay cohabiters potentially face stronger unfavourable conditions in or attitudes towards institutionalisation of cohabitation as a marital-like relationship, because of the gender composition of their couples that positions them as outsiders in respect to received norms regarding the role of prosaic and mythic love in the construction of commitment. The development of same-sex cohabitations in terms of the consistency and differentiation of its features across cases and of its inclusion in a culture of openness to negotiation of partners' preferences and of familial commitment sheds light on the matter. The ways lesbians and gay men describe and experience their entry into cohabitation offers insight in the ongoing process of homosexuals' embracement of the changing institution of stable coupledness.

Tab. 4.6 shows the distribution of single, coupled, and cohabiting lesbians and gay men in the two samples according to their reported marital status³⁶. Unmarried lesbians and gay men count for the overwhelming majority of lesbians and gay men in 1995-96 and 2012-13, whatever their relational condition. Lesbians and gay men reporting being married or in cohabitation, divorced, separated, or widows/widowers, across relational conditions, genders, and decades tell of the intertwining influences of individual life courses and socio-cultural transformation.

Single lesbians and gay men in 1995-96 and 2012-13 are the likeliest to report being unmarried. Coupled lesbians in 2012-13 and coupled gay men in 1995-96 and in 2012-13 are less likely to say they are unmarried than single lesbians and gay men. Among coupled lesbians in 2012-13, reporting being married or in cohabitation becomes more common than two decades before (from 0.8% to 6%). In 1995-96 the difference among single and coupled gay men was mostly in incidence of marriage or separation (0.5% vs. 2.5% and 0.8% vs. 2.4%), whereas in 2012-13 coupled gay men are especially likelier to report being married or in cohabitation than single gay men (3.2% of coupled gay men vs. no single gay man).

Cohabiting lesbians and gay men in 2012-13 do not report being unmarried as much as they did in 1995-96 (from 86.8% to 76.3% among lesbians, from 83.4% to 71.4% among gay men). In 1995-96, cohabiting lesbians were especially likely to report being divorced or separated when compared to single or coupled lesbians (7.6% of cohabiting lesbians vs. about 0.6% of single and coupled lesbians reported being divorced, 3.8% of cohabiting lesbians and about 2% of single and coupled lesbians reported being separated), whereas cohabiting gay men were

³⁶ The wording of answers to the question on marital status did not distinguish between being married or cohabiting, and between being married or cohabiting with a same-sex partner or being married or cohabiting with a different-sex partner. I consider the ambiguity of this answer as useful to the interpretation of data that I advance. As I explain in this subsection, respondents in 1995-96 were likelier to interpret the answer on marital status reading 'married or cohabiting' as referred to being married or cohabiting with a different-sex partner. This is suggested by cohabiting lesbians' greater likelihood to report being divorced or separated when compared to cohabiting gay men, in line with same-sex desiring women's reported greater likelihood to marry or have a stable different-sex partner before identifying as homosexual or having a stable same-sex partner when compared to same-sex desiring men (Bertone *et al.* 2003a; Bertone *et al.* 2003b). In 2012-13, lesbians and gay men become likelier to interpret this answer as being married or cohabiting with a same-sex partner. This is suggested by coupled lesbians' and gay men's growing likelihood to report being married or cohabiting and cohabiting lesbians' and gay men's similar likelihood to report being divorced or separated. Cohabiting lesbians' greater likelihood to report being unmarried when compared to cohabiting gay men is in line with analyses on cohabiting lesbians' investment on formalisation of couple relationships in tab. 4.5, suggesting that lesbians see marriage as a stronger marker of material and emotional commitment that is more difficultly claimed when not truly and legally accessible. Further analyses on lesbians' and gay men's attitudes towards marriage can be found in subsection 4.4.3 of this chapter. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

especially likely to report being married or in cohabitation (13.5%) compared to single and coupled gay men and to cohabiting lesbians (1.9%). By 2012-13, cohabiting lesbians and gay men become strikingly likelier to report being married or in cohabitation than two decades before (20.3% among lesbians and 25.1% among gay men).

Tab. 4.6 Percentages of single, coupled, and cohabiting lesbians and gay men reporting different marital statuses, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

		Lesbians		Gay men	
		1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Single	Unmarried	97	96.8	98.2	98.6
	Married or in cohabitation	0.5	1.2	0.5	0
	Divorced	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.3
	Separated	2	1.2	0.8	1
	Widow/er	0	0.3	0.1	0
	<i>N</i>	203	340	1,175	871
Coupled	Unmarried	94.8	91.6	94.8	95.4
	Married or in cohabitation	0.8	6	2.5	3.2
	Divorced	0.8	1.1	0.2	0.2
	Separated	2.4	1.5	2.4	1
	Widow/er	1.2	0	0.2	0.2
	<i>N</i>	249	273	668	502
Cohabiting	Unmarried	86.8	76.3	83.4	71.4
	Married or in cohabitation	1.9	20.3	13.5	25.1
	Divorced	7.6	0.9	1.3	1.5
	Separated	3.8	1.7	1.8	2
	Widow/er	0	0.9	0	0
	<i>N</i>	106	118	229	199

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Cohabiting lesbians who were in a heterosexual marriage in 1995-96 probably chose divorce or separation more often than single or coupled lesbians with a similar experience, because they had a new, personally decisive same-sex couple relationship. Among cohabiting gay men, the high incidence of respondents reporting being married or in cohabitation is likely to emerge from gay men in heterosexual marriages not choosing divorce as often as lesbians in

heterosexual marriages, because of women's greater readiness to initiate divorce when they are not happy with the marital relationship (Brinig and Allen 2000; Hewitt *et al.* 2006; Kalmijn and Poortman 2006). The increasing tendency of coupled lesbians, coupled gay men (more weakly), and especially cohabiting lesbians and gay men to say they are married or in cohabitation when they are partnered or actually cohabit with a person of the same-sex with whom they have a romantic bond points out that Italian homosexuals growingly see being coupled and sharing a common residence with their same-sex partner as a consequential change in their relational biography.

Do these naming practices, especially tied to cohabitation, actually emerge from a distinct grasp of one's own commitment to the couple among lesbians and gay men who choose to share a home with their same-sex partner? Interviews with lesbian and gay cohabiting couples support and at the same time trouble this interpretation. The circumstances in which cohabitation begins, such as the timing of this event in the partners' relationship, the negotiation of mutual commitment and individual preferences in the decision to cohabit, and the choice of the shared place of residence are complex narrations in which partners' choices and growing love intertwine and influence each other.

Gloria and Daniela had been cohabiting for five years when I interviewed them. They started cohabiting one year after they became a couple, when Gloria was 27 and Daniela 23. When they speak of that moment in their relationship, the relevance of ideals of commitment, negotiation, and perceptions of control on one's own life course is visible.

Luigi: How did you start living together?

Daniela: Well, it started by chance. I wasn't thinking about starting to cohabit, that's for sure. Neither was she. She was living with a relative, and he told her that he wanted to live alone. So, cohabiting became a possible solution, or either finding her a new place. [...] so we said, well: 'Let's move together!', 'Let's think about it...' [...] We were madly in love, we loved spending time together, I wanted to get out from my parents' house...I wasn't betting on it, but I accepted her proposal and we looked for a flat and in a month we moved here, we liked it, perfect location for work [...] it was a rather bumpy beginning, but then it all turned out quite alright. (L4.2)

Luigi: How did you start living together?

Gloria: The idea was there, we had known each other for a long time, the person I lived with was away for work all the time so she would stay at my place all the time, we almost already cohabited. She didn't have her stuff at my place, but she slept there, we were always together...she was a little afraid at the beginning, she was afraid we were rushing into it, it was too early. Look at the options, though. Sharing a flat with friends, finding some students and sharing a messy flat with them, it wasn't our thing. [...] So, we decided to move here. She had to tell her parents, they are very close, they had to process it: their little girl moving out. [...]

Luigi: You were sure from the beginning, or did you have any doubts?

Gloria: No, I didn't. We weren't investing anything much in it, it's not like we wanted to buy a house, I wasn't afraid. I was worried because I saw she was afraid, I felt like I was pushing her too hard, she's four years younger, you know. I don't know, maybe she was too young to start cohabiting...anyway, I was worried because she saw it as a difficult choice.

Luigi: How did you convince her?

Gloria: I didn't, she decided what she wanted to do. It was a decisive moment, moving together was a solution, if we hadn't done it then we surely would have done it a few months later or a year later. That was the right moment, she understood that and she jumped on the boat, and it all turned out for the best. (L4.1)

Cohabitation as an apt solution for one partner's or both partners' vicissitudes in residence and work choices is a common pattern among the lesbian and gay interviewees. As for Gloria and Daniela, other couples mix work, personal maturity, and reflections on the right path towards commitment to a stable relationship in their decisions to cohabit. The two lesbian partners talk about love, but they do not foreground the meaning that such a choice has in terms of family building. Their negotiations focus on deciding if the right time for one partner to move away from her family of origin has come, leaving the matter of commitment to the partner as something that will evidently be faced throughout the experience of cohabitation. Ferdinando and Pietro, gay partners of 31 and 32 sharing a home for three years, recall that their needs for a home of one's own emerging as an aspect of their young adult age and their financial circumstances entailed a stronger focus on negotiating what family and commitment meant to them.

Pietro: After two years he asked me to move in together. It was a series of events, I couldn't afford the flat I was living in anymore [...] in the meantime he had gotten rid of a flatmate and he told me to move in with him. [...] We're lucky rent is pretty cheap here and so we decided that we could actually live together, the two of us, like a family, in a home of our own. [...] He brought it up at first and I was very doubtful, and the result was he started brooding. He wasn't even aware of how much he was hurt, he wasn't able to talk to me about it. [...] I did give too little importance to his wish, I told him 'I don't know, well, I like the place I'm living in right now, I like my flatmate'. [...] I was afraid of this decision at first [...] then luckily we talked about it and we solved it and now I have no regrets, everything fell in its place right from the start. (G1.2)

Ferdinando: Pietro was putting up walls and barriers. I had been telling him about it for quite a long time. [...] Then I started being persistent, and I did because it wasn't about money or saving money, it was something I wanted for us as a couple [...] living together creates a sort of normality, normalisation, it creates habits, constant sharing, a daily thoughtlessness. [...] I was tired of living with strangers and struggling to make them comfortable living with me, changing my habits, all that you need to do when you live

with someone. The difference is that I needed to do it for someone I love. Financially, I was struggling with paying rent, this flat is very cheap but I wouldn't be able to afford it on my own [...] But he wanted to move in with me, he truly wanted to. The problem is he lived in a Disney movie where if you move in with someone you buy a house together, you buy everything new for your new house. I had to work on this, explain him that life doesn't necessarily work like that. [...]

Luigi: How did you convince him?

Ferdinando: It was all about emotions. A huge fight [...] I got really mad, we were in a very complicated moment in our relationship, we weren't living together yet but we'd been talking about it for some time, and he'd been resisting for the longest time and saying living together maybe wasn't right [...] once more, like always, lack of enthusiasm, no initiative, just letting our relationship be like it would take care of itself. [...] I had this desire to live together, it was always me bringing up this kind of things, there's two of us you know, what are you doing for our relationship?! [...] I made him understand I was questioning my trust in him, in his feelings towards me, in his commitment to our relationship, and he understood I needed him to tell me what he wanted to do loud and clear. [...] I pushed him a little. (G1.1)

Ferdinando describes Pietro's initial ideal of cohabitation as one step in a well-planned relational trajectory in which commitment between partners is insured by a joint choice of a new home, in terms of location and decisions on the shape and contents of the house (furniture, appliances and the likes). This narrative is troubled by the limited financial resources available to partners. Theirs and Gloria and Daniela's accounts of the beginnings of cohabitation highlight that, even when financial needs and considerations are paramount, emotional and relational issues give shape to these considerations. Lesbians and gay men always focus on questions such as: does my romantic partner deserve a cohabiting relationship? Is she or he able to have one? Would she or he truly benefit from being in a cohabiting relationship, and cohabiting with me? This happens whether same-sex partners' decision to cohabit is perceived as creating a familial unit or as sharing more space, time, and life with someone and being open to the eventual transformations this could mean for the relationship.

The availability of financial resources, as a couple and in terms of relative economic power between partners, does not trump the emotional and relational framing of cohabitation as a risky and alluring form of mutual commitment. Celeste and Vanessa's narrative is revealing in this sense. Vanessa, 36 and ten years older than Celeste, recalls her doubts and her partner's conditions.

Vanessa: She told me 'Let's move together. Leave your house, leave the place you've been living in these years, because what I want is living together and starting over together, new home, new life for both of us. Either we start anew together, as equals, or nothing'.

Luigi: How did you react to her request?

Vanessa: It was a kick in the guts. It was what I wanted, I think. I'd been expecting this moment for 15 years, expecting it and postponing it, I wanted to do it but I hadn't done it. [...] Because it's a sharp departure from one's own past, it's a real choice for a new life with someone, it's getting out of the known, of your daily routine and your comfort zone, of a life I had built around my needs and my preferences: my flat and stuff...When I had had the possibility to do it with my exes I always told them to move in the flat I was already living in. They all were weird situations. I have two previous experiences of cohabitation, but they both started without a real decision to cohabit, we kind of needed to. I could always say: 'Ok, you have to move because we want to stay close, you can either move in with me or find a place for yourself, I don't care', and they moved in and we started cohabiting in my world, with my flatmates, my friends. It wasn't a real cohabitation with a plan, with projects for us as a couple or as a family. I wouldn't have accepted it differently, because me and my exes started cohabiting too early, just 4 or 5 months after having met for the first time, it's too early. (L1.2)

As Celeste recounts, she and Vanessa started considering the idea of cohabitation six months after becoming a couple and actually started cohabiting two months later.

Celeste: We decided to move in together [...] because I already slept at her place or she did at mine, after some time we were fed up with it. [...] So we started looking for a flat and eventually we ended up here. At first I moved in her flat, but I'm not that kind of person, I don't like moving in someone else's flat. Lesbians do it all the time, they get together and one moves in with the other at her place. No, I wouldn't do it, she was living with her flatmates. I was adamant about it, we needed to start from zero, that's how I see cohabitation. You don't have the room to grow together if you don't start from zero. The other way it's a shaky situation, I move in with you but you live with your friends...I don't like it. I have my friends and my world. We did it temporarily, but we hated it. [...] When I brought it up she said yes right away, she didn't ask for a compromise because she knew that's how I see things. (L1.1)

The choice to find a new home for the couple is loaded with emotional and relational meanings, traceable to the marital norm of the familial residence as a sign of the distance the couple draws between itself and all other social ties, be it with the family of origin or with friends, previous flatmates, and past romantic partners. Lesbian and gay partners talk about these moments in their relationships as sometimes conflicted, and resolved because of the decision to trust the love they feel for their partners. Gabb and Fink (2015: 110) underscore the relevance of shared home in the functioning and stability of contemporary couple relationships, describing it as a sort of necessary background for the family practices that produce a continued mutual commitment and a pattern of beneficial and desirable interactions between partners. Some lesbian or gay couples among the ones I interviewed, helped by the availability of economic resources and previous

residential choices taken together with their families of origin, enjoyed a practical advantage in their search for shared home because one of the partners already owned the house where the couple lived. In these cases, the partners speak of an early start of cohabitation in their relationship, sometimes less than a month after having met each other. However, just as for the couples who decided to find a home together, the decision to cohabit did not necessarily have the same meaning in all these couples. Tito (G2.1) started moving in his partner Lorenzo's apartment from the day they first met, slowly but eventually bringing all he needed from his parents' house to his new residence. Together and cohabiting for a little longer than a year, the two partners say in unison that they just could not stand to be apart. Similarly to Tito and Lorenzo, Chiara (L3.1) and Elisa (L3.2) have been together and have been cohabiting for a little longer than a year, but their cohabitation started because Chiara had to move out of the apartment she was sharing with other people. Carlo and Roberto have been together and cohabiting for six years. They both recall that the decision to cohabit was taken in at least two steps, maybe more.

Luigi: How long have you been living together?

Carlo: We met at the end of February and ten days later I moved in. I paid rent at my flat for a year, I had a flat at the other end of the city. We said 'Ok, we like each other, let's try'. We didn't actually say anything. At the start I would come over on weekends, and then I kind of never went away. It was more like 'I'm here, I'll stay here'. (G3.1)

Luigi: How did you start living together?

Roberto: I let him sleep here one night, after that we met again and again, either at my place or at his. We realised right away it was too difficult, we couldn't go much longer like that, because I got off work too late and finding time to just relax and decompress was impossible. In the end he would come over, we cooked dinner together and then he didn't go back home. He moved in and he settled down, he occupied my flat, I always tell him so: he occupied it and never went away. We never actually said 'Ok, you'll move in now', actually after one year we decided he was going to leave his flat. We're not that kind of people, we don't say 'Today we're not together, today we sleep here together, today we sleep there together'. We parted very rarely in the first months, just for a few hours each time maybe, and then together again. Deciding to leave his flat was just a matter of making it official, there was no real decision there. We didn't need it anymore, we were wasting money on it. (G3.2)

As Celeste and Vanessa's story above, Carlo and Roberto's accounts point to conflictual aspects of the decision to cohabit. Roberto continuously refers to love as the basis of the growing commitment to his partner from the start of their relationship, but at the same time lets his partner understand that the decision to cohabit was not as shared as he would like to think. If letting his partner live with him was almost a forced choice for Roberto, making it official and stopping

paying rent for Carlo's apartment was a decision that followed and was taken together by the partners, who aimed at showing each other that they were committed to a cohabiting relationship. Again, in Roberto's words, they rarely desired to be apart from each other.

The interviewed lesbian and gay couples report a great variation in their paths to cohabitation and the meanings of this relational choice. In this regard, lesbian and gay cohabitation seems to be a weak institution in terms of internal consistency. In Italy, same-sex cohabitation as a value-laden alternative to same-sex marriage is a practical impossibility, because same-sex marriage is not legally recognised. Falling necessarily in the two types of cohabitation as an opportunistic choice and of cohabitation as trial relationship, same-sex cohabitations vary widely on what exactly the partners think they need to negotiate in order to enter into a cohabiting relationship and what level and kind of difference such choice entails in the partners' commitment to each other. At the same time, lesbian and gay cohabiters talk of their decision to cohabit as based on values of love and need for a deep daily and relational connection with their partner. As observed for different-sex cohabitation, same-sex cohabitation is becoming institutionalised by virtue of its progressive integration in the coupledness institution in which heterosexual marriage already falls. This suggests that lesbians and gay men are ready to mobilise and expect from their partners practices and promises supporting mutual commitment between partners. The next subsection starts interrogating the everyday ties that bind same-sex stable partners together by looking into partners' capability and readiness to share the everyday labour and socio-economic resources needed to sustain a cohabiting couple relationship.

4.3.2. *'Wouldn't get this from any other': inequality between partners*

Things have changed for us lately. [...] [My partner] changed job and now he needs to entertain all these social relationships for his new job. Like, having twenty guests over. [...] It's been a while, we've been inviting people over like this. It's all about work, you know...I've got a theory about all this...I see life as a theatre stage. Each one of us needs to have a role and change it when it's needed. Right now he needs to have a role and a status among his clients and colleagues. I respond to this need. I've always been a protagonist, now I take on the supporting role. I let him shine, even if it's not what I would naturally do. He needs to be the centre of attention and I do my Doris Day, pass the cocktail tray around. I don't pole dance though, I set a limit. [...] I do it because we need to help each other. If you have the means you share them, that's the way I see it.
(gay man)

One big problem of contemporary couples is inequality between partners, regardless of their gender composition. Money is a highly personal matter for partners. The fact that all the same-sex partners I interviewed had separated

financial accounts suggests that same-sex partners like to keep money personal to some extent. My interviewees sometimes kept their partners unaware of how individually earned money was spent, even in the case of expenditures regarding the couple's home or common activities. In this section, I protect the interviewees' reciprocal privacy by indicating only their gender and little more relevant information when quoting them.

As the quote from a cohabiting gay man above shows, partner's money is not just personal. It is also earned and managed through complex strategies that often involve both partners. Following his partner's decision to change job, this gay man accepted a new role in the couple. Despite becoming the main earner in the couple after his partner's career change, he started carrying out new forms of emotional and relational labour at home. He stresses that this labour is needed for partners to prosper as individuals with successful careers, and at the same time clearly sees a traditional gendered aspects in it: his new role is a feminine and secondary one to which he sets limits.

In the history of heterosexual marital relationships, the mid XX century 'golden age of marriage' (Coontz 2004: 227, 243) was characterised by unequal distribution of socio-economic resources between partners systematically advantaging the male partner over the female partner. This inequality was either interpreted as a bio-social given on which further inequality was pursued by partners as a rational form of labour specialisation (Parsons and Bales 1956: 22-26)³⁷ or as a social starting point shaping the interests of female and male partners and, more importantly, their capability in bargaining compliance to individual interests from each other (Blood and Wolfe 1960: 44-46, 73-74).

The continued prevalence, allure and resilience of heterosexual partnerships characterised by inequality, even against economic rationality, revealed the weaknesses of the theoretical focus on specialisation and bargaining based on economic resources and found a complementary explanation in the societal values attached to gender in their individual and institutional expressions (West and Zimmerman 1987; Coltrane 2000). The specialisation theory, with its assumption that marital arrangements are fundamentally a rational answer to women and men's drive towards maximisation of economic resources, gave way to a combination of the bargaining theory and the theory of gender values based on the assumption that couples and their vicissitudes emerge from partners' interactions embedded in socio-cultural contexts (Breen and Cooke 2005). The unpaid relational work women are called to carry out produces a set of resources whose value is more prone to degradation in the case of termination of the marital relationship than the human and economic capital produced and controlled by their male partners (Becker 1985), even if the male economic capital can be potentially enjoyed by both partners as much as the products of female relational work (Lundberg *et al.* 1997). The central tenet of the bargaining theory of work

³⁷ The bio-social theory of family of structural-functionalist origin was later formalised and expressed in mathematical terms by economist Gary Becker (1981).

distribution between partners is still relevant: the partner who specialises in unpaid housework and relational labour is relatively deprived of the resources needed to renegotiate this arrangement, because she or he needs to rely on the other partner for her or his financial needs. Lacking these resources, women usually do the bulk of unpaid labour in couples and must trust that their male partners won't take advantage of their position of power up to a point in which the relationship on which sharing of financial resources is based must be dissolved (Breen and Cooke 2005).

When considering the central aspect of division of paid and unpaid work between partners, same-sex marital-like relationships fit into the picture of bargained inequality. In same-sex partners' relationships the difference between partners' incomes plays a role in decisions regarding who gets to invest time and energy in bread-winning and human capital production and who must instead juggle paid work and unpaid relational work. However work cannot be distributed on the basis of gender as in heterosexual couples and equal and fair arrangements are easier to achieve (Kurdek 1993; Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 204, 212-215).

Lesbians and gay men in marital-like arrangements do not need to mobilise as much trust in their partners and compliance to her or his interests as heterosexual women. However, as shown in tab. 4.7, the management and division of financial resources is sometimes a reason for disagreement in same-sex cohabiting couples³⁸. In 1995-96, this was less the case among lesbian couples (7% argued over money) than gay couples (12.2% did). In 2012-13, lesbian and gay cohabiters are roughly equally likely to argue over money (12.8% and 11.2% of them do). Cross-nationally, same-sex coupled women find equal financial and work arrangements more often than same-sex male and different-sex couples (Kurdek 2007; Jaspers and Verbakel 2013; Giddings *et al.* 2014). Italian lesbian couples in 1995-96 display a relatively low likelihood to argue over money, confirming this finding. The growing diffusion of financial disagreement among lesbian couples is open to different interpretations. Arguments can be sparked by both partners' complaints and result in fairer or unfairer arrangements depending on what the partners see as fair and how much contracting power each partner has.

³⁸ The question on same-sex partners' reasons for arguing did not explicitly state that multiple answers were allowed. In 1995-96, respondents were about equally as likely to give only one answer and to give more than one answer, and the 'LGB 1995-96' research team coded the data as referring to a question with multiple answers (a binary variable for each answer and a value for each case in which the respondent had answered for at least one option). In 2012-13, respondents were about equally as likely to give only one answer and to give more than one answer and at similar rates to those observed in 1995-96. The coding system used for 'LGB 1995-96' was used for 'LGB 2012-13'. In tab. 4.7, respondents choosing the answer 'Other' when asked about their couple's reasons for arguing are not treated as missing. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

Tab. 4.7 Percentages of cohabiting lesbians and gay men who argue over money with their partner, percentages of lesbians and gay men in a double-earner couple on cohabiting ones, percentages of lesbians and gay men in a dual-earner or single-earner cohabiting relationship who argue over housework with their partner, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Cohabiting lesbians		Cohabiting gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Argue over money	7	12.8	12.2	11.2
<i>N</i>	100	117	222	187
In a dual-earner couple	85.4	86.4	85.6	85.2
<i>N</i>	96	118	215	189
	Cohabiting lesbians, in dual-earner or single-earner couple		Cohabiting gay men, in dual-earner or single-earner couple	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Argue over housework	24.7	34.4	27.3	30.4
<i>N</i>	77	96	172	158

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

A sign of stability in the contracting power of same-sex partners in Italy comes from the incidence of dual-earner couples among cohabiting same-sex couples³⁹ (tab. 4.7): about 86% for lesbians and gay men in 1995-96 and 2012-13⁴⁰. This data does not tell how wide the earning gap between same-sex partners

³⁹ In the 1995-96 and 2012-13 questionnaires, the question on cohabiting partners' incomes read: 'Do you both have a personal income?'. In tab. 4.7, cases were coded as being in a dual-earner couple if respondents answered either 'Yes, my income is higher than my partner's' or 'Yes, my income is lower than my partner's', and coded as being in a single-earner couple if respondents answered either 'No, only I have an income' or 'No, only my partner has an income'. The cases of respondents answering 'Other' are treated as missing, either if they specified their couple's financial situation or not. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that, as reported by Lucchini *et al.* (2007), 85% of heterosexually married men aged 20-64 in Italy were in the workforce in 2006, and this figure has remained stable over the last half-century (Bison *et al.* 1996; Istat 2007). The employment rate of heterosexually married women with no children in 2006 in Italy was 72% (Eurostat 2007).

was twenty years ago and is now, but it might be used to inquire into their dynamics of disagreement and compliance. Looking at how likely to argue over the division of housework partners experiencing an income gap are allows us to see a somewhat hidden transformation in same-sex relationships, especially lesbians' ones⁴¹. From 1995-96 to 2012-13, lesbian and gay cohabiters become likelier to argue over housework (from 24.7% to 34.4% among lesbians, from 27.3% to 30.4% among gay men). In 1995-96, gay couples were likelier than lesbian couples to argue over housework, suggesting a harder time for weaker male earners to comply with their partners' need for unequal division of housework and arguments sparked by bread-winners to achieve compliance. In 2012-13 the reverse is true, even if Italian women continue to be responsible for housework in families (Romano and Sabbadini 2007; Eurostat 2009), suggesting that two decades later arguments are more often sparked by weaker earners who do not think the division of housework in their couple is fair and are willing to talk about it. Lesbians are at the forefront of this continuing transformation, as women have been in heterosexual couples in recent decades (Sullivan 2004).

In line with this ebb and flow of disagreement over and reconsideration of fairness in same-sex relationships, among the lesbian and gay cohabiting couples interviewed in 2012-13 arrangements in the division of housework could not be mapped out on distribution of family income between partners. A lesbian couple and a gay couple adopt contrasting arrangements. The lesbian couple is formed by two partners with a relatively wide earning gap. They opted for a very traditional division of housework: the partner with greater income does not contribute to it. They also describe and justify this arrangement in traditional terms. They both say it was just right for the partner who contributes less to the couple's finances and expenses to devote her time and energies to housework.

Respondent: [My partner] goes to buy groceries, she buys all we need for the house. I take care of the expenses. [...] For example, we need the repairman to come over, she takes care of that. [...] She's the housewife.

Luigi: What do you mean by 'the housewife'?

Respondent: She goes for the groceries, she buys the blender when we need it, she hangs the linen out to dry, she puts the linen in the washer.

Luigi: Did you talk about this?

Respondent: No, it was a mathematical decision. [...] When we didn't live together, I stayed home from work one morning every now and then or stayed home in the evening to do the housework.

Luigi: Do you help her when you can?

Respondent: Yeah...what do you mean, help her financially?

Luigi: By cleaning and doing housework when you can.

⁴¹ In this analysis in tab. 4.7, I consider only respondents who reported being in a dual-earner couple or in a single-earner couple. The wording of the question allows me to identify these couples as those in which an income gap between partners is present.

Respondent: Yeah, yeah...it's not like there's lots of work to do. We tend to decide together and see what needs to be done. [...] For example, we decided together on the dishwasher. [...] I paid for it, the technician chose it. [...]

Luigi: Do you also take decisions on this kind of expenses?

Respondent: Yes and no.

Luigi: What do you mean?

Respondent: I mean, it's not like I'm the boss. We decide together. We sit at the table and talk. (lesbian woman)

Luigi: How do you divide expenditures?

Respondent: I help with the errands I do. I try and help as much as I can. We don't divide expenses equally, it'd be impossible. She earns more than I do. I pay for the groceries...I take care of the house, let's say. I go and buy groceries, this kind of things. [...] Part of me tries to do as much as I can. I try to do what I can even if it's not enough to repay her. Like, for example, when she comes back home I try and make her comfortable with me and here. I know I owe her financially.

Luigi: What do you do to make her comfortable?

Respondent: When we are together I take care of her, I cook dinner...let's say I try to make myself and her ok with the fact that I depend on her financially right now. (lesbian woman)

The gay partners also have a wide income gap. As in the lesbian couple, all expenses and bills are covered by the partner with the higher income. Nevertheless, he also is responsible for the greatest share of housework.

Respondent: I don't take care of anything here. I don't do any ironing, I don't do any cleaning. He never complains.

Luigi: How did you and [your partner] reach this arrangement?

Respondent: It just came naturally, it's so natural. I'm very lazy and he scolds me once in a while. Whenever he tells me to put on the washer I jump up and do it.

Luigi: Does he often tell you?

Respondent: No, no, very rarely. [...] He never complains.

Luigi: Did you ever talk about this, or have a discussion? Is it because you think he's more capable at doing this kind of things?

Respondent: No, it's just because everything comes naturally. Whenever we need to do something around the house, we get up...for example, he washes the pavement and I clean up the oven. We didn't divide chores and tasks. Paradoxically I should do much more than him, since I work much less, but I'm lazy. (gay man)

The other partner laughed when I asked him about the couple's division of housework. He said it is not a burden for him, and that he scolds his partner into contributing from time to time and justifies his laziness because he has never learned to take care of home. The fact that he likes cooking and puts effort into it

when he prepares meals for the couple makes it up to his eyes. Lesbian and gay interviewees often refer to preference and capabilities as the most important factors in their decisions regarding the division of housework, while also foregrounding the pleasure that they draw from knowing that it is a part of relational work and it cements the relationship. This is particularly true for less burdensome activities like cooking. Even if one partner knows her or his way around the stove better than the other and finds her- or himself giving directions and doing most of the work, cooking together is often presented as a cherished moment. It can also be true for the one-time, do-it-yourself chores such as fixing around the house, as two lesbian partners agree on, but also for the time- and energy-consuming activities of cleaning and tidying up, as explained by two gay partners.

Sometimes, the tasks each partner wants and is capable of carrying out for the house do not blend so easily. In one lesbian couple, the partner with less financial resources took up most of the housework at the beginning of the cohabiting relationship. The other partner was not used to these tasks and cared less than her partner for an orderly living environment. After six months of bickering, they started dividing housework more equally. One partner managed to convince the other that she needs to contribute to housework as much as her, and conversely the latter managed to bring her partner a little closer to her more relaxed standards in cleanliness and order.

Respondent: We needed 6-7 months to adapt. Now we both do everything. For example, we both clean around the house, it's not like one of us sweats around and the other does nothing. When we started, I was a total slob. I had never done any work around the house. My mother brought me up the way you raise old-school boys, I never had to take care of anything. I never developed a sense of duty on this kind of things. [My partner] is the complete opposite, she's borderline crazy. She's a maniac, she wants everything to shine and be perfectly clean. [...] When I pour something and drops stain the pavement, whatever, I'll clean it later...she goes nuts, she needs it cleaned now and perfectly, she throws a tantrum. The first months were very difficult. I know she's right, I completely understand her point. She educated me at a practical level, she taught me how to do stuff around the house. I was completely clueless, I didn't even know how to make the bed, I'd never done it. Now it's different, I take my responsibilities and do my share, and she learned to let go a little. It's been difficult for her too, she had to unlearn her total obsession with cleanliness. We reached a balance. Sometimes we argue about little things, like...we never cook together, because we both think of ourselves as experts and if I cook she's all over me and the other way around. We need to cook alone or else we start an argument. (lesbian woman)

Respondent: Regarding housework, we divide evenly. Like, cleaning the house on Saturdays, I do one thing and she does the other.

Luigi: Do you usually do these chores at the same time?

Respondent: Yes, or no. If one of us cooks, the other washes the dishes. [...]

Luigi: Do you scold her if she doesn't care for housework? How does she react?

Respondent: Yes, I do. She's very understanding about it, she tells me she's sorry and I'm right.

Luigi: Did her attitude about this change in time?

Respondent: Yes, it really changed a lot. And at the same time I changed my attitude, I'm more understanding now, too. When we began it was a little tragedy.

Luigi: Why?

Respondent: I was obsessed. She was oblivious, she would just let it be. We weren't able to find a fix. Now I'm much more flexible and she is more attentive, we mixed. (lesbian woman)

The two partners talk about a long period of bickering and fighting before they reached an agreement on housework. Ambivalence is still present, as both partners talk about ways they still need to remind each other that they see things differently when it comes to order and cleanliness. They recognise that to some extent they reached a common vision on the matter, thanks to their stubbornness in talking it through in a relatively long initial period of their cohabitation. Through equal or unequal arrangements, lesbian and gay partners seem to achieve what they deem to be a satisfactory level of fairness and navigate through the problems of trust and compliance raised by division of housework. However, the need to mobilise trust and compliance because of inequality of socio-economic resources between partners appears through other avenues in Italian same-sex cohabiting couples. Two themes run through all interviews: the need to plan the leisure expenditures of the couples while protecting the sense of independence of the weaker contributor to the couple's finances, and the practices of human and economic capital spillover through which the stronger contributor takes the risk of investing in her or his partner's career as relational work. In line with cross-national evidence on same-sex couples (Courduriès 2006; Burns *et al.* 2008; Oreffice 2011; Negrusa and Oreffice 2011; Gross and Courduriès 2015) and different-sex couples (Gambardella 1995; Elizabeth 2001; Heimdal and Houseknecht 2003; Nyman 2003; Gambardella 2004; Ludwig-Mayerhofer *et al.* 2006; Ashby and Burgoyne 2008; Verbakel and de Graaf 2008; Vogler *et al.* 2008; Knudsen and Waerness 2009; Verbakel and de Graaf 2009; Singh and Morley 2011), Italian same-sex couples see money and work as means to build their relationships and symbols of their complexity.

When they have a smaller income than their cohabiting partner, lesbians and gay men express discomfort at contributing less than their partners to the leisure expenditures of the couple. This is especially visible when discussing big, one-time expenditures such as holiday trips, but it also comes up when talking about splitting restaurant bills. Most lesbian and gay partners seem to truly take to heart the idea that, since they make their own money, they should be responsible for paying for themselves. Nevertheless, sometimes the couple's leisure plans are just

too expensive for the weaker earner, or they end up being too expensive because partners contribute equally to daily expenses and bills and the weaker earner, unlike the better earning partner, is left with little money to spare. One lesbian cohabiter describes the symbolic stakes of being financially independent from her partner in clear terms. On her part, the other partner explains how she strives to respect these boundaries.

I'm obsessed with economic independence. Being economically dependent would put me in unbearable discomfort, I'd feel my individuality and personality undermined. I just can't live with the 'I'm paying for you' catch. I'm not that kind of person, I don't like it if someone pays for what I want or what I need. I don't like it. [...] I've got my limbs, I've got my brain, I can find my own ways to sustain myself. [...] We divide expenditures equally, perfect halves. What I mean is that when I didn't have a job [my partner] paid for a trip for both of us.[...] So we compromise. Whenever I tell her 'Look, I can't come on this trip, I don't have the money' we either postpone the trip and I gather what I need for it or...in all other cases the division is decided and set, we pay each one for herself, we split the rent, if one of us pays for both the other repays it on her account, if one of us pays for the groceries or a bill the other gives her half of the price. [...] I'm not happy about this situation, I'm not happy my income is smaller and less secure. [...] For now I'm not asking her money, I'm on my own feet. When I get lucky moments I put some money away and save it for when it'll be worse. (lesbian woman)

Luigi: How do you manage the couple's finances?

Respondent: All house expenses, the rent, the bills, all of it is split in half. We reached a good compromise. [...] She couldn't afford it when we travelled and she would stay home. [...] Travelling without her just doesn't cut it. [...] When you're in a couple this is plain logic. I buy stuff, I pay for stuff and she must accept it without fussing. [...] She understood she has to let me do it, it can't all be fair and equal, it's fair and equal based on the money we earn, it's not like equality can stop us from doing what we want to do. [...] If we find an expensive sofa she says no. I don't want cheap furniture, she says 'I can afford only cheap furniture'. [...] We're not going to decide like everything is at stake right now. If we ever split up we know that that sofa is mine because I paid for it. [...] What's all the fuss about? What really counts is I like it and she likes it. It's the only way to find a compromise with her. [...] It's hard on her to see me pay for her. [...] All those things about partners being unequal, you can't say that about us. We care so much about independence, we talk about it all the time, we sit down and talk it all through. Bills and all that, we decided together, she wants to split equally and that's what we do. [...]

Luigi: Did you ever not tell her that you paid for something?

Respondent: Sometimes I tell her I received a gift but I actually paid part of it. (lesbian woman)

These lesbian partners' experience with division of leisure expenditures resonates with other interviewed couples' ones when partners do not have similar incomes. The economically stabler and richer partner needs to make the other trust her or him, because being paid for clashes with their sense of independence and equality. When partners do not reach an agreement on how much they can trust each other when negotiating the consequences of inequality of resources in the couple, compliance is sometimes obtained by avoiding facing this lack of mutual trust: lying to one's partner to avoid facing their preoccupations with contributing equally to the couple's leisure expenditures is common.

Lesbian and gay partners negotiate the personal boundaries money can and cannot cross. They also support each other in their careers, investing not only a considerable amount of their time and energy in their partners' plans and ideas, but also, more often if they have higher incomes than their partner, their own money. As one lesbian cohabiter explains, this is also a question of trust. She and her partner have strong plans for the couple and want to have a baby soon. In a similar time frame, her partner plans to change career and start a new one that requires her to revisit her daily and weekly schedule. Even if she is not convinced that her partner's career plans are for the better considering their family projects, she is ready to back her plan up, emotionally and financially, because she trusts her.

Luigi: Did she ever ask for your help in decisions over her career?

Respondent: She definitely did. [...] Like, for example, she's got this idea about changing jobs [...] It's something she thought over for a long time and I'm giving her my support. We talked about it, we went over the emotional and financial implications together. [...] We kind of pondered all the different aspects, if it would be economically sound or a disaster, we're trying to plan ahead together because [...] our life is going to change. I don't really understand how she plans to manage it all. She tells me she wants to do it because she's going to have more time off work, that it's something she does as a part of our plan to have a baby sooner or later. Our lifestyle would be quite affected.

Luigi: What is it exactly you don't understand about her plan?

Respondent: It sounds funny to me, thinking you're going to have more time off work in that situation, it's utter incoherence. Even more so when you start anew, you're going to have to sacrifice something. She's convinced she's going to have more time off work and be more flexible [...] that she's going to decide on her own time.

Luigi: Did you ask her opinion on this problem?

Respondent: I told her I don't know how she thinks it's possible, she says it is and that's it. I help her with the bureaucratic stuff, I don't know how she's going to manage. [...] She went through the technicalities. Actually, it's going to be different: [...] with her new job she'd be able to drop the kid off at the kindergarten and take him home afterwards, that much is true. [...] I can do that already, no fuss no hassle. I trust her on this thing.
(lesbian woman)

No big family plans such as parenthood are needed for lesbian and gay partners to mobilise trust through investments in each other's career, even when these investments take a direct or indirect monetary form. For two gay partners it is a matter of how much money the couple earns and can spend in going out and travelling together. When they moved in together, one partner rearranged their house with the help of a professional architect to make space for the other partner to deal with the practicalities of his job and earn as much as possible. However, the latter's monthly savings, tend to get lost in petty expenditures. Both partners say he 'always pays for delivery fried chicken and chips for lunch' because he is too lazy to cook. Respecting his partner's preference for an equal division of bills and leisure expenditures, the more financially wise partner sometimes needs to help him control his spending in order for the both of them to be able to afford the restaurants they want to visit and the trips they want to do together.

Uncertainties and small breaches of trust do not always spoil the trust partners put in each other's capability to earn more and put the money to good use. Since the gay man quoted at the beginning of this subsection started cohabiting, his partner has put effort in helping him advance in his career. He had been ready for a promotion for quite a long time. When I interviewed the couple, the promotion this gay man was expecting had been finally announced. Both partners report that entering a relationship and being able to cohabit with a stable partner had a positive influence on his self-presentation and efficiency, eventually resulting in him being finally given the promotion.

That's the way [my partner] is, no limits and no cares, I try to give him shape and direction sometimes. [...] When we met he'd go out every night, he'd go out to drink at 3 in the morning and be at work at 7, he would've never achieved much. I see it like my duty [...] I give him direction. Other people told me they know this is my role. Like, his boss told me he is much better now, he's got the company look and company attitude down. He wears ironed shirts, he's got the look of a real company man, he'd never do that before me. He was a little rebel [...] he'd rebel against himself and everyone else. When you're the age he was when I met him you need to stop being a rebel with no cause. It's an adolescent phase you should be over with, just wear a tie and stop wearing dirty t-shirts. (G3.2)

The other cohabiter talks about the new self-presentation he achieved with the help of his partner in more ambiguous terms, but he stresses that it did truly get him the promotion he wanted. In the same period, the more career-oriented partner decided he could leave his job and start a new one, even if his monthly income would fall to a third of his previous earnings, become smaller than the other partner's, and in his own more optimistic predictions need at least a few years to rise to what he had earned before and hopefully even further. Unexpectedly finding himself as the main bread-winner in the couple, the gay man that had just been promoted at work did not hesitate in assuring he would

take care of all expenses his partner could not cover with his new income. He decided to believe that investing in his partner's career and potential income was worth the risk.

On what grounds do lesbians and gay men cohabiting with their partner feel comfortable in trusting their partner with such far-reaching decisions on their lifestyles and prospects? The next section delves into the everyday practices and narrations of emotional support and into the spoken and unspoken promises of commitment that lesbian and gay cohabiters make to each other. Weaving prosaic love and mythic love into small habits and big plans, monogamic or non-monogamic sexual agreements, emotional support and exclusivity, and marriage wishes reveal how same-sex love can find and create marital-like institutions and regulations that let it flourish.

4.4. Ordinary and ritual knots

4.4.1. 'Gotta make you understand': sex and love for two

Sexual fidelity is a highly gendered experience among romantic partners (Buunk and Dijkstra 2014). Chetcuti (2010: 137) spells out the deep divide between cultures of monogamy and non-monogamy in lesbian and gay couples, and its origin in gender norms regarding sexuality.

In lesbian couples, the norm of sexual and romantic faithfulness is central in the definition of the couple relationship. This preference for exclusivity is tied to shared desire and to the difficult separation between sexuality and the level of emotional involvement. Women do not follow the gay culture of sexual non-monogamy. The legacy of a culture of no-strings-attached sexual hook-ups does not exist for them. Lesbians embrace the norm of sexual monogamy mostly because of gender norms regarding the links between sexuality, love, and conjugality.

The stronger social sanctions for female cheating than male cheating, Chetcuti suggests, are at the core of the difference between the embracement of the norm of exclusivity among lesbians and the diffusion of sexual non-monogamous arrangements among gay men. In his research on gay couples in France in the mid 2000s, Courduriès (2011: 313-315) notes that the peculiar diffusion of non-monogamy among gay couples recalled in Chetcuti's quote is actually observed. At the same time, in line with a decline of non-monogamous arrangements across generations of gay men (Courduriès 2011: 304-310), many of his interviewees see sexual exclusivity as an important tie between partners. His observations point out that gender norms and norms regarding commitment in stable relationships might result in changing practices of sexual monogamy for homosexuals.

In Anderson's (2012: 84-88) formulation, contemporary individuals feel the pressure of 'monogamism', the cultural hegemony of sexual monogamy as the best way to be in a couple relationship. The other side of monogamism is a reality of cheating in many different-sex and same-sex couples, because of opportunities for extra-couple sexuality that are encountered or sought for. Individuals often see cheating as a way to preserve the value of the emotional and sexual connection with their stable partners, and manage the gap between the narration of monogamism and their practices choosing silence, omission, and self-acquittal (Anderson 2012: 159-162). Because of this silent reality of cheating, the boundaries between explicitly negotiated sexually open relationships and other, less official forms of non-monogamy are often blurred (Anderson 2012: 181-184).

The fact that sexuality, as previously discussed, emerges from and carries emotional meanings that might differ for women and men results in even more complex fragmentation of the collective agreement on what sexual monogamy is, what it should be, and why it should be so, making it a delicate topic. The cohabiting partners interviewed in my research were impressively open to sharing their views and experiences in the sensitive area of monogamy and infidelity with me. Hints of uneasiness and calls for confidentiality were thrown around a few times, sometimes expressing the preoccupation that the other partner would not completely agree with or be knowledgeable about what was being said. The interviewees quoted in this section will not be identified with any information except for their gender. Among lesbian and gay interviewed couples, the most visible difference runs along the gender divide: none of the sixteen cohabiting lesbians recalled having had extra-couple sexual encounters of any kind during their current relationship, whereas three out of eight cohabiting gay men, in one way or another, had been non-monogamous. Still, sexual and romantic jealousy did not map out neatly on non-monogamous practices.

In the already recalled study by Potârca *et al.* (2015), lesbians' profiles on dating sites in nine European countries are likelier than gay men's profiles to include an explicit preference for monogamous relationships over open relationships. Same-sex stable couple relationships and cohabiting unions in Italy show this gendered aspect of monogamy (tab. 4.8). The changing influence of cohabitation on extra-couple sexual encounters supports the divide between lesbian and gay sexual cultures⁴². In the space of two decades, coupled lesbians and gay men become likelier to have never had an extra-couple sexual encounter (72.4% of lesbians and 54.5% of gay men did in 1995-96, 81.9% and 69.5% in 2012-13) and less likely to have had an occasional extra-couple slip (17.7% of lesbians and 16.9% of gay men in 1995-96, 10.5% and 12.6% in 2012-13) or to

⁴² The question referring to extra-couple sexual encounters among same-sex partners did not include an answer for partners having had more than one and less than three extra-couple sexual encounters. Using this question of the 1995-96 questionnaire in the 2012-13 questionnaire without modifying it, I aimed at grasping the difference between extra-couple sexual slips and implicitly or explicitly negotiated open relationships. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

have had more than two extra-couple sexual encounters (9.8% of lesbians and 28.7% of gay men in 1995-96, 7.6% and 17.8% in 2012-13).

Tab. 4.8 Percentages of coupled and cohabiting lesbians and gay men who never, once, or more than twice had an extra-couple sexual encounter while being in their current relationship, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

		Lesbians		Gay men	
		1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Coupled	Never	72.4	81.9	54.5	69.5
	Once	17.7	10.5	16.9	12.6
	More than twice	9.8	7.6	28.7	17.8
	<i>N</i>	254	276	670	499
Cohabiting	Never	71.9	87.7	42.6	57.1
	Once	18.7	9.8	13.5	10.7
	More than twice	9.4	2.5	43.9	31.1
	<i>N</i>	107	122	237	196

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Looking at couples in which a partner has sexually cheated on the other more than twice as couples with least an implicit negotiation of unfaithfulness, the difference between lesbians and gay couples resides in the diffusion of various forms of open relationships more than in the occasional slip outside of monogamous arrangements. This is true for cohabiting relationships as well, but with a twist. In 1995-96, lesbians in a couple and in a cohabiting relationship were roughly equally likely to have been unwaveringly faithful (71.9% of lesbians in cohabiting relationships reported they were) and to have had more than two extra-couple sexual encounters (9.4% of lesbians in cohabiting relationships reported they were). In 2012-13, cohabiting lesbians are characterised by stricter adherence to monogamy and avoidance of open relationships than lesbians in non-cohabiting relationships (81.9% of coupled lesbians and 87.7% of cohabiting lesbians never had an extra-couple sexual encounter, 7.6% of coupled lesbians and 2.5% of cohabiting lesbians have had more than two extra-couple sexual encounters). Just as two decades earlier, gay men in 2012-13 are less likely to be in a monogamous relationship and likelier to be in open relationships when they cohabit (42.6% of cohabiting gay men in 1995-96 and 57.1% of cohabiting gay men in 2012-13 never had an extra-couple sexual encounter, 43.9% in 1995-96 and 31.1% in 2012-13 have had more than two extra-couple sexual encounters).

Tab. 4.9 Percentages of coupled and cohabiting lesbians who argue with their partner because of jealousy, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Coupled	41.5	47.3	37.3	39
<i>N</i>	241	260	607	472
Cohabiting	32	25.9	31.2	25.7
<i>N</i>	100	116	222	187

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

The different perception of infidelity among lesbians and gay men and its role in characterising cohabiting relationships as more or less monogamous can be observed in the incidence of jealousy in same-sex relationships⁴³ (tab. 4.9). In the space of two decades, non-cohabiting coupled lesbians become likelier to argue with their partner because of jealousy (41.5% of them did in 1995-96, 47.3% in 2012-13), whereas no change is observed among non-cohabiting coupled gay men (37.3% of them did in 1995-96, 39% in 2012-13). Cohabitation soothes the pains of jealousy among lesbians and gay men, and does so more in 2012-13 than two decades before (about 31% of lesbians and gay men in cohabitation in 1995-96 and about 26% in 2012-13 argue with their partner because of jealousy). Considering the incidence of monogamous and non-monogamous relationships and of jealousy among lesbians and gay men, female same-sex cohabiting couples seem to be a slice of the wider population of same-sex couples in which the partners have reached a satisfactory agreement on the need for monogamy, whereas male same-sex cohabiting unions are characterised by a more secure acceptance of extra-couple encounters than male same-sex non-cohabiting couples, even if in an overall trend towards stricter adherence to monogamy.

When thinking about infidelity, the lesbian partners I interviewed refer to the security they can draw from sharing an irreplaceable feeling of emotional belonging in the couple. In their opinion, this feeling protects them from the temptation of being unfaithful to their partner as much as from the danger of their partner being sexually or emotionally unfaithful to them. The positive aspect of this serene reliance on the power of emotional complementarity between partners is mobilised by a lesbian partner when jealousy creeps in her relationship. The other partner expresses a similar security in her and her partner's bond.

⁴³ The question on same-sex partners' reasons for arguing did not explicitly state that multiple answers were allowed. See note n. 38 for discussion. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

Luigi: Have you ever felt jealous of her?

Respondent: No, never [...] but I did confront her a few times. [...] One evening we were with friends and there was one of her exes too [...] She talked to her all evening, I was with other people all the time. When we went away, I had no reason to, but I told her 'Fuck you, you know?! Just be her girlfriend!', but I had no reason to, she's completely sincere with me. [...] So she calmed me down, she tells me nothing is happening, because nothing's happening, she lets me talk and then she says that's it. She tells me how things are, and what she tells me becomes the starting point for us to talk about our relationship and communicate even more [...] I'm a jealous kind of girl but I'm getting better. [...]

Luigi: How do you think she would react [if you cheated on her]?

Respondent: I don't think it can actually happen, because I learn from my experience. The only time it happened to me it was because I wasn't truly into the person I was with. There's always some good-looking person, someone interesting and fun sending me signals, but what I think is 'Do I really have any interest in them?' I feel so good where I am right now, I don't miss anything nor wish anything were different, I could even meet the coolest person in the world, or the most gorgeous, but I would never actually get, like, the intimacy I have with her, all that we built together up to now. You never know what might happen in the future, but today it's simply impossible, I can't find any room for anyone else. (lesbian woman)

Respondent: I've never been jealous, I mean: either I trust someone or I don't. I know she loves me to death, just as I love her...I'm not jealous. Maybe some times I ask for more attention. Maybe on an evening we spend with lots of people I feel she's neglecting me a bit. But it's not because I think she might be cheating on me, it's just little events.

Luigi: Did she ever show jealousy towards you?

Respondent: She's very confident about the way I am and what I do, because she knows I'm completely sincere. [...] But she's jealous sometimes, with certain people I meet [...] but I'd call it worrying rather than jealousy, even if I guess she calls herself jealous. [...] But I don't think she might believe I have any liaison or that I might crave to be with someone else, sure, she sees some friends of mine with a bit of antipathy, but it's got nothing to do with fear of being cheated on, I'm 100 percent sure. (lesbian woman)

The undisputed connection between fidelity, infidelity, and the emotional quality of the partners' bond has its downsides. Some of the same-sex cohabiting women interviewed remember having had big arguments because of jealousy. These arguments were not sparked by infidelity, however, but by the ghost of infidelity and instability of the couple relationship summoned by the development of an emotional bond with someone outside of the couple that could entail sexual affinity as a part of an emerging alternative to the ongoing couple relationship. One female interviewee recalls her partner becoming too close with a newly found friend, and the deep shocks it sent through their relationship.

She and this friend grew close, this girl started texting her all the time, my curiosity grew and I asked her what they were talking about all the time. [...] One day we argued about something else and I asked her to let me see her phone, I read their texts, this girl wrote her 'We just said goodbye and I want to see you again already', or 'I'm going out with a girl tonight but I'll be thinking of you'. I could see that she always sidetracked her [...] she wanted her to understand her feelings weren't reciprocated, but these texts upset me anyway, because she hadn't told me anything about it, she let this relationship continue even if it was clear to see this friend wanted more than friendship. When we talked about it she told me she hadn't understood what this girl wanted, that she felt flattered but kept her at a distance...I flipped, it was the biggest fight we had in a while. [...] I told her I don't like that she seeks attention from someone else, even if it's just friendship, and runs away from me [...] she told me she chose me for the rest of her life and she's going to treat me as the first time we met again [...] we didn't think we were splitting up, but it was a huge wake-up call. (lesbian woman)

These two lesbian partners have gone through other moments of reinforcement of their possessiveness, each time facing the disturbing possibility of emotional infidelity. Sincerity regarding involvement with people outside of the couple is presented by most lesbian partners as a basic requirement of the relationship: just as the idea that such involvement could surface, the lack of sincerity on the matter might mean that the couple relationship is not based on true mutual commitment. Sexual infidelity is regarded by lesbian partners as easily avoided as long as the romantic relationship is healthy, and at the same time, if it ever comes to be, as a symptom of a profound incomprehension between partners. Nevertheless, one lesbian partner considers the possibility that her relationship could survive such an event. It depends on the ability of partners to communicate their real feelings and intentions and, most importantly, on the possible underlying relational problems that might have led to unfaithfulness.

Luigi: How would you react if you discovered she cheated on you?

Respondent: I don't know. I think everyone can make mistakes. It all depends on how and why. You can always talk with your partner and understand what happened. You really understand what's going on in these situations if you find yourself there, anything can be solved, but you need to understand the reasons behind it. (lesbian woman)

Some of the gay men interviewed make the explicit connection between sexual infidelity and relational problems between partners, just as lesbians do. In their experience, when their partner developed a close connection with a friend or a new acquaintance this connection could undermine their relationship, even if no explicit sexual overtones were present. It was a signal of wavering love and mutual indispensability between partners, and in the short or long run it could lead to sexual infidelity as part of a relational break-down or as unmistakable sign of their own incapacity in satisfying their partner's relational needs. However, gay

men are likelier to express opinions that are similar to the one advanced by the last quoted lesbian woman, often taking into consideration the possibility that their partner could fall prey to unthoughtful sexual attractions and be unfaithful. As one gay man in a cohabiting couple explains, the best way to deal with this possibility, before and after its eventual realisation, can be anything but communication between partners. In his interview, this gay man's partner expresses more or less the same opinion. Sometimes, gay partners prefer not being put in front of a harsh decision.

Luigi: Was your relationship monogamous up from the start?

Respondent: Yes, and I'm reasonably sure it's been the same for him. You can never know for sure. [...]

Luigi: Did you ever talk about it?

Respondent: Yes, we did, but very shortly, I mean, we're both jealous and neither of us wants an open relationship or anything like that. [...] We never actually talked about it.

Luigi: How would you react if you discovered he cheated on you?

Respondent: Very badly, for sure. I don't know what it would lead to, I mean I would need to understand so many things, in any case. I wouldn't dump him immediately, that's for sure.

Luigi: What things would you need to understand?

Respondent: I'd need complete sincerity. Why it happened, what it meant to him, what it could mean for me, what it could mean if I said yes or if I said no, if I said ok or if I said we're done. In these situations I'm very rational, even more than usual. Maybe, I don't know...

Luigi: How would you decide if you could tell him that you cheated on him, if you ever did?

Respondent: I wouldn't tell him. For sure. Because...maybe I'm wrong...I think that unfaithfulness can be something that happens and then it's over and done. Cheating might happen and have no effect whatsoever on a couple relationship. But as soon as you come clean, everything changes. Nothing can erase it. It never happened to me, but it could. I go out one night, I meet someone and have a fun night with him. This would in no way compromise my...my idea of this relationship. It could happen. If I had to tell him, that would transform it in a huge problem, maybe make it even bigger that it needs to be...I'm telling you because it happened to me, I cheated and I was cheated on in past relationships, and as soon as someone talked, a small thing turned into a huge problem.

Luigi: Would you appreciate it if he behaved this way?

Respondent: Rationally, yes, I would. [...] I don't want to think that he could have extra-marital relationships, and I wouldn't want to know about it if it happened. But, in theory, if he hooked up with someone and I never came to know about it, everything would go on as it does now. [If I came to know] I'd be fucking pissed, I'd feel wounded, but after a while my rational part would talk, I'd spend two days not talking to him and then I'd start thinking about how we can get over it. (gay man)

This sort of potentially open relationship, based on a careful individual consideration of the meaning of sexual infidelity, is common among interviewed gay couples. It goes hand in hand with a principled rejection of non-monogamy, predicated on the same reasons observed among lesbians. Sex might always be something more than just sex: it borders and overlaps with intimacy, care, and love. Since it is more than just sex between the two partners, it can be more than just sex, and consequently a wound in the exclusively significant dyadic relationship, when it happens between one's own partner, or oneself, and someone outside of the relationship. None of the gay men interviewed, however, fail to stress that feeling sexually attracted to someone different from their partner is normal and often happens to them.

Lesbians experience multiple attractions too. Differently from gay men, they think that for such attractions to be acted out, a greater emotional investment in relationships outside of the couple should first be present. This different place of sexuality in same-sex female and male romantic relationships, parallel to the one observed in the experiences that lead lesbians and gay men to finding a romantic partner, is the reason behind lesbian partners' concurrent greater security in mutual fidelity and active ethos of open discussion and communicative resolution of extra-couple emotional involvement. Gay men seem more prone to disconnect sexual and emotional infidelity. Telling his story, one respondent in consensual non-monogamy shows that gay cohabiting couples might end up talking about extra-couple sexual encounters in very different terms.

Luigi: Are you jealous?

Respondent: No...I mean, yes, we're jealous, we are. Some boundaries moved. The way the couple works changes. It might happen that we see [a sexual partner] more than once, it might even be more than the one-night sexual encounter, maybe because you had a lot of fun with that guy, it happened to me. Everyone knows everything, though. We even have this thing, we like to tell each other about our flings. We do it fairly often. And it doesn't make us jealous at all, it's all about sharing something that makes us stronger and closer. It's some kind of game. Yeah, now and then maybe I find my kind of guy and he makes this little scene saying he's jealous, but it's a game we play. (gay man)

The survey data and the preceding interviews point out that some level of consensual non-monogamy is common among gay couples. No data allows us to say how many of these arrangements are as free of spoken and unspoken conflict as the one experienced by the gay interviewee quoted above and his partner. It is telling that this relationship did not start out as non-monogamous, nor it became non-monogamous because both partners entered the relationship with a desire for sexual openness or came to appreciate sexual openness together. The already quoted partner recalls how the negotiation regarding non-monogamy went down.

My partner proposed to open the relationship. I didn't even think something like that could be possible for me, honestly. I hadn't even ever thought about it. [...] But he brought it up and he made me aware that...I understood he really was into it, that he's very convinced it's a good thing. I told him 'Ok, we can try.' [...] But I also said that if we couldn't make it work we would just abandon the idea, with no second thoughts. The idea was that we could meet people just for sex, only that. I pondered and I said to myself: before meeting my partner I was having sex with people all the time, did anything happen? Nothing happened [...] I mean, it was simple fun [...] there were no repercussions on anyone's life. It was just me thinking to myself, I mean, 'Can I have sex with someone with no emotional connection whatsoever because I'm in a relationship with my partner? I'll try it. If I manage, then why should I think it's different for my partner?' The problem with an open relationship is that lots of people think 'Wow, that's great, but thinking about my partner doing that, I'd go crazy and lose sleep'. So, I had to understand and trust him, trust that it was just fun for him, in order to understand that I said 'Ok, I'll try it too and see it for myself'. [...] I have to say, being in an open relationship made us stronger as a couple, I realised we don't have problems my friends have with their partners. For example, since I've been in an open relationship I've had a few flings, I still do, but I crave them much less than I would if I weren't in an open relationship. [...] I can even be more selective now, paradoxically [...] I don't imagine sex with other people as anything more than it actually is. (gay man)

The other partner, the promoter of sexual openness in the couple, articulates the different boundaries of jealousy that consensual non-monogamy has brought to the relationship. Jealousy, he says, does not centre on sexual possessiveness anymore, but on time spent together, on the special and intimate connection, on the fact that, at the end of the day, each partner's occasional sexual partner can even become part of the humorous and sexual banter in the couple. Sharing these experiences, as these partners see it, is caring, and it buttresses their relationship along with the weakening of problematic sexual tension.

As Gabb and Fink (2015: 64-67) write, intimacy, trust, and shared happiness are the emotions and practices commonly mobilised by partners when they think about sexuality. Lesbian and gay couples growingly embrace the normativity of sexual monogamy in stable couples. A deep gender divide in sexual fidelity between partners is confirmed across the two decades considered in my research. Experienced between similarly gendered partners in couples' lives, this gender difference results in a profound reformulation of the double standard of fidelity of heterosexual couples, in which male infidelity is abetted and female infidelity is sanctioned (Therborn 2004: 14). The almost complete respect for monogamy in lesbian couples and the fairly widespread preference for non-monogamy in gay couples are the result of more or less open and equal agreements between partners. The meaningfulness of sexual encounters outside of the couple can be relativised, if partners find a way to agree on this.

At the same time, it is evident that many same-sex couples do not rush into having this conversation, and prefer waiting for it to be inevitable. It is not easy for lesbian and gay partners to think that the emotional connections they have might be wavering, contestable, and surpassable. This is a clear sign of the workings of mythic love in same-sex relationships. As I show in the next subsection, mythic love is woven into same-sex partners' practices and choices that make up their everyday reality and confront them more often than the idea or reality of sexual infidelity. Lesbian and gay partners support each other through exclusivity of care and attention, and are always aware that what they are giving each other is proof that they care because they love and feel loved. The negotiations they must go through to make sure the effort they put into these practices is rightly interpreted and reciprocated by their partners show that these partners' mythic love sometimes looks down on earth to find the prosaic roots that might be disappearing out of sight.

4.4.2. *'Want to tell you how I'm feeling': exclusivity of care*

Recalling and revisiting the concept of 'families of choice' first proposed by Weston (1991: 114-127, 197-202), Weeks *et al.* (2001: 69-76, 86-90) describe same-sex cohabiting couples as often inventive, non-normative and experimental in their construction of coupledom: they do not always draw a clear boundary between their relationship with their stable partner and other emotionally-loaded relationships, undermining the idea that marital and marital-like couples must and will build a world of their own in which obligations and ties to other people become of secondary importance. In their study of same-sex couples in civil partnerships in UK, Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 81-82) partially revise this finding. In their interview sample made up of 50 same-sex couples, women and men voice a clear commitment to their partners as the most significant person in their life: when choosing a stable partner they are ready to adapt and change their other relationships, their daily schedules, their mid- and long-term projects to their partners' needs more than they are for friends and often even members of their families of origin, and expect their partners to do the same. Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 206) already stressed the centrality of the couple relationship for Italian lesbians and gay men surveyed and interviewed between 1995 and 2000.

The analyses shown in tab. 4.10, reporting the percentages of cohabiting lesbians and gay men who argue because of too little time spent together, their families of origin, and their friends⁴⁴, point out that the management and conditions of the centrality of the couple relationship are, in part, influenced by the partners' gender.

⁴⁴ The question on same-sex partners' reasons for arguing did not explicitly state that multiple answers were allowed. See note n. 38 for discussion. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

Tab. 4.10 Percentages of cohabiting lesbians and gay men who argue over too little time together, friends, or families of origin with their partner, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Cohabiting lesbians		Cohabiting gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Argue over too little time together	26	21.4	23	20.3
Argue over friends	5	5.2	9	8.6
Argue over families of origin	17	12.9	6.3	3.2
<i>N</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>117</i>	<i>222</i>	<i>187</i>

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Looking at the data regarding incidence of bickering caused by disagreement over the fact that partners spend too little time together between cohabiting lesbians and gay men across two decades, little change is observed. About 25% of same-sex partners in 1995-96 and about 21% of same-sex partners in 2012-13 say they argue because of it. Lesbian and gay partners agree on the place of their partner relationship in their daily life a little more now than twenty years ago. This does not seem to depend on the likelihood to disagree on friend relationships. In 1995-96, 5% of lesbian cohabiters and 9% of gay cohabiters argued over their friends, and these percentages are more or less the same in 2012-13. Disagreement over kin relationships, the ties that the 'greedy institution' (Gerstel and Sarkisian 2006) of coupledom strains the most, become rarer. Lesbian partners are likelier to argue over their families of origin than gay partners, in 1995-96 (17% vs. 6.3%) and in 2012-13 (12.9% vs. 3.2%), in line with women's greater involvement in maintaining kin ties and supporting kin throughout life (Attias-Donfut *et al.* 2005). In two decades, same-sex partners become less likely to bicker because of their families, and the easier time lesbians and gay men today have in coming out to their families of origin contributes to this, as the management of visibility and outness is an important stressor for same-sex couples (Schittino 2006).

In all of the interviewed couples in which one partner had not come out to their parents, this put some stress on the relationship. Some of my interviewees had migrated years before beginning their ongoing cohabiting relationship from their place of origin, where their family still resided, to the cities they were living in. Distance with their families helped managing secrecy, but could not erase the problem. Lesbian and gay cohabiters whose partner was not out to her or his family members decried the hassle, injustice, and impracticality of not being free

to spend as much time as possible together with them during much awaited holidays, because in these occasions they would visit their families back home and could not bring their loved ones with them. A lesbian and a gay man clearly stated that they would not accept being invited to their partners' family homes and introduced 'merely as a friend or a special friend'. These disagreements point out that same-sex cohabiters see a special value in their partner relationship, as somewhat different from 'mere friendship'. How exactly the relationship with one's partner comes to be highly valued and prioritised, in terms of the exclusivity of time and attention, varies greatly among Italian same-sex couples.

Among the interviewees, Sara and Alessandra are an example of how a long-lasting relationship (in their case 7 years of cohabitation) does not necessarily translate in a fusion of the partners' social worlds or the mutual exclusivity of their free time.

Sara: What I like about us is that we both have a lot of social life independently from each other. I go out with a friend of mine and spend the evening with her and it's no problem. I usually go out without her during the week, in the weekend I meet up with all my long-time friends. She's different, she's got this explosive social world. [...] These last years we've been hanging out a lot with another couple, one is Alessandra's best friend, the other is his partner, we are so much alike as couples. And then, all Alessandra's friends, with their partners if they have one, come over for dinner or whatever [...] I like it because we have moments in which we are apart and hang out with different people, and then we spend weekends together. (L8.1)

Alessandra: We spend little time together, we both have very rich social lives, we both have dominant personalities and we end up being the confidants and supporters for relatives and friends. I have two strong friend relationships, I'm always there for them. [...] When we come back home from work I just go out for a drink with my friends, there's always someone I want to hang out with. (L8.2)

Sara and Alessandra are happy that their relationship does not rob them of the many occasions in which they meet their friends. At the same time they cherish the shared friendship they have built together or have taken into their relationship with them, as Sara's comment on the friends of Alessandra's that have become the couples' friends suggests. Sitting on a completely different position on the continuum of shared friendship and shared free time, Francesca and Nina, roughly the same age as Sara and Alessandra and cohabiting for a roughly similar length of time, report spending together most of their free time.

Nina: What happened is that mine and her friends became our friends, we mixed all of our friendships. [...] I wonder sometimes if it's a healthy thing or not, having everything in common, but for now we never had any problems, I guess it works for us. [...] It's the same with new friends, I meet new people or she does and they become our friends.

Luigi: They become friends for both of you right away?

Nina: Yes, they buy the whole package. (L6.2)

Francesca: A few of my friends, a few of his friends, we have many little groups [...] we generally always hang out together. [...]

Luigi: Is it more common for you two to hang out with your friends or hers?

Francesca: Doesn't matter really, some of them we met together, they are friends of the couple. It's a very balanced situation. (L6.1)

As expressed by Nina, same-sex partners might sometimes worry that they spend too much time together or share too much of their social world, rather than the contrary. Despite this preoccupation, Nina and her partner found their balance in a form of relationship that, in terms of time spent together and centrality of the couple in the partners' relational world, decisively differs from Sara and Alessandra's. However, these two couples are probably similar in terms of commitment to each other, as detectable from their differing but ultimately equally efficient management of closeness between partners. Nina and Francesca talk about a high level of fusion in their friendship circles. Moreover, when they talk about the couple, and when they talk about themselves and their convictions and feelings, they always and exclusively do it with their partner, pointing out that they see their partner as the centre of their emotional world.

Nina: Look, it's one of the most...one of the defining features of our relationship when I compare it with my previous relationships. I think it depends on gender, when I was with my female friends before we always talked about our boyfriends or alleged boyfriends and we were cruel, we destroyed those guys [...] now that I'm with Francesca she's my best friend, I completely trust her, whenever I have doubts I ask her, I talk to her. It just comes natural to me, I rarely ask people outside of the couple for help or advice. I have my friends, I do, but I never talk about problems with Francesca to them, I go to Francesca and talk to her. (L6.2)

Luigi: Do you ever talk to a friend or a relative, someone close to you or that you trust, about things you don't tell your partner?

Francesca: No, never, there's nobody like that.

Luigi: You always talk to her?

Francesca: Yes, if I'm worried about something, if there's a problem I never talk to anyone else, I only talk to her about it. [...] I never hide anything from her. (L6.1)

Differently from Nina and Francesca, Sara and Alessandra are the confidants of many friends and are used to devote much time, energy and attention to these relationships subtracting it to time spent with the partner. They do not always or immediately speak their mind to their partner when external conditions or internal feelings put the couple relationship under strain. However, when they extensively

narrate their respective experiences of critical moments of their relationship, they stress that if their extra-couple sociality clashes with the well-being of the couple and the unspoken rules of communication and silence do not serve as well as they would have thought, emergency measure are taken. In one of these cases, the two partners became at one point aware that their friendships and activities were drawing them apart, and put a limit to the amount they would subtract from the time spent with one another at the cost of running into their friends' reproach.

Alessandra: We try to...I don't know...in the past years we realised we were losing hold of the situation, what I mean is we supported so many people emotionally and our relationship was suffering because of this. Some time ago we got a hold of the situation again and said 'Ok, we give up, we need to spend weekends together.' [...] We actually have a very relaxed lifestyle, I realise we even had to bicker with some friends of ours because lots of them actually said 'Come on, you're so lame, you're not even yourself anymore...'. Lame my ass, that's what I say, I know what sort of work a relationship needs to be healthy, only those who have a relationship like mine understand the amount of work it needs. [...] If you do it it's because you believe in it, it's a constant commitment, I mean, after the romantic phase is gone, that phase when you say 'We're together because that's what we want', today I choose to be with you because I love you. [...] I mean, people might think whatever they like, I know I come back home and I feel good! (L8.2)

The daily routine of coupledness sets in and shapes lesbians and gay partners' experience when they decide to cohabit, as Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 206) already noted in their study. In partners' stories, choosing this routine has much to do with ideals of maturity, of knowing what relationships are worth the hassle and, as Alessandra says, of seeing the value of having a partner even when romance falters back and needs dedication to be summoned up again.

The styles of relating to each other and showing love to each other vary in same-sex couples. Bruno and Emanuele have been cohabiting for one year, much less than Sara and Alessandra. They already embrace the difference between single life and partnered life and the sense of home to which the lesbian couple refers. Their relational story highlights that same-sex couples characterised by comparatively little time spent together and mixing of partners' social worlds can function also between partners with different levels of involvement in extra-couple ties and friend relationships. Agreements on the role of personal social ties between same-sex partners depend more on mutual understanding on what these ties mean for each partner, than on pairing with someone with a similar attitude on the matter. A less involved partner, in this case Emanuele, does not necessarily want and is not necessarily asked to join in the social circle of his partner, even if his time and energies are not dedicated to his own social circle. Moreover, in line with what Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 157-158) note, lesbian couples might be likelier to build the communication and communion of thoughts that makes the partner

relationship stand out between other relationships by way of talking through their individual and couple difficulties and successes, whereas gay couples might be likelier to do so by way of moments of shared silence in which the presence of the other partner is relaxing, healing and cherished, communicating a nearness of minds and souls in itself.

Emanuele: I think I became much more boring compared to when I was single, that's what my best friend tells me. Before this relationship I was always ready: 'Let's go, let's do that, fuck it all, we're going away and we don't care about anything else', now what I say is. 'No, I need to be home now', and that's because I like being home. And she tells me 'You've grown old' and that's probably a negative aspect. The positive part is that I love being in this relationship, I love living here with Bruno and this relationship gives me...we have...we've found a good way to be together, and this is the best thing ever. [...] I'm not someone who likes to go out, go dancing or to parties, I mean I like going to parties but I like staying home and relaxing with my cats and cooking dinner just as much. He says he wants to keep his social life intact so whenever he decides so he goes out, he goes dancing with his friends. Sometimes he tells me 'You never come with us, it's been two weeks since the last time, you're coming with us tonight' and I say it's ok, I force myself because of him, because he told me to and I want to.

Luigi: You wouldn't go, were it up to you?

Emanuele: No.

Luigi: Did you argue about this?

Emanuele: No, we're completely relaxed about it. (G4.2)

Bruno: Compared to when I was single my life is completely different, I mean when I was single I went out all the time, six days a week, all the time. [...] I feel more tired now than I did before, so I really don't know [...] it felt right when I was there and now it feels right the way it is. The only downside, he's got no part in it though, is that it's become difficult to maintain my relationships with my friends, I mean that we have different lives and that makes it hard for me. I mean, whereas I stopped going out a lot and I'm partnered now, all my friends, or most of them anyway, are in the situation I was two years ago. [...] Now I go out with my friends and for 90 percent of the time I'm bored, I'm out of those kinds of ideas and approach to life.

Luigi: Do you ever go out together with Emanuele when you're with your friends?

Bruno: He probably went dancing with us twice, he hates it. [...] But, you know, with my best friend we spend 90 percent of the night gossiping on people and he listens and smiles but he's got no idea what we're talking about and he couldn't care less. But he adapts to any situation. [...]

Luigi: If you think a couple relationship isn't based on this kind of sharing but on other aspects, what are they?

Bruno: It's the tie you create with the other person, it's the idea of a family that is born. I mean, a relationship is the connection that emerges after some time together. [...] I have lots of friends but I'm actually a very solitary guy, I like being alone. I understand I'm in

an important relationship when I come home and I'm exhausted, I come back home and having that person with me doesn't upset me. He reaches another level, he goes from someone you hang out with or date to someone who's your shelter, he becomes home, he becomes family, he becomes something you can hold on to when you're weak. What's important is that it's reciprocal, the other person holds on to you when he's weak. I know I'm not making much sense, it's hard to explain, I mean it's like that: when someone becomes the other part of you, the part you were missing.

Luigi: Where do the moments of weakness you help each other through come out of?

Bruno: Any little thing.

Luigi: Can you give me an example, maybe the last time he helped you?

Bruno: Well, I've been working on a new project for the last two months and it's exhausting and stressful. I come back home and I'm dead, I had to talk to a shitload of people and I can't take any more. Even if I just tell him what I feel and what I did, even if he doesn't listen to me, just having him here makes me feel better, sleeping in the same bed. I know, it was totally unconceivable for me just some time ago, I sleep so much better when I'm alone. I see it now all the time, in the last weeks, this thing about sleeping. When he's away for work I sleep so much better, but in these months when I come back home a zombie mentally and physically, going to bed with him even if we don't do anything because I'm a zombie gives me solace. [...]

Luigi: Where would you draw the boundary between a couple relationship and another form of relationship?

Bruno: In my opinion a couple relationships is a sort of mutual confidence that you build but not with stuff you tell each other, erm...I don't...I don't know...it's what I was telling you earlier...it's...it's that kind of confidence that's part physical part emotional and that grows with time...it's not telling each other things because if we go out I can tell you every little detail of my life over a drink even if we met two minutes ago, it's not something important in a couple, I think. (G4.1)

Bruno and Emanuele do not share their friendship networks, do not see each other as exclusive confidants, and are not used to talk to each other about the everyday obstacles they cross. However, they both stress that their partner relationship is an irreplaceable source of well-being that emerges from practically sharing their lives with each other. The uniqueness of the couple bond can be obtained in various ways, as pointed out by the difference between Nina and Francesca, the lesbian couple reporting a complete fusion of social worlds and a mutual choice as confidants between partners, and Bruno and Emanuele. The two gay partners stress the gap that runs between Bruno's wide and active social circle and Emanuele's reliance on a small group of friends he meets just now and then. Embracing the value that each partners' extra-couple ties hold for the him or her is a part of the duties of partnership, even when built upon relatively little verbal communication and sharing of social circles. Emanuele is adamant about the fact that Bruno would never ask him to abandon his small social circle, even if he found no way of connecting with his partner's friends because of their personal

differences, and that he would never ask Bruno to do so because part of being together as a couple is respecting each other's friendships. Celeste (L1.1) and Vanessa (L1.2) express a similar conviction, underscoring the sense of equality they strive for in their relationship and that respect for each other's friendships, passions and interests is part of this ideal. The reality of couple life sometimes shifts away from this ideal without necessarily raising conflict: Vanessa never cared for one of Celeste's best friends, and Celeste soon felt it was right to draw distance from this friend because, in her words, 'the role of confidant she had had been naturally overtaken by Vanessa'.

Partners do not always find completely satisfying agreement on the level of communication between them, the level of merging of social circles, or the amount of time spent together. Rita is unsatisfied with how her partner Sofia spends her time when they get the chance to talk and share the worries of the day, and Sofia dislikes the fact that Rita does nothing to become more involved in her partner's social circle. They let each other know about these feelings.

Rita: I'm like that, as soon as I get home I want to tell you everything that happened to me during the day, she's more of a person who wants to watch television and relax. [...] I'm fonder of doing stuff while we talk, she sits on the sofa and watches television. But, I mean, it's not like we come home and we go in different rooms, we're always in the same room. Sometimes I complain because of the noise the television makes and I go in another room. (L2.1)

Sofia: We argue sometimes because I'm much more of a social and outgoing and easygoing person, I talk to everyone, I make friends with everyone, she's much more reserved and this makes me uncomfortable sometimes, because, I don't know, we're with friends and she keeps to herself, maybe it's because she doesn't like the situation or she doesn't like what we're talking about, I tell her 'come on, at least try, I know it's not the best people we can hang out with, I know you don't like the conversation, but try, say something'. (L2.2)

Sofia bemoans that her partner acts different when she is with her own friends and she is with her partner's friends. Lesbian and gay partners sometime see their loved ones' resistance to participating in their social world as hurtful. This incomprehension can also be negotiated between partners. Rita and Sofia agree on one thing that needs fixing: they spend too much time together. Both highly invested in the relationship, they slipped into an almost complete fusion of their time and activities because of a strong desire to share everything with each other. Facing an opposite relational difficulty to that experienced by Sara and Alessandra, they talked it over and decided that they needed to spend more time apart and enjoy their own interests without each other, or else their relationship would be undermined.

Rita: Even if we are doing different things we're always together. I realise it works like that, and that's why I told her 'I'll go to the pool, you'll go to the gym, let's do something different!' Because we've got friends together, we go shopping together, I said 'Let's do something on our own'. (L2.1)

Sofia: We try to do everything we do together. Actually I think that it's too much sometimes.

Luigi: Why?

Sofia: Because, I guess, sometimes each one of us should think for herself. I would take her everywhere with me, I want her beside me all the time, but she's right when she tells me 'Go out with your friends, it's not like I need to be there every single time'. I do complain about it sometimes, that we're together all the time, but only when I talk to my friends. It's true, we don't need to do everything together, I've got my interests I can cultivate on my own. It lets our relationship breathe, we do need to cultivate our individual interests, we do need to cultivate our individual relationships and to do whatever we like to do with our own friends...she needs it too, having time with friends with whom she shares something she does not have with me...if I were there they wouldn't talk as freely. It's the same when I hang out with my best friend and other friends of ours, sometimes I prefer it when Rita's not there with us, because I'm talking about my stuff, things I discovered without her, and I wouldn't know how to tell her about those things. (L2.2)

Despite the disagreements they have and the distance they need, Rita and Sofia recognise that they play an empowering and central role in each other's life. Ironically, Sofia cherishes Rita's ability to make her express emotions like no one else, even if Rita bemoans her emotional detachment and she herself sees Rita as too often uncommunicative to other people, whereas Rita appreciates how her relationship with Sofia gave her the material and emotional security she needed to embark in personal experiences, even if Sofia worries that her partner's insecurities make the couple too co-dependent and Rita herself would like her partner to have a more emotionally supportive attitude.

Sofia: Let's say that I'm the strong one and she's the weak one, more or less. But I'm the strong one up to a point, because Rita is the only person who's able to make me talk and feel emotions and...I don't even know how to explain, parts of me nobody else ever made me talk about, maybe only my parents...it's both ugly and sweet and sensible parts of me. (L2.2)

Rita: We plan holidays together all the time, too. Maybe I look into it a little more than she does, I find the options, but we decide together, obviously. [...] But, for example [...] first year we were together [...] I went on a business trip, 15 days by myself in a war-torn zone, very dangerous. I knew I could do it because I knew she was waiting for me back home, it's a paradox. I'd always thought about doing it but I'd never done it, I got anxious.

Knowing someone was waiting for me at home, and just the little things, sending a text, getting a text, she'd be waiting for you at the airport, she'd take you there...I went on that trip by myself, but she being there for me was fundamental. After that we always went together, we always go on trips together, small and big ones, all the time. (L2.1)

As in the case of Sara and Alessandra's agreement on the limits they set on the time and attention they give to their friends and subtract to the couple, Sofia and Rita's experience with the reciprocal emotional support on which very real experiences and plans can be carried out shows that same-sex partners learn to cherish, appreciate, and manage their commitment by sharing critical moments. Taking into account the efforts that understanding each other and learning to read each other's needs and offers of help entail, all the couples interviewed express feelings and practices of prioritisation of the couple relationships, be it in the sense of a daily, continuous, and deep intermingling of their time, social circles, and internal worlds, or of a looser arrangement in which limits are negotiated, redrawn, and enforced when their relationship might be put at risk.

Not all partners express views as extreme as Tito and Lorenzo's (G2), saying they cannot even eat their meals if they are apart. However, partners are usually described or characterised as not only family, but also as the most central person in one's familial network. The language of family is omnipresent when cohabiting lesbian and gay partners talk about their relationship, and for some of them it is tightly intertwined with the language of marriage. For Italian lesbians and gay men, marriage is necessarily a myth, something they can aspire to but cannot have. If the discourse of marital love and the aspirations to marry are central in lesbians' and gay men's cohabiting relationship, the institution of marriage in itself has changed in ways that make it more inviting to same-sex couples. These couples, as we saw in this and the preceding subsections, see and experience mythical and prosaic love in ways that shore up their relationships and at the same time keep them open to renegotiation. As shown in the next subsection, similarly to contemporary Italian different-sex cohabiting couples, same-sex couples embrace marital-like regulation of relationships for a variety of reasons, but all of these reasons in one way or the other can be traced back to knowing that often love, to flourish, needs planning and believing in equal parts.

4.4.3. *'Never gonna let you down': marriage wishes*

As Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 55-59, 104) underscore, lesbian and gay couples see their everyday and ritual practices of commitment as part of wider familial narratives in which their relationships with parents, siblings, and friends become strands of their life together. In talking about marriage and marital-like relationships, some of my interviewees recalled the influence of these wider familial networks. Some of the information they gave me was a little more

sensitive than usual. I protect their privacy by quoting them anonymously. The members of a gay couple explicitly intertwine the discourse of family and the marital discourse of husband and husband when they want to explain why they are ready to commit to each other as much as possible.

Luigi: You talked about him being your support, but also other people, like friends. Do you feel there is a difference between him and these other people or are they equal to you?

Respondent: Obviously there's a difference. In a family you've got aunts and uncles, grannies, cousins and with each one of them you have some level of emotional connection, a different binding force. He's my husband, and that's why I share all of me with him, even my very worst: he knows me at my worst even too much, I really pour all my insecurities on him sometimes, sometimes I'm an unending pain in the ass. (gay man)

Respondent: I often call him 'my husband' when I'm with friends or at work.

Luigi: Would you two marry if you could?

Respondent: Yes, we would definitely do it. [...] It's just that: a matter of commitment and rights, and an occasion to throw a great party, too. (gay man)

The latter brief excerpt from a gay man's interview summarises the three reasons marriage and marital commitment are significant to lesbians and gay men in contemporary Italy. The two partners think of themselves as husband and husband because of the mutual support they have experienced or, as said in the first quote, the unending hassle they are to each other. However, they wish they could get married, and would have already done so after some time they started cohabiting. Marriage would be, first of all, a sign of their union they give to each other. Secondly, it would bestow them with rights and duties cementing this union. Thirdly, it would be a way to share the importance of their relationship with their social surroundings. One of the two gay men explains in clear terms what makes his relationship already a form of marriage and why, at the same time, an actual marriage would be a preferable option for the couple.

If we could we'd be already married, maybe some time after we started cohabiting we would have married. It's not like...it doesn't mean that I believe in eternal love or that I'm certain that we... [...] what I'm certain of is what I feel for him now and what I want now, I'm certain of the fact that my well-being is with [my partner] now, and this pushes me to invest more and more and always more in this relationship. If we had the financial resources to invest in big common expenditures together, we would do it. We talked about it and we can't [...] but that doesn't mean our commitment...I'm convinced I want to commit to a life together with him, I do it all the time already, I don't put any limit to this commitment. [...] Honestly, the possibility that I or he fall in love with someone else tomorrow will always be part of our world, so it's clear that...it's not like this puts us...I don't brood over it, I don't imagine his absence, because it's the wrong way to live, it's a

wrong way to think, it's pathological I think. It's like, say, you have a beautiful house and you spend all day thinking 'What if an earthquake destroys my house?', so, I've got a beautiful house and I enjoy it every moment of my life, and that's it, maybe tomorrow it's going to rust, it's going to crumble, anything could happen, but I know now I have a beautiful house and I'm happy. (gay man)

In planning a life together and visualising the material and emotional investment that this choice requires, cohabiting lesbians and gay men appropriate the language of marriage without necessarily seeing their relationship as protected from any future reconsideration and renegotiation by the institution of marriage. The interviewee quoted above casually touches upon where an actual marriage would fit in his and his partner's relationship saying it would have happened after some time in the cohabiting relationship. These two aspects of his perception speak of the malleability of the meaning of cohabitation and marriage in the culture of coupledom that lesbians and gay men assimilate to.

Same-sex cohabiting couples, as Weeks *et al.* (2001: 20) write, are experimenters of intimate life. As we saw in this chapter, they experiment with the first steps towards their cohabiting relationships, management of inequality in resources between them, sexual and emotional connections. In their experience, marital and marital-like institutionalisation, with its romantic, public, and legal consequences, is yet another possible ingredient in their experiments aimed at mixing the prosaic and mythic faces of love to support a growing commitment to someone that over and again shows to care for them. They see marriage as a step in a thoroughly planned socio-legal protection and presentation of a commitment between partners. Two lesbian partners, quoted one after the other, and a lesbian interviewee from another couple quoted after them hold a similar and multi-layered vision of the marital bond.

Luigi: Did you ever talk about formalising your relationship?

Respondent: No.

Luigi: Neither marriage nor civil union?

Respondent: No, this thing...about the white dress...we did but not seriously. If it'll be possible to have civil recognition of the couple we want it.

Luigi: Why don't you see it as something you desire?

Respondent: I don't know, it never was my dream. We're already married.

Luigi: You don't think it would help you commit to the couple relationship?

Respondent: No, I don't think so. What's truly important is feeling good when we're together, that's where commitment and resilience of the couple relationship come from.

Luigi: What about the legal advantages?

Respondent: Yes, they could be very important in our future, it'd be a problem if we couldn't have access to them.

Luigi: For example?

Respondent: For example, if one of us passes away...but I put my hope in our families...I

put my hope in their intelligence and sensibility, even if it might always falter. But our relationship is very young, I haven't thought about it seriously. (lesbian woman)

Luigi: Would you formalise your union?

Respondent: Yes, we would want to do it here in Italy. Very simple, a civil recognition.

Luigi: Would you marry?

Respondent: Now it's too early, a little further on. We talk about it, we joke about it, but it's too early. (lesbian woman)

Luigi: Do you see you and her as a married couple?

Respondent: Yes, I don't see any big difference.

Luigi: Did you organize any ritual or party?

Respondent: No, we didn't. But I would like to.

Luigi: Did you talk about it?

Respondent: Yes.

Luigi: What came out of it?

Respondent: That we're going to throw a party only when it'll be legal to formalise our union...but I'm going to organise it sooner or later, soon, I'm going to have this party.

Luigi: Would you marry, were it legal?

Respondent: Yes, I would, I would do it tomorrow.

Luigi: Do you worry about committing to the relationship?

Respondent: No, nothing changes, it's only a contract, I would like to have a party, invite my friends and celebrate our love together, I don't think there's any difference between a married couple and a cohabiting couple, I like the idea of making our union 'holy and sanctified', make it public. (lesbian woman)

In some cases, cohabiting homosexuals articulate their position in respect to marriage focussing on one of the three aspects recalled in the first quote from a gay man's interview, even if never completely unaware of the different facets of the marital bond. One gay partner starts off by saying that marriage is essentially a public ritual, meaningful only because it is so perceived by the couple's social surroundings, but then specifies that what really determines his and his partner's decision to marry, would it be possible, is the level of mutual commitment they have developed in their cohabiting experience and will eventually develop in the future. Another gay man cuts to the chase of the material possibilities emerging from their jobs and constraining their capabilities to plan ahead and see a clear future of mutual commitment on which marriage could be based. His and his partner's couple projects are constrained by their career prospects and experiences. Even if they share a strong couple tie they do not feel that they can promise each other the support that they see as the basis of a public and regulated marital arrangement. Similarly to contemporary Italian different-sex couples (Bernardi and Nazio 2005), their relational lives bear the burden of flexible work conditions and temporary jobs.

Luigi: Do you consider yourself as married?

Respondent: Being married is a public vow. We didn't take this public vow, I don't see us as married, I see us as a cohabiting couple. If we could we'd marry, we talked about it and we agree. It still needs some thinking over, actually...we're together and we like it this way for now, we cohabit, we'd like to marry but I haven't thought it through yet. (gay man)

I haven't thought about marrying yet, because, you know...no...because [my partner] doesn't...he lives day to day...and we both have jobs that don't allow us to plan in advance and see our future clearly...we're good the way we are I think, I think both of us would answer that we see each other together for the foreseeable future if you ask us, either here or somewhere else, but together in any case. But, for now, it's something we didn't talk about...I'd like to organise my future with him much more than what we are able to now, but the job I've been doing in the last years doesn't allow me to, because I have jobs that last eight months at most, and sometimes I need to stay abroad for months. (gay man)

These couples' stories are telling when contrasted with the relational story given by another gay couple. These partners see marriage mainly as set of rights and duties of the couple and between partners, in pragmatical terms that are similar to those expressed by the preceding partners. Unlike other couples, they see their relationship as ready for the legally binding duties of marriage. They also tried to partially make up for their impossibility to access marriage through other legal acts, such as testaments, and lament the daily and possible difficulties and uncertainties they must endure as a same-sex couple barred from marrying.

Luigi: Do you see yourself as married?

Respondent: If we could we'd marry immediately.

Luigi: Would it change your relationship in any way?

Respondent: No. Yes. I mean, a few days ago I wrote a testament. Because he told me that he'd done it and he wrote me down as his sole heir, so I did the same, I want him to have the few things I've managed to gather, all of it. I wrote down most of what I own, considering my parents too. We'd marry because marriage is a legal contract, and the law is very rarely useless, if that contract exists it means it's useful. We'd see it as a way to have all those legal protections.

Luigi: Did you write your testaments together?

Respondent: Yes we did ironically, it was a joke. He decided to nominate me his sole heir, he did everything in order for it to be legally binding.

Luigi: Did you also organize any kind of symbolic ritual to formalise your union? Or a party?

Respondent: No, but I'd like to do it. Our birthdays are close, this year I'd like to get two rings for us, with our names engraved. (gay man)

Luigi: Do you see you and your partner as a married couple?

Respondent: No, because I see marriage as a juridical concept, I recognise we don't have the rights and benefits that go with marriage.

Luigi: Would that change something in your relationship?

Respondent: Yes, I could decide on juridical matters on our and his life and material conditions.

Luigi: Do you experience any disadvantage because of not being able to marry?

Respondent: Yeah...it's mostly banal stuff now...like, if we were recognised as a married couple or we were in a civil union he'd be able to park his car here. But much bigger problems arise in more difficult situations. For example, if one of us gets hurt or falls ill, in the likely event one of us loses his job, marriage guarantees that both of us are covered financially. These benefits help a lot when facing life's hardships, and they allow the couple to develop freely and completely. (gay man)

Even when pragmatic preoccupations regarding resources and legal recognition are at the heart of same-sex couples' views regarding marriage and marital-like ties, the developing relationship between partners is the lens through which partners decide if they would benefit from such relational decisions. Unlike other couples, the gay partners quoted above see the future and unpredictable vicissitudes of their lives as potentially undermining their relationship, and want to protect it with legal agreements. As discussed in Chapter 2, the capabilities that the last respondent I quoted refers to are granted only to heterosexual married partners in Italy. In his words, the development of his and his partner's couple relationship is encumbered by the impossibility to access these sources of relational certitude. These rights lie outside of the boundaries of commitment the two partners strive to approach by mobilising as much juridical power and symbolic resources they can by writing their testaments together and buying rings.

Two lesbian partners stress the value of marriage as a public ritual. They tell the story of a big argument they had a few years before. They had been planning a trip to a foreign country in which same-sex marriage is legal. Knowing from friends that had done so that they could marry there, even if the legal act would have no effect in Italy, one partner proposed to the other, thrilled by the possibility to formalise their relationship with what she saw as a glamorous and emotionally-loaded moment of State-sponsored relational confirmation between partners. Her partner refused, saying that what she really valued about marriage was the presence and participation of her parents and family in the wedding: without this, she felt their marriage would be a mock-up. The woman who originally proposed had a difficult time relating to her partner's point of view, because she did not value her own family's participation to their wedding as much as other aspects of romantic significance between partners. She eventually accepted her partner's views on what marrying should and could mean for their relationship and postponed her project to a hopefully close future when her partner's parents could be invited to their marriage in Italy.

In his cross-national study on same-sex couples' family projects in Europe conducted in the mid 2000s, Jörgens (2008) elaborates on the recurrence of the possibility to 'marry in Amsterdam' in Italian same-sex partners' accounts of the relevance of marital and marital-like perceptions of their couple relationships. His contention that international trends of legalisation of same-sex marriage and other same-sex forms of partnership shape the ability of Italian homosexuals to see a present and future of marital commitment for themselves is confirmed by the interviewees' answers in 2012-13. Despite the symbolic significance of a marriage abroad, and the emotional support that an international culture of rights gives to Italian lesbians and gay men, legal recognition of same-sex relationships in national sexual citizenship is an irreplaceable tool for them. Sometimes, as for the lesbian partners quoted above, this is the case because of the desire to share the ritual of commitment with the close-knit community of family and friends. More often, because marital rights and duties and the ritual and social confirmation of partners' mutual commitment are truly guaranteed only by the national legal recognition of same-sex couples. As one partner explains, a gay couple strongly aspiring to marry decided that marriage abroad did not satisfy their relational needs and projects because of these fundamental flaws. Two lesbian partners, quoted after the gay man, are considering marrying abroad for the symbolic and emotional meaning of the ritual, nevertheless are keenly aware of the lacking nature of this arrangement compared to their relational needs and the much truer support they would draw from a national law on same-sex relationships.

There's no form of legal protection for our couple. No legal, social, juridical protection of our relationship. [...] We thought about marrying abroad, any kind of legal recognition with a public ritual, but that'd be useless in Italy as well, it'd be just a symbolic thing between us, like any symbol we could get. I don't need a piece of paper, we don't need that, I need social and political recognition, I need many forms of legal tutelage, and that would also support a different psychological approach, that's for sure. Because when you're a couple, when your couple is 100 percent equal to all other couples, then you can plan ahead and make big decisions. (gay man)

Respondent: The ugly thing in this situation we're in is that we can't marry, even if we both want to do it, I'd want to do it even abroad. It's a symbolic thing we want between us, it would have a huge meaning to me, sooner or later I want to plan it, in the coming months. [...] We both want it, she wants to wear the white dress.

Luigi: How long have you been talking about it?

Respondent: I can't tell you exactly how long, because at first we just joked about it, then we saw that our relationship actually worked, we're together, we want to. Before last summer I was looking for the ring. [...] I think something is going to happen in the next months. [...] You can't help hating the fact that in this situation you don't have any rights. I want to marry just like my brothers did. (lesbian woman)

Luigi: Do you see yourselves as married or would you like to marry?

Respondent: No, I pester [my partner] with this idea. [...] I would like to marry for the aesthetic part, I already have my bride gown, I mean I'm a traditional woman, I collect shoes...ok, maybe less traditional than most...but I want to marry because I need to wear that dress. No, that's just the fun part, I could've married a lot of people, not that many but a few. It bothers me that the one I really want to marry I can't, the one I love I can't marry. It's like the love we have is inferior to the love I could have for a man. I feel my love is treated as lacking in dignity, and I tried both forms of love so I just know it's not true, there is no difference at all. Why can I marry some assholes I've been together with and I can't marry her? The impediment makes it even more desirable.

Luigi: Would it change anything in your couple?

Respondent: No, it would change at a social level, our place in society. If same-sex marriage were recognised, the way people see same-sex couples would change, because the fact that we can't marry suggests that there's something wrong in our relationships, like it's a different form of love, a less important form of love. I want to marry and have equal dignity. (lesbian woman)

The last lesbian respondents is one of the two interviewees who never were attracted to the same sex and never had a same-sex relationship before meeting their current partner. She identifies now as bisexual, whereas the other sees her relationship with her partner as a stable love bond with the only woman she will ever have a romantic and cohabiting relationship with. This latter woman and her partner pondered the idea of marrying abroad, but they think that they have been cohabiting for a short time and they need to grow more as a couple and individually in their careers and life plans. They also think they need the rights and protections that only marrying in Italy can grant to carry out their marital and couple projects. In their case, being barred from marriage raises further problems in the couple's life. One of them has not told her family about her relationship with her partner. Her parents think the two girls are flatmates, a facade the partners are set on keeping up. Neither of them is happy about the closeted partner's secrecy, and it sometimes still comes up in their arguments. When asked why she does not feel comfortable telling her parents that she is has a romantic relationship and cohabits with a woman, the closeted partner answers that the obstacles posed to the couple's familial projects by the lack of marriage rights for same-sex partners make her fear that she would come out and face her parents' scorn for a relationship that will never truly have room to grow, something she identifies with realising the couple's parental desires. Quoted after her, the other partner says she complies to her request for secrecy, describing her position as based on a slow and negotiated pathway from romantic relationship to family, in her opinion guaranteeing the construction of a stable and functioning family better than a rush into full-blown familial commitment. Like her partner, she bemoans the difficulties they have to face because of the lack of legal recognition of same-sex couples.

If I told my family 'I'm happy, I'm with a girl', they would enter a crisis of shame, guilt and blame, it's a negative experience I don't need right now. Maybe people think I'm a coward, but I don't feel like going through it now, maybe because I feel a voice inside me that says: 'I don't even know how far we can go in this situation'. Because I [...] know that I want a family, if it's too difficult having a gay family I'd...I mean...I mean you can build a family if you're supported, that's the most important thing, if you're not supported trying is pointless. So, if you live in Italy, either you have a job that pays very well and then you can go abroad, but with our jobs, with our precarious positions, with the difficulties emerging from living in a nation that doesn't recognise your voice, or the other woman's parental rights when her partner manages to have a baby...I mean, trying to imagine our future is very difficult. I know that hardship can bind people together, but they can also tear people apart. So, for now we're together and we don't worry about other things. But imagining us in four years, in ten years, I can't do it, I can't. In another country I could. Here in Italy I can't, it's too difficult. It's a reason I don't decide myself to tell my parents I'm with a woman and introduce her to my friends back home, I would...it would make her the scapegoat of the situation, they'd say that it's her fault, that she made me gay. I'd accept any kind of pressure from them, as long as it affects me, but if it touched her I couldn't bear it. So, for now we keep it hidden, if it has to come out it will come out, but I won't say it [...] I accepted this situation now and I think she feels the same, now. (lesbian woman)

This thing about [...] her parents...we've been thinking about...we've plans for...we're growing as a couple, we're becoming more confident. But I can live like this for now. I mean that, you know, this is my first serious relationship, so we are both treading on unknown land...it's only right that we both can...that we don't define good and bad right away, that we still have a grey area, that we still have room and time to grow together little by little, that we respect each others' rhythms and difficulties and needs, we don't want to rush, it's dangerous because if you run you can fall. So I totally prefer this slowness, it's not slowness, it's time to grow, this thinking things through, so that when we reach the next step we have all the baggage that we need, with everything we've built together and we have a real hold on it because we created it. [...] I don't feel any lack of affection or insecurities in her, even if, as it happens in every couple, we have good and bad moments and we argue sometimes, but we have stability and mutual understanding and these things make us wish for a family, a real family that grows together, even if we know that same-sex families and lesbian families must go through so many difficulties right now, social acceptance and so many other things. They say people aren't ready, but people are ready. It's a problem of rights and duties not being recognised, it comes up because there is no law that recognises our union, saying what our rights are but also what our duties are. [...] It's a contract, with its advantages and disadvantages, rights and duties. People forget that signing a contract means accepting limits and sanctions and responsibilities too, if we want to call it a contract even if it sounds much colder and more rational that it truly is. [...] Obviously, in a situation like ours, pondering about a family, you've got the venial matter of money, and that means work and finding the right

job that allows you to give a bright future to the son or daughter that you wish to have, besides that there's also: 'Ok, I've got a son or a daughter, but we're two women, only the biological mother is recognised, what about the other mother?' (lesbian woman)

The ideas about marriage expressed by the latter interviewee are common to other lesbian and gay cohabiters: on one hand, marriage should come after a time in which partners have had the opportunity to grow together and smooth their edges; on the other, marriage is important for couples with strong family plans such as parenthood. To some extent, cohabiting lesbians and gay seem to share cohabiting heterosexuals' vision of marriage as a step in an already well rehearsed relationship and as tied to big decisions regarding the couple's residence and parental projects (Salvini and Vignoli 2014: 26, 78-79). Lesbian and gay cohabiters who perceive their relationships this way bemoan the fact that if they grow together as partners and decide to take further steps in their mutual commitment the potentially useful option of marriage is not available.

Other cohabiting lesbians and gay men, as shown above, already feel like they share a marital bond. Two lesbian partners decided to celebrate and cement their marital bond in a traditional and festive ritual. Their story resonates with accounts of the creative and grounding value partnership rituals hold for lesbians and gay men who in the past wanted to marry but could not because of national laws advanced by Lewin (1998: 246-249) and Hull (2006: 116-120) in US. For the two lesbian partners, this moment arrived long before they started pondering other steps in mutual commitment, as potential children or a home in co-ownership. The motivations behind this decision they recount are the same that we found in the first interview quoted in this subsection: romance, commitment, public recognition of their bond and of mutual rights and duties. Besides organising a ritual in front of their families and friends, followed by a party, they signed agreements on their duties in case of separation and their rights as partners.

Respondent: It came up as a romantic idea. Basically I and [my partner] are party animals, we like to enjoy life, so we wanted to throw a party. The bottom line was a wish, the same wish I imagine pushes couples to marry, a wish to celebrate our couple in our society in our world, with our friends and our families. So, it all started as a big practical joke, 'Yeah, we want to get married!', then we confronted the legal vacuum we're left in and so we decided to make it official, as much as possible. [...] I think anyone who chooses to marry does it because they want to say 'I strongly want society to see me and my partner not just as individuals but also as a couple'. [...] I think it would be so much easier if we were somewhere where we can be recognised as a couple, even if I think that family is something you build with your emotions. I mean, material and legal support, laws that recognise you and your family in very practical terms, they help a lot. [...]

Luigi: Did this ritual and this formal union change your experience in this couple?

Respondent: They helped, that's for sure. Now, everyone sees us as the couple who decided to take an important vow. [...] This commitment could be felt in everyone's

emotions and from that moment me and [my partner] became the emotional hinge amongst all our acquaintances [...] the partners who decided to do all those normal things: commit with all we have, live together, all those things everyone does, all those seemingly completely natural things. [...] At an emotional level it's marriage in every aspect, we know exactly why we did it. (lesbian woman)

Respondent: I mean, we don't have the slightest legal protection in this country...when you decide you're getting married – I feel I'm a married person – you have to think about these things. All of my friends thought about these things when they got married. It's the ugly part of it, but you have to have a safety net for yourself. [...] When we were in front of the lawyer and she was reading us the contract [my partner] said 'But we love each other!' and she said 'You love each other just as much if you sign here.' The contract we signed is very close to a marriage contract, with the list of all the agreements [...] they were reading them and we got angry, we said 'We know each other, there's complete trust' [...] It's a very unromantic part, it's boring and ugly, but you have to do it. But what I want is to live that great moment! [...]

Luigi: Once you had the marriage ritual, did it change the way you experience this relationship?

Respondent: No. I mean, when you do it [...] you're taking a public vow, and even if nothing changes in practice, truth is you're obligated...what I mean is that nothing changes, but you're saying it out loud in front of everyone: 'I take this vow in front of all of you' [...] I want marriage and nothing less, what I need is complete equality with straight couples, because there's no difference in commitment, maybe there's even more of it. (lesbian woman)

These partners' story of their pragmatic search for ways to mend their incomplete inclusion in relational rights, as they are now recognised by the Italian legal system to some of its citizen, is telling of the multifold nature of couple relationships. In other parts of their interviews, they explicitly say that they wanted the obligation to a period of mutually agreed upon financial support between partners in case of dissolution of their relationship in their marital contract. Besides protecting the relationship from life's hardships, they spontaneously stress, regulation protects them from the possible consequences of the unstable and changing character of partners' commitment. The participation of other people, of a community of family, friends, and acquaintances to the confirmation of this commitment through celebration and through everyday practices is a resource they cherish and use to tell each other and themselves that they intend to be there for each other for good. At the same time, the last interviewee says that 'nothing changes in practice'. At the core of all of these rituals and agreements, there is a feeling that partners have for each other: the love that accompanies the couples I interviewed from their first steps into cohabitation and that, rephrasing the last interviewee's ideas again, trumps in significance even the legal ties that she and her partner themselves decided to institute.

Same-sex couples experience the myth of all-significant love as defying and overpowering extra-couple recognition, public regulation and, more shockingly, other people's loves. All my interviewees, when talking about the realness of their bond, remembered that other people's opinions against their own fashion of loving each other had to be emotionally dealt with and that other people's relational experiences did not measure with their own commitment. The last interviewee's opinion on the possible greater realness of same-sex love compared to different-sex love is just another expression of this conviction: no partners love each other as I and my partner do.

As Barker (2013: 198-202) notes, developing commitment and love between people aimed at assuring personal well-being is always based on the idea that someone else is 'not the marrying kind'. This is the essential paradox of the institution of love that, Coontz (2004: 20-21) writes, has gradually conquered the institution of marriage between different-sex and same-sex desiring people alike. Choosing someone with whom to make things work for the best on the long run implies telling and retelling the story that nobody else could be better, and nobody else could choose better. This narration is increasingly created, reproduced and evaluated on the basis of a continuous negotiation between partners' needs, attitudes, and emerging familial projects. As expressed by my interviewees, Italian lesbians and gay men ask for their voice to be heard in the public regulation of these life-altering choices.

4.5. Conclusions

In their study on lesbians' and gay men's lives in Italy in the mid 1990s, Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 204) observe that lesbians and gay men belonging to each cohort are likelier to express a preference for stable relationships over occasional encounters than lesbians and gay men in preceding cohorts. The continuation of this trend is not observed from the mid 1990s to the early 2010s. My data shows that among young lesbians and gay men born from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s, especially the youngest, expressing the desire to form a stable relationship when they are single is less common than among their historical predecessors.

Changing forms of lesbians' and gay men's engagement with relational and gender norms lie behind this new aspect of same-sex desiring individuals' culture of coupledness, observable across the relational and linked life courses of same-sex partners. Lesbians' and gay men's experiences in finding partners and romance reflect the significance of gender in dating experiences. Women and men still follow very different routes to find their romantic partners and court them. Gay men tend to seek many sexual encounters and fall in love with a carefully chosen person among their sexual partners, whereas lesbians tend to choose their

romantic partner among people they meet in everyday environments and with whom sex ensues after a period of courtship. Nevertheless, across generations their romantic rendezvous result in commitment and cohabiting relationships, and these relationships increasingly show the signs of enduring and cherished love in their duration and formalisation.

As observed in different-sex stable couples (Swidler 2001: 158-159), cohabiting same-sex couples mix and support their narrations about having found the one with a variety of practices that make love an everyday reality, continuously negotiated, requested, and granted between partners. The stable couples created in same-sex dating markets are supported by mythical narratives of love, making them so central in lesbians' and gay men's life courses that new relational institutions are emerging from them. At the same time, they are seen by lesbians and gay men as based on an understanding about individual needs that can be negotiated and created only between partners through prosaic, everyday love. Single lesbians and gay men become less likely to express the desire for stable relationships when the partner with whom to build this negotiated commitment has not come about. Their attitudes to coupledness are similar to those observed among young heterosexual cohabiters in Italy, who see marriage not as a necessary step for stable couples to flourish, but as a path of commitment that should emerge only when partners reach a satisfactory negotiation of mutual interdependency.

Contemporary lesbians and gay men carry this attitude to coupledness through their relational life course, creating new links between highly interdependent lives. The paths leading them to cohabitation with their partners are diverse, but they increasingly perceive cohabitation as a turning point in their relational status. Same-sex partners in cohabiting couples often openly negotiate paid work, housework, and control over money, while also mobilising trust in each other and compliance to each other's projects when individual resources are invested in the couple. They negotiate sexual monogamy, a highly gendered aspect of their relationships, by voicing and recognising the importance each partner sees in sex as an emotional tie in the couple. They often focus their time, energy and social networks on their partner, while also redrawing boundaries between the couple and extra-couple relationships to avoid their prosaic and mythic commitment to each other unexpectedly being overwhelmed and undermined.

Their growing commitment and capability to negotiate commitment result in cohabitation being perceived as equal to marriage, a relationship that differs from marriage only because of externally imposed legal limits, or a relationship that differs from marriage but might turn into marriage once the partners satisfactorily negotiate their needs. Contemporary Italian partnered lesbians and gay men aspire to have access to the ritual, public, and legal aspects of the marriage institution. They say that their mutual commitment can lead to relying on each other for emotional and material well-being, and the institution of marriage would help them experience their relationship as a beneficial quest for love.

As recalled in Chapter 1, in the XIX and XX centuries Euro-American cities in which communities of same-sex desiring people embracing the gender-inversion model of homosexuality were flourishing witnessed the first signs of another cultural transformation of homosexuality. Modern homosexuals gradually abandoned the cultural strategy of gender inversion responding to the first developments in contemporary gender equalisation. They also preserved the centrality of the stable couple relationships in personal life that had characterised gender-inverted homosexuality. In doing so, they continued the subterranean reformulation of relational and gender norms that was already unfolding in the preceding generations of same-sex desiring individuals. Because of the social marginality and repression of same-sex desire, homosexuals were necessarily detached from the familial, patrimonial, and mate-selecting institutions that regulated courtship, pairing and stable coupledness in different-sex relationships. The couple relationships they aspired to and formed relied on an institution that was in the same historical period slowly taking hold of heterosexual relationship: the institution of love. Their embracement of love subtly, or maybe overtly, advanced the idea that this institution does not need to be based on gender difference, and gradually brought them to realise this was true through the creation, protection, and enjoyment of relationships between partners who wanted to stay in love regardless of how good they were at enacting gender norms.

As Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 7, 36) note, contemporary same-sex stable couples are similar to different-sex couples in that they vitalise the institution of love and the institution of coupledness. Italian lesbians' and gay men's couple and cohabiting relationships are created by finding new ways to reciprocally commit, from the first steps into romance to the decision that romance should thrive through decisive material and ritual declarations of interdependence. Through the workings of love, same-sex couples thrive because they are continuously negotiated, not despite of this. Contemporary lesbians and gay men experience love in gendered ways, but know how to prioritise their relationships with stable partners and work around the obstacle of lacking the gender difference on which heterosexuals narrate their love. The commitment they build on this continued negotiation sometimes brings them to see public celebration and legal regulation of their interdependence as desirable, and marriage as a way to achieve this resonating with their very ordinary narration that they love each other like nobody else could.

In the sociology of the family, the historical vicissitudes of love and marriage as two reciprocally supporting and transforming institutions have been documented through the description of differing relational styles between partners. Similarly to what Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 153-154, 160-161) argue regarding same-sex couples in civil partnerships in UK, Italian same-sex cohabiting couples adopt the social and institutional model of the 'capsule couple'. This relational model differs from 'companionate marriage' (Burgess and Locke 1960: 97-99, 289-304, 462-465, 651-654), typical of stable relationships in

the central decades of the XX century, because it is not based on two individuals with unequal socio-economic standing and power associating in a difficultly renegotiable relationships, and from the 'pure relationship' characterising same-sex relationships according to Giddens (1992: 58, 188-191), because it does not involve an exchange between individuals looking for satisfaction of already defined needs in their partner and ready to end the relationship when these needs are not met. Capsule couples are characterised by negotiability of terms and rules, and at the same time by partners' need to invest a great deal of resources in the couple relationship in order for the relationship to sustain emergence and satisfaction of relational needs and familial projects.

Some of the partners quoted in this chapter talked about parenthood as a familial project. As discussed in Chapter 1, lesbian, gay, and same-sex coupled parents surfaced to public visibility in the past decades, originally through the legal battles regarding custody of children they endured and through the diffusion of alternative and technologically assisted reproductive methods that medical and political public instances increasingly regulate. In Euro-American countries, the gradual reconciliation of politico-legal disagreement over same-sex desiring people's adeptness in care-taking of children they had in heterosexual marital relationships is accompanied by a growing relevance of disagreement regarding these individuals' access to alternative paths to reproduction and parenthood and the consequences it might have on the relationships between the child and its biological, social, and care-taking parents. Couple relationships have been influenced by technological innovation in past decades (Bittman *et al.* 2004; Wajcman *et al.* 2008). However, the relational and gendered life moments of fertility and parenthood are historically set apart by the fact that technological innovation has been aimed directly at revising individuals' capabilities in avoiding or realising them (Goldin 2006; Franklin 2013: 13-14). The specificness of this technological project foregrounds that socio-cultural transformations in individuals' intentions regarding fertility and parenthood lie at its roots. The next chapter looks at Italian lesbians' and gay men's changing parental desires on the background of this socio-cultural development.

5. 'I am the one who waits': parental desires and the meaning of the child⁴⁵

5.1. Introduction

The currently growing reality of homosexual parenthood is a developing arrangement of interpersonal and social relationships in the midst of the reconsideration of the links between biological, social, and care-taking parenthood (Moore and Stambolis-Ruhstorfer 2013). As jurist Moscati (2011) states in her contribution to an Italian volume on 'omogenitorialità'⁴⁶ focussed on the comparative study of legal frameworks in Europe,

looking into the [...] legal development of family, it is clearly visible that the definition of 'parent' is continuously evolving. The parental relationship is, as for today, socially and legally untied from the sole biological connection. Examples [...] can be drawn from the answers [received] in a class on family law [when asking]: 'Who is a parent?': 'A parent is anyone who is responsible for the child's development; the biological parent; the adoptive parent; the man or woman who takes care of the child in psychological and emotional terms; the man or woman who is publicly responsible for the child; someone the child trusts and respects; someone from whom the child wants to learn and whom the child wants to imitate.' These answers are particularly interesting [because] firstly, no connection to the marital status of parents is made. Secondly, these definitions [...] are not in any way concerned with the sexual orientation of those who are identified as parents. Thirdly, they reflect a legal approach that is becoming more and more important in British law.

The jurist's comments efficiently grasp the multiple aspects of the evolving reality of parenthood. It is a part of biographies in which institutional, interpersonal, and individual aims and regulating capabilities influence each other and might sometimes be misaligned: whereas some national legal systems have undergone a transformation towards inclusion and support of parenthood independently from marital status and sexual orientation of individuals, in other socio-legal systems, such as the Italian one, homosexual parenthood remains an almost completely ignored parent-child relationship (Sangalli 2011; ILGA-Europe 2015b). Contemporary parenthood is centred on the positive development of the child

⁴⁵ A version of this chapter was presented at the conference 'Social Class in the 21st Century: Intersections between class, gender, and sexuality revisited', at Amsterdam Centre for Research and Gender and Sexuality/Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies, 22-23 October 2015, University of Amsterdam.

⁴⁶ *Omogenitorialità*, modelled on the French *homoparentalité*, is the widespread portmanteau referring to homosexual parenthood and same-sex couples parenthood in Italy.

(Edwards and Gillies 2013), predicated on the freedom of this development from illegitimate thwarting identifiable when considering the child as a subject with own needs, interests, and preferences. The foregrounding of the child's own subjectivity results in the growing centrality, in institutional and individual discourses, of the care-taking aspect of parenthood. In institutional and individual discourses, care-taking parenthood is not independent from biological and social parenthood, as each aspect of parenthood is often taken into consideration when the legitimacy of parent-child relationships, the individual capability in carrying it through, and the individual desire in embarking in it are evaluated (Pocar and Ronfani 2008: 121-126; Ellingsaeter *et al.* 2013).

The complexity of individual decisional paths in parenthood is widely examined by using models of individual action considering fertility desires and fertility intentions, in analyses of the micro-determinants of fertility and, as implicit sketches of individual agency, in analyses of macro-determinants of fertility (Balbo *et al.* 2013). If one common theme can be found across different demographic eras, it is the fact that procreation and parenthood are risky investments. Prospective parents' and parents' cognitions regarding what resources should be invested in fertility and child-rearing, in what conditions it is worth it to invest them, and what rewards should be expected vary by interacting individual levels of commitment to parenthood and interpersonal recognition of commitment to parenthood. All of these decisional paths form the historically changing 'social meaning of the child' (Ellingsaeter *et al.* 2013). This construct is the array of more or less fuzzy organising principles of the complete trajectories of offspring-related behaviours, experienced by individuals as a buffer at the entrance of these trajectories and influencing different levels of individual commitment to fertility and childcare, and can be analysed as envisioned and realised biological, social, and care-taking ties to the child.

This chapter aims at inquiring into the transformations of Italian lesbians' and gay men's parental desires in the context of the historically changing social meaning of the child, and the role that relational and gender norms play in lesbians' and gay men's individually envisioned biological, social, and care-taking ties. Differently from couple and marital-like relationships, in contemporary Euro-American countries parenthood and childhood are considered as involving the well-being of a person, the child, whose value trumps all other preoccupations (Zermatten 2010). The next section (5.2) sketches the historical transformation of fertility and parental cultures in Euro-American countries to trace the emergence of this recent collective agreement on the social meaning of the child. The section continues by presenting a conceptual model of lesbians' and gay men's position in respect to the contemporary consensus on the value of the child to the collectivity and to individuals. At a first look, same-sex desiring people's fertility and parenthood desires characterise them as adept contemporary parents, but hints that this may not be the case emerge from their considerations of bio-social ties to the child and trouble this idea. The following section (5.3) uses survey data to check

if Italian lesbians and gay men took part to the transformation of parental culture, and uncovers the problematic aspects of this process of assimilation in the role of envisioned bio-social ties in their parental desires. Interview data on cohabiting lesbians and gay men, a segment of same-sex desiring population in which parental desires are especially common, allows us to question the problematic aspects of lesbian and gay fertility and parental cultures. The concluding remarks (5.4) consider Italian lesbians' and gay men's ongoing embracement of the unparalleled value of care-taking ties in parenthood in light of the generational transformations of homosexuality, highlighting that the emerging central role of community as a source of happiness for the parent-child dyad foreshadows innovation in relational and gender norms

5.2. Demographic eras and the meaning of the child

5.2.1. 'Living in another world': heterosexual regimes of parenthood

A historical model of two demographic eras of parenthood, the second one further divided in two phases, can be derived from different scientific contributions on wide-ranging transformations of the social meaning of the child. Before the first demographic transition, in societies with low life expectancy and high infant mortality, individuals value children for their use as helping hands in the production of subsistence goods and as care-takers when parents reach the age of physical impairment. After the first demographic transition, a centuries-long process embracing social classes and national populations in different moments and extending to contemporary times in societies with high life expectancy and low infant mortality, individuals value children for the sense of purpose they give in life, the socio-psychological benefits of contributing to the continuation of a family and a community, and the pleasure derived from an unparalleled interpersonal connection (Nauck 2007).

In the first phase of this second demographic era, in Euro-American societies centred in the decades of industrialisation, the norm of the 'child-king' was hegemonic (Ariès 1980). The dedication of women and men to the ideal of a small number of indispensable children hung on the idea that these children, once they grew up, were bound to enjoy a better socio-economic situation than their parents could, and this extra-individual biologically continued destiny of betterment was the self-evident route of a meaningful life. The child was the focus of a lifetime of decisions preceding, accompanying, and following the formation of a family and the acts of procreation. Fewer births than before were observed because every child had to be thoroughly empowered to profit from her or his durable and bright potentialities, and the golden age of marriage ensued because of the structural conditions making the marital couple an advantageous situation for procreation

and child-rearing. In this period, decreasing couple fertility was eminently a matter of individual male resources: the husband being the main or sole breadwinner in the family, it was his duty as a rational parent to judge how many future efficient social climbers his resources, when spent on the market of activities producing human capital, could support (Dalla Zuanna 2007).

In the second phase, the new hegemonic norm of the ‘individual/couple queen’, appearing with the cohorts born between the 1940s and the 1950s, downplays the role of the extra-individual biologically continuing destiny of betterment in the lives of sexually and socially mature individuals holding the resources needed for parenthood (Ariès 1980). This results in a decades-long continuation of low fertility in Western and developed countries as a whole (Balbo *et al.* 2013). The many sources of personal well-being and fulfilment valued by contemporary individuals erode the centrality of procreation and child-rearing aimed at intergenerational familial social mobility as the best project that women and men can pursue in the interest of themselves and their human surroundings (Surkin and Lesthaeghe 2004). As Billari (2009) puts it in a commentary on the contemporary preoccupation with declining European fertility:

the quest for ‘happiness’ is the commonality that guides fertility in contemporary societies. On the one hand, happy people have more kids if we limit our study to rich contemporary societies. On the other hand, fertility is one of the ways through which individuals achieve, or expect to achieve, a happier life.

As noted by Hakim (2000: 72-78), this focus on the individual evaluation of one's own experience (one might dub it ‘happiness’) as the main determinant in judging one's own commitment to parenthood originally became evident and relevant in the female population of Euro-American countries. Women, traditionally and widely called to undertake the bulk of care-taking parenthood (Chodorow 1978: 205-209, Therborn 2004: 285-286), are the pioneers of the transformation of fertility into a lifestyle choice realised only when the individual reaches a satisfactory grasp of her preferences and the opportunity-costs of such a choice.

This lifestyle approach to parenthood is supported by and supports the loosening of the conjuncture between adulthood, heterosexual marriage, and fertility/parenthood. Individual women's capability and interest in carrying out close evaluation of the best conditions for parenthood are buttressed by the changing place of women in contemporary societies, growingly equal to men in their educational and work biographies and thus growingly free from the lack of resources they can mobilise in order to secure a satisfactory life for themselves and their possible children outside of procreative marriage (Goldin 2006). This also buttresses the diffusion of an almost completely unheard set of voices, claims, desires, and rationalities entering the millions of decisional paths leading to fertility, directing parenthood, and supporting socio-legal transformations in the realm of non-marital childbearing, single parenthood, divorce and arbitration

between diverse arrangement of child custody (Pocar and Ronfani 2008: 141-142, 155-160). In the ongoing phase of the demographic transition, individual fertility is eminently a matter of female resources: even if women cross-nationally enjoy fewer individual resources than men, their rationalities in embarking into fertility and parenthood is based on an evaluation of their capability to serenely carry out what they consider a satisfying level of childcare as much as on their capability to secure resources for the child through work or marriage (McDonald 2000; Brodmann *et al.* 2007).

According to Goldscheider (2000), a further and ongoing transformation of the social meaning of the child in Euro-American societies is the assimilation of men in a lifestyle approach to fertility and parenthood articulated on the same grounds of contemporary women's culture of fertility and parenthood. Foregrounding a fine-grained evaluation of one's own commitment in the care-taking aspects of parenthood, men become the likelier to want or have children the stronger their preference for involved fatherhood (Bernhardt and Goldscheider 2006; Puur *et al.* 2008). This transformation of the gendered rationalities behind fertility and parenthood, Goldscheider (2000) notes, is supported by the diffusion of artificially assisted reproduction methods. In their many forms, these technologies multiply the possibilities for biological, social, and care-taking parenthood to be unbound from each other and be distributed among a plurality of individuals (Mamo 2007: 225-226). Their diffusion advances the disconnection, already supported by the revolutions in contraceptive methods, sexual lifestyles, and equal opportunities (van de Kaa 2004), between fertility/parenthood and the once socially collapsed experiences of heterosexual procreative sex and heterosexual marriage, pushing women and men outside of the norm of parenthood as a contextually biological, social, and care-taking connection to the child of one's own marital partner modulated on the basis of gender.

Lesbians' and gay men's participation in parental cultures and experiences becomes a less contested aspect of contemporary families with the unhinging of parenthood from bio-social ties emerging from heterosexual procreation and procreative marriage (Patterson *et al.* 2013). However, the ties that they create and envision with their children do not necessarily entail a full compliance to contemporary, child-centred and care-taking based parenthood. The next subsection proposes a model of individual rationalities lesbians and gay men follow when desiring and embarking into parenthood in different demographic eras, and discusses how gender and relational norms embedded in their parental paths problematise their participation to parenthood as a collectively beneficial endeavour.

5.2.2. *'Life's what you make it': dilemmas of homosexual parenthood*

When societies go through the first demographic era, the options are clear for same-sex desiring people. Finding a different-sex partner with whom to procreate and form a familial union where parental labour is divided according to gender is the only way to secure dignified survival for same-sex desiring women and support in labour and old age for same-sex desiring men. The transition from the first to the second phase of the second demographic era poses more difficult questions. Even if both phases of the second demographic era prioritise parents' commitment to the child's well-being over children's commitment to parents' well-being, lesbians and gay men in the two socio-cultural regimes have very different visions of parenthood. In the first phase, they either parent in heterosexual relationships or forgo parenthood if opting out of them. In the second phase, they want and realise parenthood outside of heterosexual relationships. Sociologists Viviana Zelizer and Jens Qvortrup offer insights that help disentangle the interconnections between lesbians' and gay men's individually chosen parental destinies and the changing social meaning of the child in the second demographic era.

Zelizer (1985: 57) notes that the contemporary child is both useless and priceless. In other terms, the child is a luxury good: the happiness it produces is directly proportional to the resources invested in it. Qvortrup (2005), responding to critics of Ariès' (1960) field-opening study in the history of childhood, underscores that in Euro-American countries the collective agreement over what kinds of investments in parental happiness produce the best outcome for parents and the best externalities for the collectivity changed from the first to the second phase of the second demographic era. Looking at the history of childhood as if he were an observer at the cusp of the first phase of the second demographic era, Qvortrup (2005) writes that

the child has never in history been visible in public: in pre-modernity, because the category did not exist and therefore there was not seen to be a relationship to adults or adulthood. [...] In modernity, children are invisible in the public space because they have become marginalised from it, partly due to a new and very conscious definition of the child as a person whose competences and capabilities are found wanting as a full-fledged member of the human community, partly because of a strong tendency to believe that the individual child and children as a group do not relate to adults in general, but only to their parents, teachers and supervisors.

Continuing this account from the standpoint of a contemporary observer immersed in the second phase of the second demographic transition, Qvortrup (2005) states that

children continue to be the less powerful part in an adult world – politically and economically. The real task remains that of combining a positive exploitation of children by making them and their life worlds visible, while preventing negative exploitation of their weaknesses. [...] A re-appreciation of children as contemporaries, as participants and as reclaiming a status and a stake in the public and social fabric is in no way a return to an Arièsian lack of awareness. Rather [...] it is a highly conscious effort to understand childhood as an integral part of society.

Paraphrasing Qvortrup, in the first phase of the second demographic era the child is an adult-in-the-making, the collectivity needs it for social reproduction, and individuals are motivated to have children because their unparalleled connection to these children allows them to pass on their blood and ownership legacy to them and see these resources result in better living conditions for their children than they did for them. In the second phase, the child is an adult-in-the-making, the collectivity needs its voice to be heard in order for its well-being, an inestimable collective good, to be protected, and parents are motivated to take good care of their child, the best way to protect their voices (Misca and Smith 2013) because they too see it as the unparalleled source of happiness.

Considering contemporary individuals' experiences of parenthood as rotted in happiness and producing happiness pointed out by Billari (2009), the changing situation of lesbians and gay prospective parents is in line with this change in the social meaning of the child. In the first phase of the second demographic era, same-sex desiring people know that they can accrue the biological resources needed to create an unparalleled connection to the child and the social resources that they want to pass on to the child only through heterosexual procreation regulated by heterosexual marriage. They either prioritise their desire for procreation and bio-social continuation of their lineage and choose to marry with a different-sex partner, or prioritise their own relational desires and forgo fertility and parenthood. In the second phase, lesbians and gay men, as all parents, are asked to and inclined to focus on care-taking parenthood if they want to realise their parental desires and create an unparalleled connection to the child. Therefore, lesbians and gay men forgo all paths to parenthood in which the happiness they need to commit to such care-taking tasks would be undermined, among them heterosexual arrangements of fertility and parenthood (Agigian 2004: 7-10; Stacey 2006). At the same time they learn that if they lead lives that empower them to take good care of a child no one can deny them this source of happiness. In short, they display a clear grasp of what a parent must do to respect the contemporary parental mission to let the child unleash its potential as a collective good.

The picture would be clear, were it not for details that throw lesbian and gay prospective parents off the seats they are about to take among the parents of the future. On one hand, gay men are less likely to parent than lesbians (Baumle *et al.* 2009: 36), and in contemporary Italy have been observed to desire children less

often than lesbians (Baiocco and Laghi 2013), raising the suspicion that, instead of embracing their potential as care-takers and producers of happiness for themselves and others through inestimable contributions to upbringing of children, they prefer to free-ride on women's procreative and care-taking capabilities (Danna 2015: 41-49) as men have been doing for centuries (Therborn 2004: 13). On the other hand, lesbians' embracement of artificially assisted reproduction as a path to parenthood raises the suspicion that they are abandoning the traditionally female idea that their gender allows them to put care-taking abilities at the service of their children, the collectivity, and themselves and embracing the traditionally male attitude that what matters is a bio-social link to the child that can insure continuation of the lineage (Danna 2015: 29-31). Lesbians and gay men might unwillingly be reproducing cultures of parenthood that do not fall in line with contemporary collective agreement on the irreplaceability of parental care-taking ties in the production of happiness for themselves and the collectivity.

The next section focuses on Italian lesbians' and gay men's parental desires to observe compliance and dissidence to the relational and gender norms troubling contemporary parenthood. In the first subsection, I analyse survey data to verify if lesbians' and gay men's parental desires have been changing in line with the model of sociocultural transformation sketched above. This means, firstly, inquiring into the assimilation of lesbians and gay men in a parental culture in which the social meaning of the child is centred on care-taking ties that are expected to insure the happiness of the parent-child dyad. Secondly, problematising this assimilation by asking if lesbians and gay men still significantly envision biological and social ties as supporting the desired care-taking commitment. These questions lead to the relevance of interpersonal social ties achieved in romantic and cohabiting coupledom as expected sources of parental happiness. The appreciation of interpersonally recognised social parenthood undergoes an impressive diffusion among lesbians and gay men. In the second subsection I analyse my interview data on same-sex cohabiting couples to see if, while embracing the multifold and ambivalent contemporary social meaning of the child, Italian cohabiting lesbians and gay men are reinventing the meaning of bio-social ties as they foresee an ever stronger desire for children of their own.

5.3. Lesbians, gay men, and parental desires

5.3.1. 'Happiness is easy': biological, social, and care-taking ties

When facing the choice to embark into heterosexual models of parenthood, to them potential sources of unhappiness, Italian lesbians and gay men often renounce to parenthood because of the risks of raising their children in unhappy

households. Nevertheless, some lesbians and gay men have children. In 1995-96, 4.7% of lesbians and 2.5% of gay men in my sample had children (tab. 5.1). In 2012-13 these figures were 3.1% and 1.2%. As observed in other Euro-American countries (Rupp and Eggen 2010; Gates 2011), the incidence of parenthood among lesbians and gay men decreases in recent decades, probably as a result of the increasing importance of parental happiness and care-taking involvement that pulls homosexuals away from the easy route to parenthood of heterosexual sex and coupledness.

Across decades, gay men are less likely to have children than lesbians. Hinting at the problematic figure of the gay parental free-rider, this difference is not actually so unambiguously interpretable. On one hand, lesbians and gay men are much less likely to have children compared to heterosexuals than gay men are compared to lesbians (Black *et al.* 2000; Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 219-220). On the other hand, lesbians' greater participation in parenthood points out that, at the crossroad of parental gender norms, the changing social meaning of the child, and heterosexually framed parenthood, Italian homosexuals are taking part in the second phase of reformulation of parenthood in the second demographic era. Motherhood-oriented lesbians think that one can make the unhappiness of participating in heterosexuality harmless to one's child more often than fatherhood-oriented men, because female specialisation in care-taking parenthood is seen as more efficient in balancing the negative effects parental unhappiness can have on the child's well-being better than male advantage in resources. If we look at the diffusion of parental desires among lesbians and gay men in 1995-96 and 2012-13, we find support for this positive interpretation of gender differences among homosexuals.

Tab. 5.1 Percentages of lesbians and gay men who have children, percentages of childfree lesbians and gay men who want to have children, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Have children	4.7	3.1	2.5	1.2
<i>N</i>	530	747	1,976	1,570
Want children (if childfree)	42.9	64.3	49	54.5
<i>N</i>	489	701	1,885	1,524

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

The changing role of parental ties supporting personal happiness and confidence in one's care-taking abilities is observed in the parental desires of childfree lesbians and gay men (tab. 5.1). In 1995-96, 42.9% of lesbians and 49% of gay men desired to have a child. Even if they realised their parental desires more often than gay men, lesbians were less likely to express these desires. As women, lesbians were comparatively specialised in the care-taking aspects of parenthood and disadvantaged in the task of earning financial resources to support the happy parent-child dyad. This led them to renounce parenthood as demanding resources that could be obtained only by undermining their happiness and finding a male partner. Gay men belonged to the gender that was embracing the new meaning of the child more slowly, and were likelier to express the desire for a child because they saw the path to parenthood as finding someone who could specialise in care-taking and be supported by their financial resources. The low incidence of parenthood among them points that, as Italian and European heterosexual men in times of decreasing fertility, they were decreasingly capable to find this person.

In 2012-13, lesbians are likelier than gay men to express the desire to have a child (64.3% vs. 54.5%). The increasing centrality of care-taking capabilities in the social meaning of the child empowers lesbians' prospects as future parents. Men have not fully embraced the feminine specialisation in care-taking tasks, therefore gay men do not desire parenthood as much as lesbians. However, the diffusion of parental desires is observed among gay men as well. The gender gap in the embracement of care-taking as the central task parents need to provide intertwines with the diffusion of the idea that care-taking produces parental happiness, for women and men alike.

Even if lesbians and gay men seem to be sensitive to the allure of parental happiness, individual commitment to parental happiness is influenced by envisioned biological, social, and care-taking ties to the child. Lesbians and gay men might feel they want a child because of envisioned ties that do not fall in line with the contemporary focus on the value of care-taking. Bio-social links to the child, such as genetic relatedness and legal maternity or paternity, shore up parents' security that a child will see and experience them as parents for as long as it is necessary for them to be repaid of their toils in happiness (Pocar and Ronfani 2008: 204-205, 215-222). Even in times in which the relevance of care-taking ties widens, prospective parents have reason to see children through the lens of the bio-socially continuing lineage received from preceding demographic eras.

In the case of social parenthood, the most direct way to achieve it available to individuals is forming a marital or marital-like parental couple. Whatever the legal provisions regarding coupledness and social parenthood, people give great importance to having an unparalleled interpersonal connection with someone that recognises them as the parent of the child they see as theirs (Balbo *et al.* 2013). If anything, this social aspect of parenthood insures that, were individual resources not enough to support what the parent sees as a beneficial activity for the child,

another individual would be ready to mobilise her or his own resources for what he sees as a legitimately taken decision on the child's life.

This influence of coupledness was already observed in Italian lesbians' parental desires in 1995-96, but not in gay men's parental desires (tab. 5.2). The desire for parenthood was expressed, among singles, by 35.7% of lesbians and 48.4% of gay men; among coupled individuals, by 48.2% of lesbians and 50.6% of gay men; among cohabiting individuals, by 41.9% of lesbians and 47.9% of gay men. Coupled and cohabiting lesbians were likelier to desire children than single lesbians, and coupled lesbians were almost as likely to desire children as coupled gay men. Among lesbians, the prospect of a same-sex interpersonally supported social parenthood functioned as a boost for individual evaluations of one's own capability to be a good care-taker. No similar effect of relational situation was observed for gay men.

Tab. 5.2 Percentages of single, coupled, and cohabiting childfree lesbians and gay men who want to have children, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	Lesbians		Gay men	
	1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Single	35.7	57.6	48.4	52.7
<i>N</i>	168	321	1,080	841
Coupled	48.2	72.9	50.6	59.4
<i>N</i>	222	269	577	483
Cohabiting	41.9	63	47.9	50
<i>N</i>	93	108	211	190

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

By 2012-13 the unequal terrain of parenthood desires has thoroughly shifted: whatever their relational situation, lesbians want children more than gay men do. The desire for parenthood is expressed, among singles, by 57.6% of lesbians and 52.7% of gay men; among coupled individuals, by 72.9% of lesbians and 59.4% of gay men; among cohabiting individuals, by 63% of lesbians and 50% of gay men. Gay men's parental desires seem to be shored up only by couple relationships, despite cohabiting relationships involving greater commitment between partners (see Chapter 4). A similar conundrum is presented by lesbians' parental desires: both couple and cohabiting relationships result in diffusion of parental desires, but couple relationships more markedly than cohabiting ones.

The analysis of the different motivations behind the lack of parenthood desires⁴⁷ among coupled and cohabiting homosexuals (tab. 5.3) indicates that cohabiting homosexuals are less likely than coupled homosexual to express a desire for parenthood for reasons similar to those behind the lower lesbian likelihood to express parental desires in 1995-96: a closer evaluation of one's own capability to mobilise the resources needed for good parenting. This is the case especially for lesbians in 2012-13: 81% of coupled lesbians who do not want children identify age, maturity, or external difficulties as the reason, whereas 95% of cohabiting lesbians do. This difference was not observed among coupled and cohabiting lesbians in 1995-96 (about 84% in both cases blamed age, lack of maturity, or external difficulties). In 1995-96, coupled lesbians were less likely than cohabiting lesbians to say they did not want children because of external or internalised homophobic prejudice (5.1% and 10% respectively), whereas in 2012-13 they were likelier to say so (7.1% vs. none). Cohabiting lesbians in 1995-96 tended to frame the difficulties they faced when desiring a child as stemming from the normative force of traditional heterosexual fertility and parenthood. Two decades ago, the most widely accepted path to homosexual parenthood was in a heterosexual household. Cohabiting lesbians, as the least likely among lesbians to be able to take part in a heterosexual household, felt that their parenthood desires were undermined by the normativity of heterosexual parenthood more than lesbians in other relational situations. In 2012-13, in a profoundly changed lesbian culture of fertility and parenthood, the empowering force of intra-couple interpersonal recognition of social parenthood enjoyed by lesbians with a cohabiting same-sex relationship overrides all extra-couple interpersonal framings of heterosexual households as the preferable environment for fertility and parenthood.

The reasons for lack of parental desire reported by gay men show a rather different picture. In 1995-96 and in 2012-13 gay men are likelier than lesbians to say they are influenced by homophobic prejudice, whether they are coupled (12.3% and 9.8%) or cohabiting (19.2% and 18.5%). Across two decades, cohabiting gay men are especially and stably influenced by homonegative prejudice. Homosexual maleness is a highly relevant obstacle to recognition of capabilities and commitment to the care-taking aspects of parenthood. Cohabiting gay men suffer this exclusionary framing of parenthood the most because they are the likeliest to think their own fertility and parenthood projects as embedded in arrangements and households with little to none female involvement.

⁴⁷ In 1995-96 and 2012-2013, an open ended question asking 'Why?' followed the question asking childfree respondents to state if they wanted to have children or not. For the 1995-96 data, the 'LGB 1995-96' research team coded respondents' answers in 32 classes including motivations for wanting children and not wanting children. For the 2012-13 data, I coded respondents' answers with the same system. In tab. 5.3 and tab. 5.4, I present the distribution of seven classes grouping the original 32 classes used for the 1995-96 and 2012-13 samples, three classes for respondents who do not want children and four classes for respondents who want children.

Lesbians' parental desires across relational situations point out that the social recognition of parental ties granted by coupledness displaces other parental ties of greater relevance in preceding demographic eras. This form of social parenthood, unlike other forms, distances social parental ties from biological ties to make them more similar to care-taking ties. Biological ties and other social ties are made up, on one hand of genetic relatedness and similar constructs, and on the other hand of social parental ties supported by material and emotional familial legacies, modelled on the biological ties because they presuppose the passing down of an inalienable set of characters and assets from parent to offspring (Devine 2004: 174-176, 179-184; Taylor 2009: 47-59). Differently from these parental ties, interpersonally recognised parenthood in the couple can be likened to care-taking ties because it expresses prospective parents' preoccupation that more than one person's happiness can be put to work for the happy development of their child.

Tab. 5.3 Incidence of different motivations for lack of desire to have children reported by coupled and cohabiting childfree lesbians and gay men, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

		Lesbians		Gay men	
		1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Coupled	Age, maturity, difficulties	83.5	81	80.6	80.5
	Prejudice	5.1	7.1	12.3	9.8
	Personal preference	11.4	11.9	7.1	9.7
	<i>N</i>	79	42	196	113
Cohabiting	Age, maturity, difficulties	84.6	95	75.3	74.1
	Prejudice	10.3	0	19.2	18.5
	Personal preference	5.1	5	5.5	7.4
	<i>N</i>	39	20	73	54

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

As shown by data in tab. 5.4, among coupled and cohabiting lesbians the importance of care-taking ties and social ties modelled on them is growing at the expense of biological ties and social ties modelled on them. In 1995-96, about 40% of coupled and cohabiting lesbians reported a wish to pass down their bio-social inheritance as the reason for their parental desires. In 2012-13 just above 30% did. At first glance, gay men undergo a much smaller change. A slight increase is observed among coupled gay men (from 40.9% to 42%), and a slight decrease among cohabiting gay men (from 39% to 36.2%). This divergence between coupled and cohabiting gay men in 2012-13 is not explained by their

likelihood to report desiring parenthood because of the pleasure of giving to and caring for a developing and fragile girl or boy. This motivation becomes rarer among coupled and cohabiting gay men across decades (from about 49% to about 35%). This decrease is likely to express homosexuals' waning need to claim care-taking competence against their own and others' prejudice. It is so suggested by the fact that an even deeper drop and smaller incidence is observed among lesbians, socialised to be relatively skilled care-takers in virtue of their gender (from 46.8% among coupled lesbians and 26.7% among cohabiting lesbians in 1995-96 to about 18% for both relational statuses in 2012-13). Expressing such a low interest in care-taking ties, Italian lesbians could be seen as abandoning the contemporary and originally female attention to childcare. The fact that both lesbians and gay men become less likely to explicitly foreground care-taking ties supports the alternative interpretation linked to waning homophobic prejudice.

Tab. 5.4 Incidence of different motivations for the desire to have children reported by single, coupled, and cohabiting childfree lesbians and gay men, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

		Lesbians		Gay men	
		1995-96	2012-13	1995-96	2012-13
Coupled	Bio-social inheritance	41.6	30.3	40.9	42.9
	Altruism and need for caring	46.8	17.7	48.4	36.8
	Couple relationship	5.2	30.3	5.1	5.5
	Rights of sexual minorities	6.5	21.9	5.6	14.8
	<i>N</i>	77	119	215	182
Cohabiting	Bio-social inheritance	40	32.4	39	36.2
	Altruism and need for caring	26.7	18.9	49.4	34.5
	Couple relationship	23.3	24.3	7.8	17.2
	Rights of sexual minorities	10	24.3	3.9	12.1
	<i>N</i>	30	37	77	58

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

Coupled and cohabiting gay men's divergence in the relevance of bio-social inheritance finds no explanation in their views regarding the principled stance that homosexuals have a right to parenthood as heterosexuals do. A similar diffusion of this motivation for parental desires is observed regardless of relational status (from about 4% in 1995-96 to about 13% in 2012-13). What really makes the difference is the incidence of interpersonal recognition of parental ties between partners as a motivation for parenthood: a small difference in 1995-96 (5.6% among coupled gay men, 7.8% among cohabiting gay men) significantly widens by 2012-13 (5.5% among coupled gay men, 17.2% among cohabiting gay men).

A contextual consideration of the distribution of motivations for parental desires, of the distribution of motivations for lack of parental desires, and of the increasing gap between coupled and cohabiting gay men's likelihood to express the desire to have a child suggests that gay men still see bio-social ties as more effective in insuring a positive parental relationship with a child than care-taking ties and social ties modelled on them. The more contemporary Italian gay men see their prospective parental experience as lacking female involvement and envision this parental experience as shared with their same-sex partner, the less they are likely to desire children, and the likelier they are to say that their status as male homosexuals prevents them from wanting to be parents. When they could count on the boost to care-taking resources granted by committed coupledness, gay men disinvest in parental futures. In the contemporary culture that sees children as invaluable public goods, they call the accusation of being parental free-riders on themselves.

This does not seem to be the case for lesbians. The high incidence of altruism and need for caring as a motivation for parental desires (46.8%) among the relatively small share of childfree coupled lesbians who wanted children in 1995-96 suggests that they were especially motherhood-oriented women, as Hakim (2000: 6-7, 89-93) would call them. Cohabiting lesbians who wanted children in 1995-96 were more attentive evaluators of the resources they could mobilise as parents, as pointed out by the incidence of motivations for lack of parental desires among them, and were especially likely to give importance to their couple relationship as the motivation for their parental desires (23.3% of them did). By 2012-13, coupled lesbians become likelier than cohabiting lesbians to see their partner relationship as the motivation for wanting a child (30.3% vs. 24.3%). However, cohabiting lesbians report their right to have a child as equal citizens as the motivation for their parental desires more than lesbians in any other relational status and gay men in all relational statuses: 24.3% of them do. Considering the preoccupation with external obstacles to the realisation of parental desires that cohabiting lesbians who do not want children report in 2012-13, cohabiting lesbian prospective parents' insistence on parental rights should be interpreted as a strong lamentation of the obstacles posed by exclusionary legal provisions to especially cherished parental projects.

Lesbians seem to have a clear record of cultural migration from parenthood envisioned as bio-social inheritance to parenthood envisioned as realisable in relational conditions supporting commitment to care-taking tasks through interpersonal recognition and happiness. However, looking at the trends in their preferred means to achieve parenthood their record gets murky⁴⁸ (tab. 5.5). In 1995-96, coupled and cohabiting lesbians were likelier to want a child through adoption (48.9% and 51.4%) than artificial insemination (42.4% and 40%). In 2012-13, the reverse is true. The preference for artificial insemination is more marked among cohabiting lesbians (75.8% would choose artificial insemination, 35.5% adoption) than coupled lesbians (respectively 67.9% and 47.8%). The more lesbians see their parental desire as a realisable and desirable project, the more they wish for a child that is biologically related to them. This is especially striking when considering that, endowed with unparalleled specialisation in care-taking, female same-sex couples should have comparatively little need to mobilise bio-social ties in their projects of parental happiness.

Tab. 5.5 Percentages of coupled and cohabiting childfree lesbians who want children through artificial insemination or through adoption, in 1995-96 and 2012-13, Italy.

	1996-96		2012-13	
	Coupled	Cohabiting	Coupled	Cohabiting
Artificial insemination	42.4	40	67.9	75.8
Adoption	48.9	51.4	47.8	35.5
<i>N</i>	92	35	184	62

Source: 'LGB 1995-96' and 'LGB 2012-13'.

⁴⁸ In tab. 5.5, gay men's preferences regarding paths to parenthood are not reported. No answer regarding surrogacy was available to respondents. The question on childfree lesbians' and gay men's preferred means to have a child did not explicitly state that multiple answers were allowed. In 1995-96, respondents were about equally as likely to give only one answer and to give more than one answer, and the 'LGB 1995-96' research team coded the data as referring to a question with multiple answers (a binary variable for each answer and for each case in which the respondent had answered for at least one option). In 2012-13, respondents were about equally as likely to give only one answer and to give more than one answer and at similar rates to those observed in 1995-96. The coding system used for 'LGB 1995-96' was used for 'LGB 2012-13'. Respondents choosing the answer 'Other' when asked about their preferred means to have a child are not treated as missing. For wording of questions and answers, see Appendix A.

Cohabiting gay men and lesbians today are the most attentive evaluators of the different resources they can mobilise to be care-taking parents and enjoy parental happiness, and at the same time express the most problematic aspects of gendered dissidence from care-taking parenthood. In the next section, I look into interview data on same-sex cohabiting couples in 2012-13 to see if, behind the picture of gay men's disinvestment in care-taking parenthood and lesbians' embracement of bio-social ties, we can glimpse a more secure lesbian and gay compliance to the contemporary social meaning of the child. As we will see, the potential for transformation in the life course of homosexual parents is hidden behind the many meanings that different ties to children can have to prospective parents, with their complex and metaphorical usages.

5.2.2. *'The gift': parental desires in same-sex cohabiting couples*

In contemporary Italy, as recalled in Chapter 1, adoption, second-parent adoption, and assisted reproductive technologies are accessible only to heterosexual couples, and surrogacy is prohibited. Nevertheless, when interviewing women in same-sex cohabitation, fertility and parenthood desires often came up as part of the couples' projects without the need to introduce the subject in the conversation. This was never the case with gay male interviewees. Many of the women, whether lesbian or adopting other sexual identity labels, spoke of parenthood as a long-held desire and project. The contrast with the following account given by Ferdinando when asked about the project to have a child is evident.

Honestly, I've never thought about it, I haven't thought about it yet, and maybe I will never think about it. I mean, we hail from a cultural background, a social background, a familial world in which same-sex couples were non-existent. [Where I come from] homosexuality did not exist at all. When I understood I was gay I thought I was the only one in the whole world. [...] One of the first things I had to realise was that I would never have children or a family. Today, I have a family, and I feel I've conquered so much, I've fought so much. I don't know, a child is something so much further down on this road, I almost can't figure having one [...] being sadly aware that in Italy we're falling behind regarding these rights like in some many other things. Homosexual parenthood is everywhere in Italy, despite what many believe, even more that people know, but me myself, I haven't yet walked the personal path that leads you to wanting a child, it's not been my life. (G1.1)

Ferdinando clearly states the role of pervasive homophobia on the direction his life course has taken and will likely take in the future when asked about the prospect to have a child. The role that partner relationships as a central resource homosexuals consider when thinking about parenthood also comes up. Ferdinando

says he never thought about having children because, in his life course, the precondition of having a stable loving relationship could not be taken for granted. Institutional support for parental desires is also mentioned. When same-sex desiring people manage to overcome obstacles to their relational happiness and parenthood becomes a thinkable option, Ferdinando explains, the many difficulties it entails call for legal and public support for such projects.

Lesbian partners often started mentioning their couple relationship as an aspect of their parental projects by saying that some disagreement over the desire for parenthood between them and their partner emerged in the past and in the present. This disagreement hung on the material difficulties of parental projects that homosexuals clearly see. Usually, one of the two partners is originally more committed to fertility and parenthood as a life prospect and readier to face material and legal obstacles. The long, often rehearsed and often taken up conversations on the possibility of having and raising a child between lesbian partners focus on these practical and economic matters even when they are sparked by principled choice. This can be observed in Anna's account of her conversations with her partner Pilar.

She's got this thing about owning a house and having a baby, it's her life project, she's not going to compromise on it. I'm different, I stop and think it through. She just doesn't see the other options or the obstacles, what's important to her is her maternal instinct. This is how we talk about it usually: she asks me when we're going to do it and I tell her to wait. It's much more difficult for me, I don't hide it...I tell her that it's going to happen, I don't think it's impossible, but she hears what she wants to hear. So, this thing lingers on our relationship, because we have to be aware of the fact that the moment is not right, we barely manage to earn a living for ourselves. There're many practicalities to consider. She'd do it tomorrow, you might say she'd do it without even thinking about it [...] for now that's how it works out: she proposes it, I say we need to wait. (L5.1)

Most of the times, lesbian partners' financial and work considerations focus on preserving a decent standard of living. Sometimes, it is a matter of deciding if one's own job is compatible with parenthood, or parenthood is compatible with reaching the career goals that have been set. Alessandra raises this kind of objections, even if she was a strenuous and effective advocate of parenthood when she was faced with her partner Sara's reluctance to the idea. The partners recall it took years for Alessandra to convince Sara they could have a child as a couple, but now Sara is more convinced than ever and Alessandra regained her original positive attitude towards their parental projects. Sara wants to undertake the pregnancy and has contacted experts to step on the difficult path of artificial insemination. The fact that Alessandra does not have any close relatives is also relevant for the partners.

Sara: It's clear that I'd be the pregnant mother [...] because I have a stronger desire for pregnancy, she's obsessed with her physique, she's afraid to gain weight, that kind of things. She's a hypochondriac. She's afraid she would spend nine months in pain and preoccupation and she'd make me go through nine terrible months, so that wasn't even a problem, we didn't even talk about it, it was natural. Besides, I have a family that supports me, if anything happened she doesn't have a legally recognised role but I'm certain my parents would recognise her role, even in the absence of laws. The other way around would be difficult, so that's a practical aspect of it. It was an emotional decision, completely based on our feelings, but this practical consideration did play a role, we know I'd be more protected and so it's better if I do it. I wouldn't stand her complaints for nine months, she'd complain about pains every three seconds, please spare me! (L8.1)

The motives behind the partners' decision that Sara will be the one to carry the child are practical, stemming from a personal preference in terms of the bodily transformation and aches of pregnancy and on a strategy of protection of their socio-legal ties to the child through biological ties in absence of laws supporting same-sex parenthood. In a few cases among the couples interviewed, the desire to experience pregnancy is the reason why one of the partners has brought the desire for children in the relationship. It is more common for pregnancy to be just an aspect of the desire for parenthood in lesbian couples choosing artificial insemination and balancing different or emerging commitments to the prospective baby. Gloria and Daniela are much less ready to become parents than Sara and Alessandra, but they both knew they wanted a child before meeting their current partner. They feel too young and insecure in their careers now. However, they went into details about the possible paths to parenthood.

Gloria: We were talking about the possibility of insemination with an unknown donor. She told me she would like to give birth, I don't feel the need to do it, and we thought at first we could take my ovum, take her brother's semen, fecundate it and she'd be the gestational mother and go through pregnancy. I mean, if we include her brother he'd be some sort of uncle/dad, he'd have a connection to the child. One way or the other, it's ok for me. If I could choose, it's obvious I'd want the baby to look like me, but it's bullshit, adoption is good for me just as much, but if I had the choice I'd choose a baby that looks like me, if I can't choose I want a baby in any case. (L4.1)

Daniela: She wants our children to have both her genetic makeup and mine, like a baby with her eyes and a baby with my feet, so I said we could ask my brother, we look very alike and he's got no wishes to be a parent, we could ask him his semen. So, take her ovum, fecundate it *in vitro* and I'd be the gestational mother. She doesn't feel like going through pregnancy. After we discovered I was sick she told me she'd do it, though. I'd do it immediately. After a few years we realised that asking my brother for his semen was a huge complication, I mean you can do it, you need to go to a Swiss clinic, pay a shitload of money, it's the three of us, he gives his semen, she gives her ovum, you fecundate it

and then you implant it and you wait and see if it works. It'd be much easier if I chose a donor and went through assisted insemination. We were talking about it a few days ago, she told me that this way the baby wouldn't look like her and in that case she'd want to have another baby that looks like her and she'd get pregnant. But, whatever, it'd make no difference, but she cares for this thing about hereditary traits. But if I give birth to a baby and it has my genetic makeup, she'd feel like the mother just as much, but, you know... We don't know, maybe she's going to have it, I wouldn't mind. (L4.2)

The two partners would like their child to have the genetic makeup of both. At the same time, they know that the desire for parenthood they share can take them to different solutions. The financial costs of their preferred path to parenthood, *in vitro* fertilisation of Gloria's ovum with Daniela's brother's semen and implantation of the fertilised ovum in Daniela's womb, make it hard to realise. Daniela went through a recent serious illness that could make it difficult for her to be the gestational mother, even if that was the original plan. When I interviewed them, the two partners were considering different solutions, from Gloria taking up the gestation in the *in vitro* fertilisation project to assisted reproduction for any of the two partners with an unknown donor's semen in foreign clinics without the extraction and implantation of the fertilised ovum.

Strategic deployment of procreative and gestational potential between lesbian partners is a common form of management and negotiation of different commitments to the idea of family. Even when present, the realisation of a gestational desire does not command lesbian partners' fertility projects. The mystique of biological relatedness with one's own child goes a longer way (Nordqvist and Smart 2014: 88-91), but it does not override the idea that the child is valuable mainly as a shared project with the partner, making it possible for lesbian partners to negotiate relatedness to the child both as an end towards which to strive and a means towards an easier route to and through parenthood.

Just as in the matter of gestational procreative labour required by couple parental wishes, lesbians are attentive to their partners' needs in terms of balancing between the prospective duties and gains of parenthood and the costs they might entail in terms of personal independence and individual goals. Celeste and Vanessa are two partners with a 10 year age gap. They both desire to experience parenthood with their partner. Vanessa, the older partner, is much more settled in her career than Celeste. When I asked her about her and Celeste's future plans, she mentioned children spontaneously, but she also put the greatest stress on how she was engaged in rationalising her and Celeste's parental wishes.

Luigi: What are your future plans with Celeste? How far in the future do you look into?

Vanessa: Our capability to look into the future is kind of blocked. It's because of a contingent situation, it's all about financial difficulties and managing our lives, we don't lack anything in commitment and maturity. What I mean is that we've been talking about having kids for quite a long time [...] but we have to consider the...let's say the financial

and work situation. I say this because Celeste is still trying to find her balance at work and thus, I think, she's in a moment in her life in which she still needs to figure it out. [...] I wouldn't want her to rush into anything. It's true, I'm ageing and that's a problem. She's attentive to all my needs and I don't push her against her needs. [...] It's one of the reasons I'd be perfectly ok if we had a family, if we had kids. So many women...you can see it in their personality [...] they become completely subjugated when they have kids, the couple relationships doesn't matter anymore to them. I don't want kids like that, a kid is something different from your partner. A kid is a kid and it's not all of my life nor all of my world. I don't like women and couples that see their realisation in having a baby. We talked about it in clear terms: if it doesn't work out, it's no problem. It's something we wish for, we would be very happy. If we don't manage we won't go for aggressive treatment. I've got friends who spent 8-9 years trying to have a baby and after that their relationship crumbled amidst regrets and pain. Everything because of the dream of a traditional family. (L1.2)

Celeste and Vanessa are both ready to be the gestational mother of their child. At the same time, they agree on the fact that no child is better than a child that would disrupt the younger partner's future job prospects. They are also aware of the difficulties and obstacles of artificial insemination. With Celeste expressing substantially similar views, the two partners prioritise their couple relationship over the parental desires they harbour, experiencing Ferdinando's dilemma from another point of view: the couple relationship is the most important emotional resource in parental projects. Moreover, Celeste and Vanessa and other lesbian prospective parents show that the centrality of the couple in parental desires entails a careful consideration of how the partners can collaborate to realise a parenthood that is at the same time true to the desires of both partners, in terms of timing and relatedness, and respectful of both partners' fragile arrangement of resources and lifestyle choices. In their case, it is mostly a matter of work career. As we have seen, other lesbian couples also consider and weigh their preferences regarding gestational labour.

Lesbian partners' interviews allow us to see that bio-social ties are much more negotiable and less important to lesbian couples than it seemed from survey data. The focus of their parental desires is both partners' readiness to be happy parents, that is parents who can mobilise fundamental resources for the happy development of the child. Lesbians embrace a strong version of the contemporary attention to the quality of the relationship in the parent-child dyad. If, as Billari (2009) notes, contemporary individuals see their own happiness as a central asset to embark into parenting projects, Italian lesbian couples put a strong emphasis on both the 'happiness of commonality', *i.e.* the idea that they will be happy to have a child also because their partner will be happy, and the 'commonality of happiness', the idea that it is their duty to manage the different aspects of fertility and parenthood in order to preserve their partner's happiness in parenthood. In this scenario, bio-social parenthood and couples' interpersonally recognised social tie

to the child support each other because the mobilisation of lesbian women's own procreative and gestational potentialities is a particularly direct route to fulfilling the couple's desire for parenthood, and thus enrich one's own happiness through the creation of one's partner's happiness. Sometimes, a genetic and gestational connection to the child is also an end in itself and a source of individual happiness. But it is not as important as knowing that a jointly planned child can come into the couple's life at the right time and enrich each partner's life with the happiness emerging from parenthood and from the happiness of having a happy partner.

In their study of the social meaning of the child in Norwegian heterosexual couples, Ravn and Lie (2013) inquire into the taken-for-granted centrality of the joint decision between partners in fertility projects, and conclude that

[t]he decision to have a child [...] is partly pragmatic, partly magic. Magic, in the sense that [...] [t]hese decisions are assumed to be about love, caring and belonging [...] this magic has to do with the interpretation of this part of life as something [...] unique between the individuals involved [...] a desirable family unit in accordance to contemporary cultural ideals is one in which the child choice is a joint decision and, at the same time, two autonomous decisions.

In a national context characterised by high gender equality, thus little difference in individual decisional autonomy between women and men, the desire for parenthood presents a paradoxical quality: it is ideally both dependent on the couple and articulated by each individual autonomously. This applies to Italian lesbian couples as much as to Norwegian heterosexual couples. According to Ravn and Lie, the paradox of the coexistence of joint and individual decisions in couple fertility is resolved by prospective parents by mobilising the magical reasoning of love, an ideally infinite commitment to someone else. Italian lesbian couples show us the internal workings of making joint and individual decisions go together: in the couples I interviewed, no joint decision could be taken without being attentive to preserving one's partner's happiness, thus her own individual decisions regarding fertility and parenthood, because this happiness is part of the desired package of child-bearing and child-rearing lesbians expect as individuals who know that raising a child in a happy household is the most culturally valued form of parenthood in contemporary times.

When expressing the desire to have a child, cohabiting gay men seem to be expecting exactly the same kind of experience from fertility and parenthood. Tito talks about this project of common happiness with his partner Lorenzo.

There's this picture where we hold a baby and you just see it's the most natural thing in the world, anyone would start thinking about it. The main problem [...] is the cost, it costs so much. [...] You need to travel to countries where assisted reproduction is legal, you need to find a gestational mother, it's an expensive procedure we can't afford right

now. But we really want to. What makes you immortal and happy is family. Having a family is the most important objective me and Lorenzo must have. It gives meaning to life. I'm a true optimist: we are lucky we don't have many expenditures on the house [...] Lorenzo would be a great dad and I would too. (G2.1)

Gay men see paths to parenthood in which their genetic connection to the child is assured as more difficult to thread than lesbians do. They value this genetic connection, as Tito's spontaneous choice for surrogacy shows, but they do not have a gestational body to put to work for their own and their partner's happiness. Similarly to lesbian partners quoted above, Tito bemoans the additional obstacles posed by the lack of legal access to assisted reproductive technologies and gestational surrogacy. At the same time, as seen for lesbian partners, the idea that parenthood would be a shared experience between partners is emotionally powerful: Tito mentions his feelings in seeing himself and Lorenzo as a parental couple as laying at the core of his realisation that he wants to be a parent. Lorenzo harbours similar parental desires as Tito. However, disagreement between partners' parental desires is more common among gay couples than among lesbian couples, posing an additional and decisive obstacle to gay parenthood.

Emanuele and Bruno's case is a good illustration of the complex solutions gay men try to find to reach the happiness they expect as parents when even agreement between partners' parental desires is lacking. Emanuele (G4.2) is a 22 year old gay man who does not desire to be a parent. He refers to his young age as one reason, but not the only reason. He also believes, citing the sexual biology of reproduction as proof, that gay men might not be meant to reproduce and parent. Bruno (G4.1) is his 36 years hold cohabiting partner. He would like to become a parent, and he has tried to become one in his ongoing relationship with Emanuele.

Some time before I interviewed Bruno, a female friend of his who lives abroad contacted him and asked for his semen in order to get pregnant. He enthusiastically accepted, cherishing the idea he could contribute to bringing a new life into the world, even if it had been agreed that this child would live his whole life with the mother and see her as the only parent. He told me that he would prefer to be a true, care-taking parent, and supported by his partner's similar desires at that. This situation being unattainable, he would have loved to donate his semen to his friend, had she not backed out in the end because of personal problems. Bruno's case is a witness to the fact that the valorisation of the well-functioning parent-child dyad based on the parent's commitment to fertility and parenthood as expressions of individual realisation is such a central cultural value that he, as a gay man, decides that participating in making this happen contributes to his own happiness despite him not being able to enjoy the happiness of being this child's parent. Gay men such as Bruno are somewhat similar to altruistically motivated surrogate mothers, who see the children they beget as a gift to prospective parents (Jadva *et al.* 2003).

Emanuele and Ferdinando remind us that many, if not most gay men do not see parenthood as a walkable path yet. Tito and Lorenzo's optimism regarding parenthood and commitment to becoming parents, however, might be spreading attitudes among gay men. As seen in the previous subsection, in 1995-96 cohabiting lesbians were already especially likely to want children. They were already embracing the contemporary contextual focus on commonality and happiness as linked resources in parenthood projects, being likelier than single and coupled lesbians to say that their parental wishes emerged from their couple relationship and were based on the desire to complete the couple relationship. In 2012-13, once the desire for parenthood has been normalised among lesbians, both coupled and cohabiting lesbians are likelier than single lesbians to refer to the couple relationship as the source of their parental wishes, pointing to a wider diffusion of the 'double care-taking culture of parenthood': care for the child and care for the partner's parental projects as mutually reinforcing sources of happiness. In 1995-96, gay men's motivations behind the desire for parenthood did not vary according to relational status. In 2012-13, gay men start embracing the parental culture already displayed by lesbians two decades before: cohabiting gay men are likelier to say they want children because of their relationship with their partner than single or coupled gay men. The double care-taking culture of parenthood is taking hold of them as well.

If in lesbian cohabiting couples parental projects are the stuff of magic, gay cohabiting couples see the child as a gift someone else can afford, even with their help, but they and their partners cannot. These seemingly different cultures of parenthood can be seen as stemming from a similar embracement of the contemporary value of the child. As argued in Zelizer's (1985) account, based on Thorstein Veblen's (1965/1899) classic sociological theory and discussed in the previous section, in the transition from the first to the second demographic era the child becomes a luxury good. Italian lesbians' and gay men's changing parental desires, seen through Qvortrup's (2005) account of the transition from the first phase to the second phase of the second demographic era, point out that another classic sociological theory describes the emerging contemporary social meaning of the child: the theory of the mutual construction of gift exchange and community advanced by Marcel Mauss (2002/1950: 83).

Once collectively agreed that children's value is directly proportional to the resources invested in creating it, and discovered that adult care-taking ties are the most precious of resources to be invested in children, the child switches from a luxury good to a good that cannot be culturally distinguished from its producer, as Mauss (2002/1950: 84-85) wrote of the ritual gift. Raising a happy and functional child becomes synonymous with giving oneself to another person, someone who cares for the care-taker enough to repay her or him in the same, inestimable coin: contributing to the exact same task. Lesbians and gay men, as heterosexuals, find this immediate community created by gift exchange in their loved ones, usually their partners, because they see these people as the ones that most surely will feel

that they need to give back and know how to do it.

As such, lesbians' and gay men's changing parental desires and growing compliance to the contemporary meaning of the child foreground engagement with mutually supporting relational and gender norms in their gradual abandonment of bodily and heterosexual limits to parenthood, but also unexpected further reconsideration of relational norms. In preceding generations of Italian lesbians and gay men, the interconnection between creation and cultural valuing of bio-social ties to children, at the expenses of care-taking ties, and the role that different-sex coupledness had in them caused homosexuals to forgo the desire for parenthood. Today, lesbians increasingly see their female partners as worthy of receiving the parental gift, and gay men also step onto this path. Care-taking happiness does not exclusively stem from heterosexual coupledness and is at the root of diverse parental communities. As I discuss in the concluding section, the potential life-course-altering influence that is embedded in new lesbian and gay parental desires' focus on care-taking communities, the role that gendered bodies play in these communities through their unequal procreative capacities, and the inclusion of these communities in the wider public community that recognises the inestimable value of the child take us back to my original and last research question: how lesbian and gay generations and sexual citizenship relate to each other.

5.3. Conclusions

Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 223-224) saw Italian lesbian couples pursuing parenthood in the mid 1990s through the lens of the fragility of these relationships caused by their marginality in respect to accepted familial norms.

Homosexual families are fragile because their members do not know what socio-cultural norms they should follow as kin. [...] In Italy, as in other Western countries, kinship is a cultural system based on a significance of consanguinity, not observed in other societies. According to this cultural system (centred on the symbol of the sexual encounter between a wife and a husband), the father is as genetically related to the child as the mother. [...] The kinship system in Italy and other Western countries is slightly transformed in the past thirty years, considering the diffusion of blended families emerging from divorces and remarriages. [...] However, these families are still built on a man and a woman, both related by blood to their new offspring. Lesbian couples who raise children born in a dissolved heterosexual marriage or via artificial insemination are especially distant from Western systems of kinship.

A revisitation of Italian lesbians' and gay men's parental desires points out that, on the contrary, they are increasingly aware of what parenthood entails and requires.

They are so committed to this contemporary parental culture that they take their parental decisions in light of their ability to secure the energy-consuming, life-altering and particularly efficient parental resource of stable romantic coupledom or other similarly happiness-producing relationships. This leaves relatively little room for doubt regarding the fact that their compliance to the contemporary culture of care-taking parenthood is settled enough for them to be able to easily take up the many parental skills and techniques that can be learned from experience, observation, and education (McGowan 2010).

Nevertheless, we can see that no culturally established model of homosexuality in past and recent history provides individuals with clear norms regarding their prospects and roles as parents. In embracing fertility and parenthood as their desires, contemporary Italian lesbians and gay men are escaping the limits posed by revisited relational and gender norms of the preceding generations and foreshadowing a new possible development of homosexuality. At the same time, this emergent reformulation of gender and relationships displays the features of a generational transformation. Despite being embedded in individual fantasies, it is modulated and experienced according to lesbians' and gay men's personal life courses. Lesbians and gay men silence, assert, and become aware of their parental desires because of their capabilities in building families and communities. They see every detail of their bio-social connection to the child as dependent on negotiations of desires in these families and communities. They clearly embrace the contemporary norm that each child deserves all the happiness its family and community can give, and therefore commit to building this happiness for themselves. The care-taking communities Italian lesbians and gay men will create are fundamental aspects of their future life courses and, at the same time, highly unpredictable.

Queerness, as the potential of disturbance of accepted norms that is embedded in human interactions and especially in sexual diversity because of its nature of bodily insurgence (Johnson 2015: 118-121), emerges in lesbians' and gay men's choice to pursue parenthood in stable same-sex couples that, at an ideal level, puts them as distant from the traditional bond between parenthood and heterosexual marriage as possible. This queerness is not completely cancelled by their assimilation to the rule of the best interest of the child. The rationalities emerging from lesbians' and gay men's parental desires, and the practicalities they envision in their paths to parenthood, unsettle relation and familial norms.

My interviewees offer hints on this. We can recall Gloria and Daniela's original plan to include Daniela's brother in their fertility and parenthood projects by choosing him as sperm donor and visualising his role in the family as an 'uncle/dad' to the child. Or Tito and Lorenzo's wish that they could more easily find a gestational mother for their child. Or Bruno's enthusiastic participation as a sperm donor in his long-time friend's parental desires. All of these accounts position lesbians and gay men in newly fashioned imagined parental communities.

Two other aspects of lesbians' and gay men's commitment to the creation of new care-taking communities can be observed. On one hand, as recalled by all my interviewees who wanted children, a child would revitalise their relationships with their families of origin. One lesbian woman says that their parents would be so happy to have a niece or a nephew to take care of that they would just 'forget everything else'. On the other hand, as recalled by my interviewees and shown by the appearance of organised groups of lesbian and gay parents in Italy and elsewhere (La Delfa and Von Kaenel 2015), lesbian and gay prospective parents know that looking for help and guidance from likely-minded communities of friends and experts empowers them to overcome the many obstacles to their projects of care-taking parenthood. Even when distant from established organisations of non-heterosexual parents, lesbian and gay prospective parents recognise the importance of these supportive relationships. A lesbian interviewee who preferred to keep away from established organisations explained that looking at and listening to a gay couple in her and her partner's close friendship network as they were transitioning to parenthood made her understand that anyone can be a parent, regardless of the biological link to the child, if she or he knows how to balance care-taking tasks and personal happiness.

These queer aspects of lesbian and gay parental projects explain the uncertainties and debates plaguing the interdisciplinary debate on this matter recalled in Chapter 1. Demographic doubts on how to count lesbian and gay household with children are rooted in the complex arrangements of lesbian and gay care-taking communities. Psychological research moved from considering heterosexual parenthood as the benchmark on which to measure lesbian and gay parents' capabilities to seeing lesbian and gay parents as potentially more capable than heterosexuals because, being removed from traditional heterosexual procreation and the bio-social ties to the child it entails, they are positioned as pioneers in the construction of parental communities bound by contemporarily valued care-taking ties.

Legal-theoretical and sympathetic sociological recent preoccupations with different procreative paths, and especially surrogacy, also stem from the queerness of lesbian and gay care-taking communities, but at the same time focus on the problematic role of gendered bodies. In outsourced gestational labour, the risk is for gestational mothers to be forced to sever ties to a child to which they have grown close or to undermine their own well-being by ceding their procreative potential in disadvantageous conditions, and in the process potentially harm the well-being of the children for whom they are or might become the primary care-takers (Danna 2015: 109-118).

From this point of view, what is queered (using this term as synonymous to 'problematised') by the emergence of a new socio-cultural model of homosexuality that entails homosexual parenthood is not the well-being of children desired by homosexual parents and raised in multi-parental, bio-socially complex families. It is the interrelationship between the three pillars of

contemporary Euro-American polities identified by sociologist Esping-Andersen (1999: 35-36): families, markets, and governments. Esping-Andersen (2002) argues that these three pillars should share the aim of elimination of obstacles and inequalities in children's development, because it is the main path towards a just distribution of resources and well-being in contemporary Euro-American polities. The possible negative externalities of contemporary parental projects cannot be ignored when complying with this collective aim. By highlighting the possibility that a child's well-being is secured by harming another child's well-being even before any of these children are born, but in no way creating or necessarily intensifying it (Therborn 2013: 55-62, 199), homosexual parenthood puts market and government institutions in front of problematic aspects of their current systems of allocation of resources between families. This reveals an enigma lying at the core of Esping-Andersen's project: can we be sure that various forms of investment in children do not harm other children's well-being, or their parents' or prospective parents' well-being, and that the harm these children suffer undermines all children's development and well-being?

Regardless of sexual orientation, gender composition, and reciprocal relationships, the value of parental communities to polities depends on what level of care-taking these communities are able to mobilise. This means from what children these parents raise, and if the value of these children to the collectivity trumps potential harms these same children can run into because of the ways their care-taking communities secure the resources they employ to sustain their development. As such, lesbian and gay parental desires take us back to the link between communities and citizenship discussed at the close of Chapter 1.

In the concluding chapter of the thesis, I turn to this question and seek answers in the generational transformations described in this and previous chapters. Recalling contemporary Italian lesbians' and gay men's engagement with relational and gender norms, I argue that it qualifies them as a new homosexual generation because it carries them through transformed life courses. Looking at the narration of lesbian and gay existence that contemporary Italian homosexuals can weave with their new life courses, I argue that it qualifies them as a new homosexual generation because it allows them to look at their reinvention of lives as a continuation of past same-sex desiring people's engagement with relational and gender norms. I then ask what kind of communities emerge from lesbians' and gay men's new engagements and narrations, and how and why sexual Italian citizenship might start supporting these communities by responding to unfolding transformations in lesbian and gay lives. In doing so, Italian sexual citizenship would leave behind its decades-long and cross-nationally striking immobility that motivated my research and its generational approach.

Conclusions

*We barely have time to react
in this world, let alone rehearse.*

- Ani DiFranco

My research rested on the widespread affirmation of sexual citizenship as a set of transformations in norms regarding sexual diversity and responding to contemporary change in the lives of sexual minorities. I asked if Italian lesbians' and gay men's lives were going through a cross-nationally untypical period of stasis in the past two decades that could be deduced from the stagnation of Italian sexual citizenship.

Linking the history of homosexuality in Euro-American countries to sociological reflections on the relevance and mutability of the role of sexuality in contemporary women's and men's lives, I adopted a generational approach to sexuality. This framework is aimed at observing and analysing change in life courses in light of individuals' reformulation and reinvention of social norms. Personal relationships and gender emerged as two socially normed historical constructs that lesbians and gay men potentially revisit in their sexual developmental trajectories and strategies of resilience, in their experiences of stable couple commitment and institutionalisation of same-sex cohabitation, and in their parental desires and construction of the meaning of the child. As discussed in the concluding sections of the substantive chapters, Italian lesbians and gay men born between the mid 1970s and the early 1990s see meaning in their sexual diversity in light of the relational and gender norms that reached them through lesbians and gay men born between the mid 1950s and the early 1970s, in whose legacy a centuries-long history of engagement with such norms is embedded. They reinvent these meanings once again, and create sexual, relational, and familial life courses that could not be observed in previous generations of same-sex desiring individuals.

In these concluding remarks, I discuss the transformations lesbian and gay lives underwent in the past two decades from the point of view of the narrative these lesbians and gay men can create to link their life choices to the ones their generational predecessors made. On the basis of this narrative, lesbians and gay men create the communities that support their well-being and life projects. Their communities are knit by sexual pluralist aims, and Italian sexual citizenship can change in order to support these pluralist aims.

Chapter 3 showed that contemporary Italian lesbians and gay men revisit the experience of sexual development. They displace the gender norms that limit their capability to realise sexually satisfying and interpersonally meaningful sexual

encounters by enforcing gender complementarity and silencing homosexual desires. In timing and contexts of their sexual milestones (first experience of same-sex attractions, first disclosure of same-sex attractions, first same-sex sexual contact, first different-sex sexual contact, first coming out to self), the last generations of lesbians and gay men are more similar across the gender divide than the ones preceding them. Embodying their same-sex desire as a decisive expression of potential love and cherished sexual well-being, lesbians and gay men unchangingly feel the need to see these positive emotions supported in their familial intimate life-world. The sexualisation of emerging commitment between partners, especially relevant among same-sex desiring women, is condemned in religious communities upholding inequality in sexual empowerment between genders weighing on female sexual agency. The protection of a vulnerable acceptance of their sexual desires undermines lesbians' sense of belonging to these non-accepting religions. Similarly to religious lesbians, bisexuals are especially vulnerable to homonegative repression. A changing lesbian and gay community, based on more liberal views in terms of sexual feelings, embraces and supports their well-being with greater conviction.

These newly embodied sexual desires unhinge relational norms from gender norms and result in the diffusion of modern sexual agency, *i.e.* the idea that individual sexual desire is the only legitimate criterion on which sexuality can be judged when no harm is done to others (Weeks 2010: 118, 140). Looking back at their generational predecessors, contemporary Italian lesbians and gay men can expand the narrative that Barbagli and Colombo (2007: 232-233) found in their immediate predecessors. This narrative saw same-sex desiring people across centuries as engaged with relational and gender norms to find partners that would adopt a lesbian or gay identity or show in other ways that they shared with them the will not to renounce to same-sex sexuality because of repressive forces or prioritised preoccupations. Contemporary lesbians and gay men include this aim in a wider experience of the necessity to find relationships and communities in which the value of modern sexual agency is respected.

With a complete view of contemporary lesbian and gay sexual development trajectories and strategies of resilience, we can look back at their transformations and see how this narration emerged. The ordering of sexual developmental milestones is especially telling. Italian lesbian youth of the contemporary generations tend to come out to themselves as homosexuals as an immediate step after feeling same-sex attractions for the first time. Two decades ago, they experienced sexuality with a different-sex partner before telling themselves they were homosexuals. Gay youth of today tell someone about their same-sex attractions earlier than their generational predecessors, and do not do so some time after their first same-sex sexual experience. These two transformations point out that lesbian and gay youth today decide early that their sexuality is not just a desire that needs to be followed, with all the attentions that the normative pull of different-sex sexuality in heteronormative societies requires. It is a part of their

life that they want to see recognised, cherished, and protected in their surroundings. They perceive it as a central feature of themselves and communicate so to intimate others. Not all lesbians and gay men go through these precise sexual developmental trajectories. The reinvention of these experiences allows us to see that same-sex desiring people see their sexuality with new eyes.

If lesbian and gay youth today look at their generational predecessors, they see Pride marches and subcultural venues. These moments and meetings emerged from a history of lesbian and gay reciprocal visibility. In the past, with the gradual affirmation of the model of modern homosexuality, reciprocal visibility became the path for lesbians and gay men to find and be with a stable romantic and sexual partner that would cherish their sexual diversity as they did (Barbagli and Colombo 2007: 232-233). Today, knowing that their surroundings can cherish who they are as sexual beings, lesbian and gay youth see this reciprocal visibility as an expression of public visibility, made up of all their private presences. They would not be able to do so, if their individual agency did not put them on the path of a life course in which sexual freedom is over and again snatched and negotiated. They would not be able to do so either, if their predecessors did not through their agency create these moments and meetings, reinventing homosexuality as it had been lived before. Being able to do so, they reinvent homosexuality as a new way to fight the old battle for sexual freedom.

Through the eyes of contemporary lesbian and gay youth, their predecessors' narrative centred on stable coupledness as the expression of a free sexuality was based on the choice to protect one's sexual freedom in times in which towering homophobia did not allow to do so while also expanding one's personal and public community further. We can see that their new, braver narration of free sexuality was already taking roots in the past. Comparing the sexual developmental trajectories of lesbian and gay youth twenty years ago and the ones lesbians and gay men experienced in preceding decades is revealing. Despite experiencing different sex sexual contact as the immediate first step after feeling same-sex attractions for the first time, as normative for same-sex desiring women in the past, Italian young lesbians surveyed in the mid 1990s swerved from the normative path by coming out to themselves as homosexuals before having had their first same-sex sexual contact. Young gay men, normatively looking for someone to whom to tell of their homosexuality as a last step in their sexual development, reinvented the norm by coming out to themselves as soon as they had their first same-sex sexual experience instead of doing so later in their sexual trajectories. Already twenty years ago, young Italian lesbians and gay men were creating a new way of living as homosexuals, and a new narration in which the path towards sexual freedom started from one's most immediate surroundings.

Not surprisingly, these young lesbians and gay men were the ones that through their 30s and 40s transformed many small Pride marches in the World Pride march in Rome in 2000 (Grigolo and Jörgens 2006; Ross 2008). Not surprisingly again, today's young lesbians and gay men can look at the past and

see their generational narration of a continued and embodied struggle for sexual freedom as telling a historical truth.

In doing so, today's young Italian homosexuals support the advancement of modern sexual agency not only in their private life courses, but also in their public communities. When they guide their interpersonal relationships towards respect of modern sexual agency, lesbians and gay men advance sexual pluralism by showing that male and female sexual agency do not need to be thought as complementary for individuals to follow their sexual desires. They go through decisive moments of construction of private sexually pluralist relationships and communities in the formative years of sexual developmental trajectories. As a sexual pluralist policy, wide diffusion of support to a positive view of same-sex sexuality in formative years holds particular promise (Rivers 2011: 185-188; Carnassale 2014; Gusmano 2014).

The implementation of policies supporting same-sex desiring individuals' positive embracement of their sexuality in formative years is sometimes considered unmanageable (Anatrella 2012: 49) because these trajectories directly unsettle the widely valued socio-cultural differences between genders (Gilligan 1982: 149-150, 167-173). However, public neutrality regarding lesbians' and gay men's suffering caused by heteronormativity or eradication of the problem posed by their suffering through the prevention of the emergence of same-sex desires poses a serious risk for sexually pluralist societies. In his review of the history of violence, Pinker (2011: 403-412) argues that the normative content of modern sexual agency is endemically challenged by male sexual violence targeting women, a form of violence traceable to the average male physical advantage over women and retreating because of the overall civilising process hinged on XXVIII century Enlightenment (Elias 2000/1939: 377-379). Not supporting lesbian and gay youth in their paths to sexual freedom reduces the reach of the civilisation process in sexuality by presenting sexuality as a sphere of human action in which indifference to individual sexual desire is legitimate. When considering gender difference and avoidance of sexual violence as two desirable social aims, the protection of contemporary lesbian and gay lives from homonegativity is a continued effort whose value is tied to the value that is recognised to women's well-being and freedom from sexual violence.

The struggles against homonegativity contemporary Italian lesbians and gay men engage in after embodying their sexual desire in contrast to gender complementarity point out how sexually pluralist policies can be implemented. On one hand, reaching the familial life-world of young same-sex desiring people is as relevant as it was twenty years ago (Saraceno 2003a; Bertone and Franchi 2008). On the other hand, looking contextually at the inclusion of bisexuals in the lesbian and gay community and at religious lesbians' encounters with internalised homophobia indicates that the fragmented world of sexual minority associations is a fundamental tool in the protection of lesbian and gay lives. Bisexuals and religious lesbians are two segments of the same-sex desiring population that

experience acute homonegativity. As shown by the case of bisexuals, through its growing embracement of modern sexual agency and unhinging of relational norms from gender norms the lesbian and gay community becomes increasingly able to empower these individuals' sexualities. The case of religious lesbians allows us to see that, in the struggle to enjoy positively framed sexuality when facing communities in which homonegativity is rooted and acute, same-sex desiring people might bear marks of resilience that distance them from sexual minority communities and their empowering influence, such as internalised homonegativity (Bertone *et al.* 2003c). As a sexual pluralist policy, support for the expressions of lesbian and gay culture and community should go hand in hand with support for internal debate and consideration of the unexpected ways socio-culturally diverse individuals might need to be included in the community in their own, non-normative terms (Richardson 2005; Ward 2008: 136-142; Rebucini 2015), as long as these terms do not result in non-negotiable repeal of modern sexual agency.

One of the most widely cherished aims in lesbian and gay communities is the formation of stable romantic couples. As shown by Marzullo and Herdt (2011), the legal recognition of same-sex relationships as equal to different-sex relationships supports the well-being of same-sex desiring youth and youth identifying as lesbian or gay. It could be considered as a policy that supports these individuals' relationships and communities and advances sexual pluralism. Social scientific expertise gathering around a critique of 'homonormativity', a successful concept in sexuality studies (Richardson 2015) but also, according to Brown (2012), a 'metropolitan concept that denigrates ordinary gay lives', sees the politico-legal focus on same-sex marital-like relationships as a central value in lesbian and gay lives differently. According to these critics, this struggle could be either a misinterpretation of same-sex desiring individuals' lives advanced by mainstream sexual minority social movements and their political allies (Roseneil *et al.* 2013), or a reality of contemporary homosexuality brought about by repressive assimilation of homosexuals in traditional relational norms smothering sexual pluralism through the affirmation of the socio-cultural centrality of inherently unequal coupledness (Warner 2000: 126-132).

The analyses carried out in Chapter 4 show that neither the first nor the second argument in critiques of homonormativity capture the reality of contemporary Italian lesbian and gay partners' linked life courses. Contemporary homosexuals in Italy continue to see stable couple relationships as a relational aspiration, and they growingly embrace partnered life as the setting for unparalleled reciprocal commitment and life-changing decisions. Moreover, as contemporary heterosexuals in Euro-American societies (Treas *et al.* 2014), homosexuals buy into marriage and marital-like relationships not as all-encompassing institutions to which individuals surrender their preoccupation with individual autonomy but as a flexible contexts of individual development (Barbagli and Kertzer 2005; Roisman *et al.* 2008).

The negotiated nature of this development results in what Heaphy *et al.* (2013: 160-161) call capsule couples: partners whose choices in exclusive mutual commitment, reaffirmed through time, are a strategy employed to judge what sources of individual well-being can be drawn from growing mutual commitment. Gender differences in the dating markets of lesbians and gay men are still profound. However, across the gender divide these individuals look for love in their dating markets, and engage with relational and gender norms to create a new institution of coupledness. Their paths to cohabitation do not follow a strict set of rules, and the commitment to one's own partner entailed by entrance in a cohabiting relationship is highly variable according to partners' values, needs, and prospects. In these cohabiting relationships, despite the advantage of the socio-economically stronger partner in controlling the flow of interpersonal financial support, norms of reciprocal support in careers and housework are present. Sexual non-monogamy and reliance on extra-couple relationships are somewhat discouraged, but only as measures taken to protect the emotional connection between partners allowing them to negotiate these matters when external conditions influence each partner's relational needs.

Non-formalised cohabitation is often felt as equivalent in practice to marriage, because what matters most is the emotional connection created by partners on which material co-dependence and binding agreements are negotiated. Formalisation of partners' unions through marriage or marital-like contracts is visualised as a tool to protect the couple relationship from life hardships and partners from possible negative outcomes of mutual commitment, to be employed when the nature and rules of the relationship have been negotiated between partners. In their linked life courses, contemporary lesbians and gay men engage with relational and gender norms by scripting love regardless of their and their partners' gender, and finding new ways to negotiate prosaic and mythic love to stay in loving relationships.

Italian lesbians and gay men assimilate to the originally heterosexually dominated and contemporarily changing culture of coupledness as a central aim in private choices. Arguably, they participate in the marginalisation and repression of non couple-centred and non-normatively framed sexual and romantic relationships (Donovan 2004; Richardson 2005). Johnson (2015: 162-166) employs the concept of affect, borrowed from queer analyses of sexuality and pointing to the shifting and plural emotional makeup of individual sexualities, to interpret why lesbians and gay men cross-nationally embrace the value of coupledness. She argues that same-sex desiring people experience their sexual and romantic drives as part of complex assemblages of interpersonal and communitarian ties in which coupledness might function as an individually controlled barricade against publicly enforced destinies of relational estrangement. As described by Collins (2004: 255-257), this emotional content of romantic and stable coupledness became an unprecedented focal point for the majority of same-sex desiring people once they witnessed the full-blown result of centuries of transformation in gender and

familial norms in Euro-American heterosexual populations. In historical terms, in wake of the post-WWII quasi-universal production of life-long intimacy through assortment between women and men with relative decisional and economic independency from their families and communities of origin.

Backed up by the momentum of this socio-cultural upheaval in the framing of what an individual rational path towards private bliss against opposing forces should be (Coontz 2004: 20-21), the norm of coupledness might require all the time capsule couples need to negotiate their relationships before being visibly shaken. The creation of capsule couples slowly moves towards individual and collective reconsideration of coupledness in its normative expressions. At the present moment, the relational communities of same-sex stable couples support contemporary lesbians' and gay men's well-being, advancing their sexual pluralist aims. Through their deeply negotiated nature, emerging from these individuals' engagement with relational and gender norms, these relationships do not undermine sexual pluralist aims. On the contrary, they advance the idea that each individual's subjectivity, sexual or otherwise, should be reflected in her or his intimate life-world. Materially and symbolically supporting these relationships through equalisation of the legal opportunities open to same-sex couples to those open to different-sex couples can be considered an additional effective policy in sexual pluralism.

In Chapter 5, we saw that the desire for parenthood spreads among Italian lesbians and gay men in the past twenty years. Lesbians who want children in Italy nowadays are the majority of the lesbian population. Almost all of them are lesbians whose procreative/parental potential is realised or realisable via the mobilisation of bio-social resources among which the presence of a same-sex partner plays a decisive role. Individuals who want children in Italy nowadays are a smaller share in the gay population than in the lesbian population. Almost all of them are gay men whose procreative/parental potential is realised or realisable via the mobilisation of various bio-social resources whose efficacy is weaker than resources mobilised by lesbians, and among which the presence of a same-sex partner plays a decisive role. Lesbians and gay men now buy into the same culture of parenthood as a difficult but worthy lifestyle of care-taking happiness. They do so as they engage with relational and gender norms to move from seeing children as meaningful parts of individual life courses because of parental ties insuring the continuation of biological and social lineages to doing so because of parental ties insuring that the child can enjoy as much care-taking resources, rooted in parental happiness, as possible.

For contemporary Italian lesbians and gay men, the production of parental happiness is tightly intertwined with romantic and stable coupledness. This is a social corollary to the above discusses centrality of coupledness in lesbian and gay relational life courses. Transformations in Italian lesbian and gay parental desires point out that homosexuals take the reconsideration of relational and familial norms even further than the diffusion of capsule couples allows them to. Seeing

the child mainly as a gift to others who participate in taking care of it, they advance a culture in which the complex communities of each child's care-takers are recognised and cherished. Considering the centrality of bio-social ties in the construction of Euro-American families (Pocar and Ronfani 2008: 230), it is likely that their normative force is even stronger than the one exerted by stable coupledom as a relational institution. Nevertheless, contemporary Italian lesbians and gay men engage with reformulation of this norm through their parental desires and projects. Other non-normative parental communities, such as bisexuals' and transgender persons' ones (Biblarz and Savci 2010), coparenting ones (Farr and Patterson 2013), and polyamorous ones (Pallotta-Chiarolli *et al.* 2013) benefit from the growing importance of care-taking advanced by lesbian and gay prospective parents.

Studies regarding the outcomes of children born to and raised by homosexual individuals and same-sex couples show that sexual orientation and gender composition of parents have no effect (APA 2004). Considering the best interest of the child, the importance of same-sex couple relationships in the production of parental happiness as a resource in childcare calls for the recognition of the couple ties between same-sex partnered care-takers and the parental ties between coupled care-takers and children (Long 2011; Winkler and Strazio 2011: 197-203). Moreover, considering the role of reciprocal gifts of happiness that children play in the carefully planned lesbian and gay stable couple relationships and communities, supporting lesbian and gay parental desires can be considered an additional effective sexual pluralist policy.

Parental projects do not only entail relational ties, but also inescapably gendered bodies. The role that gestational bodies should have in the creation of lesbian and gay families is in some cases contested. In lesbian assisted reproduction and in gestational surrogacy, a female prospective parent might want to create parental happiness through gestation for herself and her possibly present partner or for an individual or a couple with whom she does not share a parental project. These other individuals might appropriate the result of the woman's gestational labour in conditions that hurt this woman's well-being, thus the well-being of children for whom she might be or become a care-taker (Danna 2015: 109-115). This possibility goes against the values embedded in the parental culture lesbians and gay men embrace, based on the recognition of care-taking ties between parents and children as the most precious of resources because of their function in creating a happy child, *i.e.* a child that is contextually free to express her or his subjectivity and capable of being a future care-taker.

In the case of lesbian artificial insemination, as in the case of heterosexual procreation, partners agree that the interpersonally recognized tie with the child is a source of their parental happiness and protects them from the potential harms of appropriation of gestational labour. Surrogacy, through its commercial or quasi-commercial functioning, poses additional problems. Considering the best interest of the child, some advocate the prohibition of surrogacy (CORP 2015), already in

force in Italy. However, in the set of current and more fully ascertained ways markets and governments allocate resources among families and hurt the well-being of parents and prospective parents to secure the well-being of other parents and prospective parents (Therborn 2013: 168-173), surrogacy could be treated as a least problematic case. Differently from other sources of inequality between families emerging from the structural features of participating in the global labour market (Therborn 2013: 172-175), it is relatively easily kept inside the boundaries of bodily labour that is beneficial to the gestational mother via limitation and regulation of the commercial aspects of surrogacy agreements (Danna 2015: 159-171; Balzano 2016).

From the vantage point of parental desires, all policies supporting contemporary lesbians' and gay men's lives empower them to look for sexual pluralist communities, raise their children in these communities, or build communities that help other people raise children in societies where sexual pluralism is promoted. As recalled in Chapter 1, lesbian and gay individuals are a small minority of the contemporary Italian population. However, the protection and recognition of their sexual development, couple relationships, and parental projects advances not only their well-being, but also the nationally beneficial reconsideration of power differential between women and men (Billari and Dalla Zuanna 2008: 116-117, 165-166).

In Euro-American societies, same-sex desiring individuals who signal some level of personal investment in their non-heterosexuality without adopting a lesbian or gay identity have been recently observed to grow in numbers (Vrangalova and Savin-Williams 2012). Despite lack of research on the matter, this transformation is recently becoming of public interest in Italy (Luciottio 2016). These individuals are potentially distant from lesbian and gay culture and communities (Walker 2014; Ward 2015: 192-193), but their sexual empowerment benefits from lesbian and gay generations' unwavering engagement with relational and gender norms. It has likely already done so in the decades of transformation considered in this study, as the generations of lesbians and gay men born from the mid 1970s to the mid 1990s built familial, private, and public sexual pluralist communities even when the public instances of sexual citizenship were not following suit.

At the last turn of century, with a hundred years of sexual pluralisation to account for, social-scientific reflection on sexuality faced the ever-changing and increasingly fraught scenario of sexualities with queer analysis (Roseneil 2000). The widely discussed anti-identitarian edict of queer sexuality research is the most visible aspect of a wider anti-definitional stance that aims at keeping faith to the call of sexual anti-essentialism: to look into sexual diversity through times in which every definitional try can erase an ongoing individual or collective reformulation of sexuality (Eribon 2013; Johnson 2015: 102). Italian lesbians and gay men have been responding to this call with their everyday, personal, and ordinary choices.

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Appendix A

‘LGB 2012-13’ questionnaire⁴⁹

Survey on LGB individuals and their worlds

This questionnaire is the result of a collaboration between the National Bologna Pride Committee, other important LGBT associations, the Department of Education Science at the University of Bologna, and the Carlo Cattaneo Research Institute, a scientific research foundation with a long history of contributing to social and political research. This questionnaire is targeted to gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and all those who have, had, or desire sexual experiences with people of the same-sex, regardless of their current or past heterosexual experiences. The research data will be published in order to be evaluated by all stake-holders.

The questionnaire is anonymous. All information is protected by statistical secret. Your answers will be used only in aggregate form. For this research to be successful, you should answer to all questions sincerely and attentively. We ask you to read each question in its entirety before answering. Some of the questions will give you detailed instructions on how to answer. If you have any doubt, ask the people who are handing out the questionnaires: they will be glad to help. Once you answered to the questionnaire, fold it and bring it back to our stand, where it will be stored away. Answering to the questionnaire will take you about 10 minutes. We know it is quite a long time. We ask you to answer with the utmost attention. Remember: this is not a test. There are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers, only ‘your’ answers. This questionnaire is meant to be answered to individually and personally. We ask that you answer alone, without suggestions from friends or partners, and somewhere where you can think about your answers.

ATTENTION!!

- 1) Read all possible answers before answering, then check the box or the number corresponding to your answer.
- 2) You can choose more than one answer only when so stated.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ My English translation of the original questionnaire in Italian. All questions in the ‘LGB 2012-13’ questionnaire were included in the ‘LGB 1995-96’ questionnaire. Wordings and answers were unmodified from 1995-96 to 2012-13 for most questions. When wordings and answers were modified, it is so indicated in footnotes.

⁵⁰ Similar shares of respondents in 1995-96 and 2012-13 consistently interpreted some questions as allowing multiple answers even if not so stated. When this was the case, it is so indicated in footnotes. For additional discussion, see notes n. 38, 43, 44, 48.

A. Discovering your homosexuality

1. You define yourself as:⁵¹

1. Homosexual
2. Homosexual, and I sometimes have heterosexual encounters
3. Homosexual, and I often have heterosexual encounters
4. Bisexual
5. Heterosexual, and I often have homosexual encounters
6. Heterosexual, and I sometimes have homosexual encounters
7. I don't know

2. How old were you when you first felt any kind of attraction towards someone of the same sex?

Age: _ _

3. Have you ever told anyone that you are attracted to people of the same sex?

1. Yes
2. No (go to question n.6)

4. If you told someone, how old were you when you first told someone?

Age: _ _

5. If you told someone, who were the people you told for the first time? (you can choose more than one answer)

1. Heterosexual friend
2. Brother
3. Sister
4. Gay/lesbian friend
5. Mother
6. Father
7. Other relative (specify: _____)
8. Heterosexual boyfriend/girlfriend/spouse
9. Teacher
10. Personal doctor
11. Psychologist
12. Priest, nun or other religious figure
13. Gay/lesbian group
14. Other (specify: _____)

⁵¹ For a discussion of the rationales of the wording of this question and its answers, see Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.1.

6. How old were you when you first told yourself: 'I am homosexual/gay/lesbian/bisexual'?

Age: __

X: I never did

7. How old were you when you first had any kind of sexual contact with a same-sex partner?

Age: __

X: I never did (if your answer is 'never' go to question n.9)

8. For how long had you known the same-sex partner with whom you had your first same-sex sexual contact?

1. I had just met him
2. Less than a month
3. Less than a year
4. More than a year
5. I don't remember

9. How old were you when you first had any kind of sexual contact with a different-sex partner?

Age: __

X: I never did

10. If you were born again, would you rather be:

1. Homosexual/gay/lesbian
2. Heterosexual

B. Family of origin (and spousal relationship)

11. Which members of you family know about your homosexuality? (one answer for each member)

Mother:

1. Knows
2. Knows, but she pretends not to know
3. I believe she knows, but we never talked about it
4. Does not know
5. She is not there (because she died or any other reason)

Father:

1. Knows
2. Knows, but he pretends not to know
3. I believe he knows, but we never talked about it
4. Does not know
5. He is not there (because he died or any other reason)

Brother/s:

1. Know/s
2. Know/s, but he pretends/they pretend not to know
3. I believe he knows/they know, but we never talked about it
4. Do/es not know
5. He is/they are not there (because he/they died or any other reason)

Sister/s:

1. Know/s
2. Know/s, but she pretends/they pretend not to know
3. I believe she knows/they know, but we never talked about it
4. Do/es not know
5. She is/they are not there (because she/they died or any other reason)

Spouse:

1. Knows
2. Knows, but he/she pretends not to know
3. I believe he/she knows, but we never talked about it
4. Does not know
5. He/she is not there (because he/she died or any other reason)

Son/s, daughter/s:

1. Know/s
2. Knows, but he pretends/she pretends/they pretend not to know
3. I believe he knows/she knows/they know, but we never talked about it
4. Do/es not know
5. He is/she is/they are not there (because he/she/they died or any other reason)

12. How did the members of your family come to know about your homosexuality? (choose only one answer for all members of your family who know in any way, that is for all members of your family for whom you answered 1, 2, or 3 in the previous question. Do not answer for members of your family who do not know or are not there)

Mother:

1. I came out to her
2. I came out after she asked me
3. I made her understand (*e.g.*: I left clues)
4. She discovered it breaching my privacy (looking through your personal belongings, listening to your personal conversations...)
5. Another member of the family told her
6. Someone else told her

Father:

1. I came out to him
2. I came out after he asked me
3. I made him understand (*e.g.*: I left clues)
4. He discovered it breaching my privacy (looking through your personal belongings, listening to your personal conversations...)
5. Another member of the family told him
6. Someone else told him

Brother/s:

1. I came out to him/them
2. I came out after he/they asked me
3. I made him/them understand (*e.g.*: I left clues)
4. He/they discovered it breaching my privacy (looking through your personal belongings, listening to your personal conversations...)
5. Another member of the family told him/them
6. Someone else told him/them

Sister/s:

1. I came out to her/them
2. I came out after she/they asked me
3. I made her/them understand (*e.g.*: I left clues)
4. She/they discovered it breaching my privacy (looking through your personal belongings, listening to your personal conversations...)
5. Another member of the family told her/them
6. Someone else told her/them

Spouse:

1. I came out to him/her
2. I came out after he/she asked me
3. I made him/her understand (*e.g.*: I left clues)
4. He/she discovered it breaching my privacy (looking through your personal belongings, listening to your personal conversations...)
5. Another member of the family told him/her
6. Someone else told him/her

Son/s, daughter/s:

1. I came out to him/her/them
2. I came out after he/she/they asked me
3. I made him/her/them understand (*e.g.*: I left clues)
4. He/she/they discovered it breaching my privacy (looking through your personal belongings, listening to your personal conversations...)
5. Another member of the family told him/her/them
6. Someone else told him/her/them

C. Political participation

13. How often do you discuss politics?

1. Everyday
2. A few times a week
3. Once a week
4. A few times a month
5. A few times a year
6. Never

14. Many people, when thinking about politics, are used to think about 'left', 'centre', and 'right'. In the graph below, each number represents a position on this continuum: considering your current political opinions, where would you be on this continuum? (the closer you are to 1, the more to the left you are positioned; the closer you are to 10, the more to the right you are positioned)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Left Centre Right

D. Couple relationships

15. You prefer having:

1. Stable couple relationships
2. Occasional encounters

16. Do you currently have a stable relationship?

1. Yes
2. No (go to question n.21)

17. If you do, how old is your partner?

Age: __

18. What do you argue the most about?⁵²

1. Money
2. Too little time together
3. Families of origin
4. Friends
5. Jealousy
6. Division of housework
7. Other (specify: _____)

19. Since you have been together with your stable partner, did you have any extra-couple sexual encounters?

1. Yes, once
2. Yes, more than twice
3. No, never

20. When you are with your partner in public spaces, do you do any of the following?

Hold hands:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

⁵² This question did not explicitly allow multiple answers. Consistent and significant shares of respondents gave more than one answer in 1996-96 and 2012-13. The resulting data was coded and interpreted as gathered through a question allowing multiple answers. For additional discussion, see notes n. 38, 43, 44.

Hug:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Caress:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Kiss:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

21. With whom do you currently live?

1. Currently with my same-sex partner
2. Currently with my same-sex partner in a place we share with friends
3. Currently with my family of origin
4. Currently with my husband/wife/my different-sex partner
5. Currently in a place I share with friends
6. Currently alone, and I never cohabited
7. Currently alone, and I cohabited with a different-sex partner before (either married or not)
8. Currently alone, and I cohabited with a same-sex partner
9. Other (specify: _____)

ATTENTION. Questions n.22 to n.25 are meant only for those who are currently cohabiting with a same-sex partner and those who had a cohabiting relationship with a same-sex partner that lasted at least one year in the past. If the last option applies to you, read the questions as if they referred to your past same-sex cohabiting relationship. If you had more than one same-sex cohabiting relationship in the past, consider the one you feel was the most important. Remember: the questionnaire is to be answered alone, without your partner. If you are not currently cohabiting with a same-sex partner or never had a same-sex cohabiting relationship that lasted at least one year, go to question n.26.

22. How long have you been cohabiting with you same-sex partner? (how long did you cohabit with your past cohabiting same-sex partner)

Years: __ __
Months: __ __

23. Did you and your cohabiting partner formalise your relationship in any way?

1. Yes, we organised a celebration and invited friends and family
2. Yes, in other ways (specify: _____)
3. No

24. Do you (if you cohabited in the past: did you) both have a personal income?

1. Yes, my income is higher than my partner's
2. Yes, my income is lower than my partner's
3. No, only I have an income
4. No, only my partner has an income
5. Other (specify: _____)

25. Do you wear a ring or any other symbol of your union?

1. Yes
2. No

E. Children

26. Do you have children?

1. Yes
2. No (go to question n.30)

If you have children:

27. How many children do you have?

1. One
2. Two
3. Three or more

28. You had these children:

1. In a marriage
2. In a heterosexual stable relationship
3. In a heterosexual casual relationship
4. In a heterosexual sexual encounter with a homosexual partner
5. Through artificial insemination
6. Other (specify: _____)

29. If any of your children showed homosexual inclinations, you would be:

1. Satisfied
2. Unconcerned
3. Opposed
4. I don't know

If you do not have children:

30. Do you want children?

1. Yes
2. No

31. Why?

32. How?⁵³

1. Occasional heterosexual encounter
2. Occasional sexual encounter with homosexual partner
3. Artificial insemination
4. Adoption
5. Marriage
6. Other (specify: _____)

F. Sex and relationships

33. In the past 12 months, with how many same-sex partners (including your current partner) did you have sexual encounters?

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2 or 3
4. 4 to 10
5. 11 to 20
6. 21 to 50
7. More than 50

⁵³ This question did not explicitly allow multiple answers. Consistent and significant shares of respondents gave more than one answer in 1996-96 and 2012-13. The resulting data was coded and interpreted as gathered through a question allowing multiple answers. For additional discussion, see note n. 48.

34. In your entire life, with how many same-sex partners (including your current partner) did you have sexual encounters?

1. 0
2. 1
3. 2 or 3
4. 4 to 10
5. 11 to 20
6. 21 to 50
7. More than 50

35. In the past 12 months, how often did you do each of the following?

Visit gay/lesbian pubs and other public venues:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Visit gay/lesbian discos:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Visit gay/lesbian saunas:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Visit dark rooms in gay/lesbian venues:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Visit gay lesbian cinemas:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Visit cruising spots:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Visit gay/lesbian beaches:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Use personal ads in magazines to meet partners:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Use Internet sites for gay/lesbian sexual encounters⁵⁴:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Use gay/lesbian erotic phone chat lines:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Pay a partner for a sexual encounter:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

Accept money for a sexual encounter:

1. Often
2. Rarely
3. Never

⁵⁴ This question was not included in the 'LGB 1995-96' questionnaire. For additional discussion, see note n. 33.

36. Except for your current partner, where did you meet your last partners, even if they were casual partners?

My last partner:

1. In a gay/lesbian pub or venue
2. In a gay/lesbian disco
3. In a gay/lesbian sauna
4. In a dark room in a gay/lesbian pub or venue
5. In a gay/lesbian cinema
6. In a cruising spot
7. At a gay/lesbian beach
8. Through Internet sites for gay/lesbian sexual encounters⁵⁵
9. Through personal ads on a magazine
10. Through an erotic phone chat line
11. At a friend's house
12. At a political meeting
13. At work, at school, in college
14. Other (specify: _____)

My second to last partner:

1. In a gay/lesbian pub or venue
2. In a gay/lesbian disco
3. In a gay/lesbian sauna
4. In a dark room in a gay/lesbian pub or venue
5. In a gay/lesbian cinema
6. In a cruising spot
7. At a gay/lesbian beach
8. Through Internet sites for gay/lesbian sexual encounters⁵⁶
9. Through personal ads on a magazine
10. Through an erotic phone chat line
11. At a friend's house
12. At a political meeting
13. At work, at school, in college
14. Other (specify: _____)

⁵⁵ This option was not included in the 'LGB 1995-96' questionnaire. For additional discussion, see note. n. 32.

⁵⁶ See note n. 55.

My third to last partner:

1. In a gay/lesbian pub or venue
2. In a gay/lesbian disco
3. In a gay/lesbian sauna
4. In a dark room in a gay/lesbian pub or venue
5. In a gay/lesbian cinema
6. In a cruising spot
7. At a gay/lesbian beach
8. Through Internet sites for gay/lesbian sexual encounters⁵⁷
9. Through personal ads on a magazine
10. Through an erotic phone chat line
11. At a friend's house
12. At a political meeting
13. At work, at school, in college
14. Other (specify: _____)

37. Have you ever paid a partner for a sexual encounter?

1. Yes, for a same-sex encounter
2. Yes, for a different-sex encounter
3. No, never

38. Have you ever accepted money for a sexual encounter?

1. Yes, for a same-sex encounter
2. Yes, for a different-sex encounter
3. No, never

G. Socio-demographics and general information on the respondent

39. Sex:

1. Male
2. Female

40. Year of birth:

19 __

41. Marital status:

1. Unmarried
2. Legally separated
3. Widow/er
4. Married or cohabiting
5. Divorced

⁵⁷ See note n. 55.

42. Municipality of birth:
_____ **Province:** _____

43. Municipality of residence:
_____ **Province:** _____

44. (Only for those who do not live in their city of birth) If you moved from your city of birth, did you do it (also) to live your homosexuality more freely?

1. Yes
2. No

45. Could you tell us what your, your father's, and your mother's educational qualifications are?

Me:

1. No educational qualification
2. Primary school diploma
3. Secondary school diploma
4. Vocational school diploma
5. Technical school diploma
6. High school diploma
7. University degree

My father:

1. No educational qualification
2. Primary school diploma
3. Secondary school diploma
4. Vocational school diploma
5. Technical school diploma
6. High school diploma
7. University degree

My mother:

1. No educational qualification
2. Primary school diploma
3. Secondary school diploma
4. Vocational school diploma
5. Technical school diploma
6. High school diploma
7. University degree

46. In the past 12 months, have you ever gone to church?

1. Yes
2. No

47. If you did, how many times did you go to church (synagogue, etc.)?

1. Everyday or almost everyday
2. At least once a week
3. At least once a month
4. Only for special occasions, celebrations, etc.
5. Never or almost never

48. (If you are religious or practicing) To what religious confession do you belong?

1. Catholicism
2. Protestantism
3. Judaism
4. Islam
5. Other (specify: _____)

The National Pride Committee and Carlo Cattaneo Research Institute thank you for your collaboration and attention. If you think that this questionnaire is reductive of your experiences, your story, and their complexity, please use the following space and the following blank page to tell us about anything you feel is important (experiences, opinions...) and that you did not find in this questionnaire.

Have you already answered to this questionnaire in another occasion?⁵⁸

1. Yes
2. No

⁵⁸ This question was added to the questionnaire in 2013. For additional discussion, see note n. 13.

Appendix B

‘LGB 2012-13’ interview guide⁵⁹

Interview on LGB individuals and their cohabiting relationships – separate interview for each cohabiting partner

Individual life course

Youth and education

Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? How was your experience in the transition from school to work? Did you move between different cities while you were growing up?

Work and professional life

Do you currently work? What job do you have? Can you tell me about your professional life? The tasks you carry out? Your work hours? Your professional position in your work place? How did you find this job? Did you change jobs? What jobs were you doing before? How and when did you change? Are you satisfied with you current work situation? How much do you earn per month? Did your earnings change during your career?

Do people in your workplace know about your homosexuality? Did you tell them? How and when? Did your experience at work change because of it? Do you think your colleagues know about your homosexuality? Do you hide your homosexuality on purpose? Have you ever felt discriminated, picked on, molested, or threatened because of your homosexuality in your workplace?

Family of origin

Socio-cultural background

Can you tell me about your family background? How many people are in your family? What educational qualification do your parents have? What are or were their jobs? Where does your family currently live? Did they move from somewhere else? Is your family religious? Are they practicing? Did you receive a religious education? Are you religious or practicing?

⁵⁹ My English translation of the original interview guide in Italian.

Coming out in the family

Are the members of your family of origin aware of your homosexuality? Who among them knows and who does not? Can you tell me about your coming out story with your family of origin? How and when did you come out? How did they react? Did your relationships with them change after you came out? Did the relationships between them change? Does your extended family know and how did they react? How are your relationships with your family of origin today? Do you think the members of your family of origin knew about your homosexuality before you told them?

Friendship network, free time, social and political activity

Do you feel you have a good friendship network? How and when did you meet your most important friends? Is there any activity in particular you share with them? Did you lose or meet friends in particular moments of your life? Did you change friendship networks when you moved? Who among your friends knows of your homosexuality? Do you have more than one friendship network? Is there any difference in the relationships you have with homosexual friends and heterosexual friends?

Do you have any particular hobby or cultural interest that you pursue with other people? Are you out in these settings?

Are you a member of any association? What social issues or aims do these associations work on? Are you out in these associations? Are you a member of lesbian/gay associations?

Sexual and romantic relationships across the life course

How would you describe your sexual orientation? Do you identify with a sexual identity label? Did you have any important partner relationship in the past? Who were your partners? How did you meet them? Are you still in contact with them? Why did these relationships end? Is your current partner your first same-sex partner? Did you cohabit with your previous partners? Do and did you have different-sex sexual or romantic relationships? What relationship did you have with past heterosexual romantic partners? What relationship do you have with them now?

Couple relationship

Getting to know and falling in love with the partner

When and where did you and your current partner meet? How long since you met before you started a relationship? How did you go from getting to know each other to being together? Did you or your partner talk about being together first? When did you first have sex? What are and were your partner's qualities that you appreciate? What got your attention? What made you fall in love? Were you in another relationship when you met your current partner or when you started a relationship with her/him? Was your partner? How was your experience leaving that relationship and starting this one?

Before starting a relationship with your current partner, how did you perceive your sexual orientation? Who were you attracted to? Did you adopt a sexual identity? Did and do you talk about your sexual orientation with your current partner? Did and do you talk about her/his sexual orientation?

How did your family of origin react to your current relationship? How did your partner's family of origin react? What about friends, colleagues? Did these relationships change when you started your current relationship? Have they changed since then? How do and your partner behave in familial and social situations? Do you show affection? Where and when do you or don't you? Did you experience any negative reaction from family, friends, or in public?

Everyday couple relationship

Can you tell me about a typical day in your couple's life? How about yesterday? A work day? A holiday? What activities do you do together with your partner? What activities do you do without your partner? Did you talk about this? How much time do you spend with your partner? How much time do you spend alone? What do you usually talk about with your partner?

When do you argue with your partner? What are the reasons you argue the most? When you argue, is any of you more understanding and open to seeing things differently than the other? Do you or does your partner often start arguments?

Are you jealous? What about your partner? Since you have been together, have you or has your partner had extra-couple relationships? How long after you started being together? Did you tell her/him? How did he react? Did you ever talk about possible extra-couple relationships? Did you talk about what would happen if you had extra-couple relationships?

Since you have been together, have there been any moments of crisis in your relationship? How did you manage them? Did they change your relationship with your partner? When you have problems outside of the couple, do you talk with your partner about them?

Can you tell me about your and your partner's sexual life? How often do you have sex? Does any of you propose it more often? Does any of you reject the other more often? Are you satisfied of your couple's sexuality? Do you talk about it with your partner? Do you have fixed sexual roles? Do you talk about the different ways you have sex? Did you ever have any STDs while in your current relationship? What about your partner? How did you and your partner manage it?

How often do you see your friends? Do you and your partner share your friendship networks? Do you usually see your friends together? How many friends do you share with your partner? What do you think of your partner's friends? What does your partner think of your friends? Do you and your partner travel together on holidays? Who plans these trips? Have you ever argued about it? Have you ever argued because of your or your partner's friends? Did your friendship circle change during your current relationship?

Thinking about when you were single, is there anything you miss? What changed from when you were single that makes you happier now? What are the things you had to renounce to?

What gifts do you like to give to your partner? What gifts does she/he likes to give you? Is there any particular occasion in which you exchange gifts?

Cohabitation

Cohabiting

When did you decide to cohabit? Did you or your partner ask the other? How was this decision taken? Who looked for a house? Who furnished it? Did you have any disagreements in these choices? Did your friends and families participate in these decisions?

Did you formalise your cohabiting relationship in any way? Did you throw a party or celebrate with friends or families? Do you wear any symbol of your relationship? When did you choose it? What does it symbolise? Do you both officially live here? Do public offices, your neighbours know you both live here? Is there anything in particular that you think changed the most in your relationship since you started cohabiting? Did you and your partner have any difficulties at the

beginning of your cohabitation, with each other's habits and needs? How did you manage these difficulties?

Private spaces and couple spaces

Can you tell me about the house you share with your partner? Can you tell me about the different rooms? How do you use them? Do you have a room or a space for yourself? What about your partner? Do you have a room for you and your partner? Do you or does your partner work at home? Is there a room or a space for this?

How much time do you spend at home? How much outside of home? How about your partner? Do you usually eat home? Do you often have guests over? Who are these guests? Do you or does your partner invite them?

Couple finances and housework

The division of housework

Do you or does your partner cook more often? What about washing dishes? Ironing? Clean around the house? Do laundry? Check the bills? Bring out the trash? Take care of pets? How did you and your partner decide about these matters? Did anything change in this division of housework since you started cohabiting? Did or do you talk about this division of housework? Did or do you argue about it? Do you sometimes do housework together? How much time do you spend doing housework? What about your partner? Is there any particular reason you and your partner divide housework the way you do? Do you or does your partner appreciate an orderly environment more than the other?

Money and the couple

Do you and your partner both earn an income? Do you and your partner set any rules on how your money is used? Do you have a shared account? How do you divide common expenditures? How about leisure expenditures? How about personal expenditures? Do you and your partner own anything in common? Do you live in your or your partner's house? Who is the renter of the house?

Is there any difference between your and your partner's income? Do these difference count in the way you manage the couple's finances? Do you talk about your expenses with your partner? What about your partner? Did you ever argue with your partner because of the way you spend your money? The couple's finances? Her or his money? Do you often take decisions regarding expenditures for the couple? What about your partner? What about expenditures on the house?

Going out, eating out? Where you spend your holidays? When you travel?

Do you ask your partner to help you in anyway with your job? Does your partner ask you? How often do you talk about your jobs and careers? Do you ask your partner advice on your job or career? Does your partner ask you? Did you ever argue about your or your partner's job or career?

Desire for children

Did you ever think about having children? Do you desire to have children? Does your partner? Did you ever talk about it? What do you consider when you think about having children? How would you like to have children? How about your partner? Did you talk about the different ways you can have children?

The couple and other relationships

How do you and your partner see your relationships with your and her/his families of origin? Do you live close to your parents? How often do you visit your parents? Your partner's parents? How often do you go together? Do your and your partner's parents come visit you? How often? How often do you talk to your parents on the phone or in other ways? How about with your partner's parents?

Do you spend your holidays with your parents? Your partner's parents? How often? How would you say your relationship with your partner's parents is? How about your partner's relationship with your parents? Do your or your partner's parents help the couple financially? In other ways?

Do you feel there is anything that makes you and your partner more similar to each other than you and your other close friends or family members? Anything that makes you more different? What experiences that you and your partners have in common do you think are important to the couple? What experiences that you had before being together with him or her? What experiences that she/he had before being together with you?

Did you ever ask anyone's help to solve couple problems?

Plans for the future

Do you have any future plans for the couple? Do you consider you and your partner married? What do you think about legal regulation of same-sex couples in Italy? Did or do you and your partner talk about it?