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MPIDR WORKING PAPER WP 2007-030
AUGUST 2007

**The Influence of Parents on
Cohabitation in Italy – Insights from
Two Regional Contexts**

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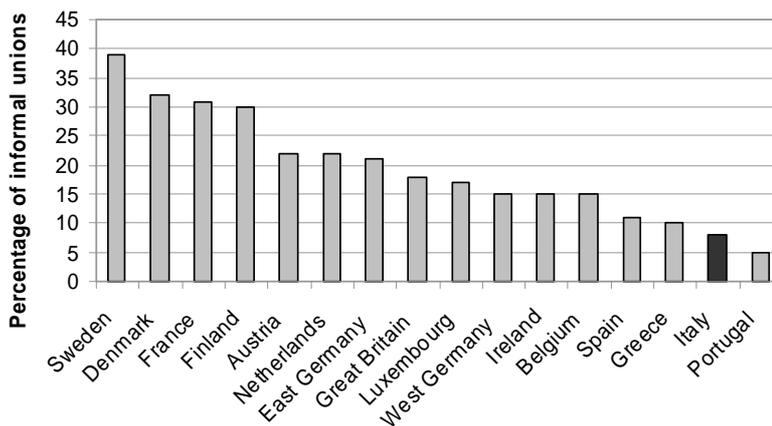
Abstract

In view of the demographic changes that affect all European countries, the diffusion of new living arrangements such as non-marital cohabitation is particularly interesting. In this article we concentrate on Italy, a country that is characterized by a low pace in the diffusion of cohabitation. Earlier studies found statistical evidence of the impact of parents' characteristics on young adults' decisions for cohabitation. However, there is only limited empirical knowledge about the actual mechanism through which parents influence the choices of their children. We employ qualitative research methods and focus on two regional contexts in order to analyze if and how parents intervene in the choices young adults.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades, most European countries have witnessed to some degree a strong increase in informal unions. The highest levels of cohabitation are found in the Northern European countries of Sweden, Denmark, and Finland as well as in France. Austria, the Netherlands, Germany, and Great Britain are in the middle group, whereas Southern European countries show the lowest cohabitation rates (see Figure 1). However, in Italy, this change took place at a slower pace. Although cohabitation figures started to rise, the country continues to remain at the low end of the scale. Moreover, Italy is shaped by a high degree of regional heterogeneity. In 2001, 3.6% of all Italian couples were living in cohabitation. In the northern regions, especially in Valle D'Aosta and Emilia-Romagna, the proportion was between 5% and 8%. In Southern Italy we find figures below 2% (ISTAT 2001, Censimento).

Figure 1: Percentage of cohabitation among adults aged 25-34, 2000-01.



Source: Kiernan 2004 (based on Eurobarometer data of 2000-01).

Previous research focused mainly on the diffusion aspects of cohabitation in Italy, paying almost no attention to the mechanisms responsible for the hesitant development of informal unions in the country. In general, it is argued that economic dependence on the family, the rigid structure of the housing market, high youth unemployment rates, and traditionally strong family ties hamper the formation of informal unions (Ferrera 1996, Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002, Bernardi and Nazio 2005, Reher 1998, Rosina and Fraboni 2004, DiGiulio and Rosina 2007).

Since there is only limited knowledge about the actual mechanism through which parents influence the choices of their children, we are interested in the question of how – if at all – parents intervene in the choices their children make about entering cohabitation and whether

young adults are indeed hampered by their family when it comes to non-marital union formation.

Rosina and Fraboni (2004) claim that a relationship exists between strong family ties and the development of cohabitation in Italy. Since parents are economically and emotionally deeply involved in the lives of their adult children, they consider the success (and failure) of their children in various aspects of life as a consequence of their own far-sighted family strategy. Since parents tend to discourage their offspring from behaving in a way that is socially disregarded (such as cohabitation), their adult children have to rely on prevailing traditions, norms, and values when making choices. Young adults who nevertheless decide for cohabitation may also be 'punished' in that they receive less generous help (Di Giulio and Rosina 2004, 2007; Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002). Rosina and Fraboni (2004) argue that adults may only decide to enter a new living arrangement if their family accepts their choice. These authors found this to apply in particular to families in Northern Italy that have highly educated fathers. In this respect, the father's level of education degree influences the level of openness towards modern living arrangements.

However, in our analysis at the national level¹ we discovered that the mother's education – also relative to the father's degree – has an even stronger positive impact on their daughter's entry into cohabitation. We believe that mothers with a higher educational degree relative to that of the father have reached a higher level of emancipation and a higher level of decision-making autonomy than their counterparts of lower education relative to that of the father. Consequently, one may assume that these mothers tend to have rather open-minded attitudes towards any modern living arrangements of their daughters. We suppose that these mothers either use their autonomy to provide greater emotional support when their daughters enter cohabitation (against the wish of the father), or that they transmit modern values and attitudes to their daughter right from the start (Schröder 2006). In fact, other studies found evidence that perceived and actual maternal attitudes on cohabitation impacted union formation intentions of young adults in Italy: Young adults showed a higher inclination to enter an informal union if they perceived their mothers to have favorable attitudes towards cohabitation. This effect was even stronger if mothers actually declared that they had these attitudes (Billari and Rosina 2005).

Clearly, employing statistical methods alone does not allow investigating the real mechanisms that guide this process. Therefore we have chosen to work with qualitative research methods.

¹ Event history analysis using the 'Indagine longitudinale sulle famiglie italiane' (ILFI) of 1997 and 1999.

Qualitative methods promise deeper insights on the influence parents have on cohabitation in Italy, including these issues: How – if at all – do parents influence their adult children’s choice for cohabitation? Specifically, how do young adults perceive the attitudes their parents have on cohabitation? What kind of importance does the opinion of parents have? How far do economic and non-economic interdependencies influence the decision for cohabitation? How do parents and children communicate about cohabitation? What is the parental reaction to a cohabitation? How does the relation between parents and adult children change after entry into an informal union? To sum up, our study contributes to answering the question, “To what extent does family influence the diffusion of cohabitation in Italy?”

2. DATA AND METHOD

Since we focus on decision-making with regard to an informal union and the mechanisms that guide this process, we have used methods that permit an extensive consideration of “cohabitation” in everyday life – methods that identify the meanings of cohabitation and marriage, and the underlying norms and expectations of and motivations behind personal behavior. Therefore, we conducted a qualitative analysis that allows for a deeper understanding of the social phenomenon (Silverman 2001). As indicated above, previous studies on informal unions in Italy mainly have focused on the diffusion aspect and less on the mechanisms behind the hesitant development of cohabitation. Using quantitative research methods, existing studies fail to capture the motivations behind informal union formation in Italy. In addition, quantitative studies are problematic, as representative studies on Italy have only low numbers of cohabiting unions owing to the rare coincidence of such unions.

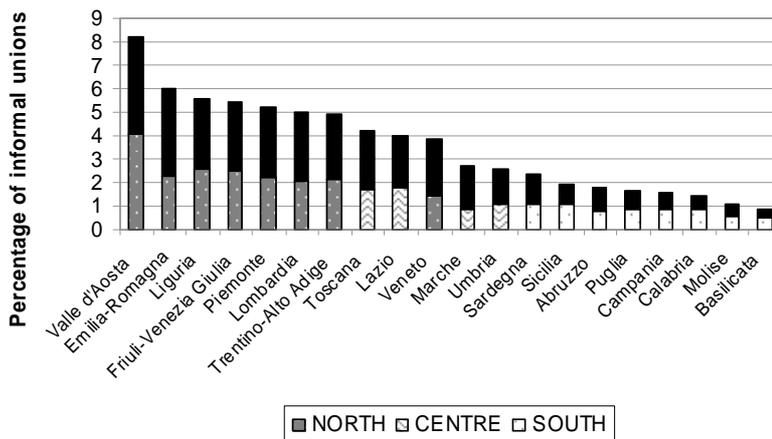
The cities selected for our study are Bologna and Cagliari. Bologna is the capital city of the Northern Italian region of Emilia-Romagna. This region is very interesting since the proportion of informal unions rose from 2.3% of all couples in 1991 to 7.6% in 2001 (Sabbadini 1997, ISTAT 2001, Censimento). Thus, Bologna – traditionally governed by liberal left-wing parties – represents a particular regional context with respect to cohabitation: The area witnesses a stronger increase in informal unions than do other Northern Italian regions – this applies not only to the cities, but also to the countryside (author’s calculations based on Sabbadini 1997 referring to Censimento 1991 and ISTAT 2001, Censimento).

Cagliari, on the other hand, is the capital city of the island of Sardinia. Between 1991 and 2001 the share of informal unions in the region doubled from 1.1% of all couples to 2.4% (Sabbadini 1997, ISTAT 2001, Censimento). Sardinia also represents a distinct regional context: Among the southern Italian regions, it displays the highest percentage of informal

unions. In general, cohabitation in southern Italy is characteristic for older persons who decide against marriage in order to keep their widow's pension. Only in Sardinia do we find a higher extent of the 'innovative' kind of cohabitation – that is, cohabitation of younger people – in which we are interested (Sabbadini 1997). Figure 2 shows the regional heterogeneity of informal unions in Italy.

Between May 2005 and May 2006 we conducted 56 semi-structured in-depth interviews (28 interviews in each of the two cities) with cohabiting women, women who married after previous cohabitation, and women with and without children. The Bologna interviewees were identified through register data and were contacted first by phone and then by mail. Furthermore, we used the 'snowball method' to complete our sample. For Cagliari, we used the snowball method only and started with contact persons at social and information services. We intended to interview women aged between 25 and 40, and most women in our final sample are from this age group.

Figure 2: Percentage of informal unions by region, Italy 1991 and 2001.



Note: Patterning bars display the percentage of informal unions in 1991; black bars display the further increase up to 2001.

Source: Sabbadini (1997) referring to Censimento 1991 and ISTAT, Censimento (2001).

The final data set for Bologna has information on 17 cohabiting women (two of them mothers) and eleven married women (three of them childless). From these, 15 women were born and raised in Bologna, six in the region of Emilia-Romagna, three came from other northern regions to the city, and four came from the South. They mainly moved to Bologna because of their studies and at the time of the interview they had been living there already for many years. For Cagliari, the final data set consists of information on 16 cohabiting women (five of them mothers) and on eleven married women (six of them childless). Additionally we interviewed one single woman who intended to enter cohabitation within the next six months. Fifteen of the Cagliari women were born and raised in Cagliari, nine in Sardinia, two came

from Northern Italian regions to the city, and one came from the South. The main reason for moving was the intention to study in Cagliari. Particularly those who came from the Italian mainland moved to Cagliari because of their partner. Although we did not sample for education, most of the interviewees in Bologna and Cagliari had a very high educational level as they had completed university education. As to employment, there were many white collar workers in both samples, including several working in the public sector. In Bologna, two interviewees were still students. And in both cities we have women who come from the medical, teaching, or photography professions.

Since we interviewed only women who experience(d) cohabitation, we have no data on women who desired or intended to cohabit, but nevertheless did not enter informal union. We thus cannot investigate why women made a decision against this choice or which factors drove such decision. Furthermore, we cannot provide evidence on women who did not take into consideration the possibility of entering a cohabiting union – maybe because it never seemed to be an option for them. However, as we interviewed also women who decided for marriage after cohabitation, we were able to analyze the reasons and motivations that drove the choice to enter a conjugal union after having experienced an informal union.

The interviews were based on an interview guideline that covered several major topics, such as the motivation behind and decision to cohabit (and marry), as well as economic conditions, past and present family relations, economic and non-economic support, and the families' reactions to cohabitation (especially the parents' reactions). Following the interview, the respondents answered a short questionnaire on their socio-demographic characteristics. Most interviews were about 50 to 60 minutes long.

The interviews were conducted in Italian. The interviewer was of German nationality, a characteristic which possibly had some effect on the respondents' answers. Some interviewees might have trusted a 'stranger' less than someone of their own nationality and thus might have shown some reservations in sharing all of their thoughts on the questions asked. On the other hand, interviewees might have had more trust in the interviewer exactly because of this fact: Some people tend to be more talkative when in discussion with a completely unknown person than with people who live in the same city or region. In addition, the interviews greatly benefited from asking the women to elaborate on what they said, as the interviewer played on the fact that she was not from Italy, thus implying that she knew less about the socio-cultural context than they do.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. This enabled us to go back to the data several times and to code the material. The coding and categorizing of the interviews is based on grounded theory, a procedure developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to analyze qualitative data. Furthermore, we used memos as an intermediate step between coding and analyzing (Charmaz 2000).

The analysis looks primarily for the impact of factors such as parental attitudes, pressure, and economic and non-economic support, etc. We also investigate the way in which and the mechanisms through which parents and adult children talk and negotiate about the children's entry into cohabitation and the parental reaction to the couple's desire to cohabit.

In Section 3, we describe the categories used for the analysis of parental influence in both settings. Section 4 deals with the Bologna part of the study and Section 5 with the Cagliari sample.

3. CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS

We start our analysis with by placing the interviewees into categories following the 'theory of reasoned action' by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). This theory offers a good starting point for understanding parental influence on cohabitation in Italy. These authors argue that a person will usually act in accordance with her or his intention. In their view, a person's intention is a result of two basic determinants: one personal, the other reflecting social influence. Whereas the personal factor is affected by the individual's evaluation of performing the behavior (*attitude towards the behavior*), the social factor results from the individual's perception of the social pressure to perform or not perform a certain behavior and his or her motivation to comply with this wish (*subjective norm*). If a person's behavior is blocked by a certain conflict between both determinants, the individual will act according to the relative importance of each.

In order to capture both the personal and social determinants in regard to entry into cohabitation (and/or marriage), we employ a diagram with two dimensions. The first dimension refers to the individual's perception of cohabitation. Cohabitation might be seen as a premarital step, a trial, one experience among others, or as an alternative to marriage. The second dimension targets the perception of parental attitudes on cohabitation by the women we interviewed. The spectrum of possible values ranges from perceiving parents to oppose cohabitation to assuming parents encourage such a choice. We also introduced a third dimension, to capture the individual's motivation to comply with the parents' wishes. This

classification ranges from strong to weak motivation to comply. All three dimensions are continuous rather than categorical, that is, the transition from one value to the other is along a spectrum.

In the next two sections of this paper we plot interviewees according to their characteristics along all three dimensions. First, we turn to Bologna. We limit ourselves to only the main clusters. We are especially interested in investigating whether there are differences and/or similarities among the clusters – also with respect to the interviewees’ intention to behave and their actual behavior. In sum, we want to know how individuals perceive parental attitudes, how important they regard their parents’ desires, and how they finally realize their own desire for cohabitation.

4. THE CASE OF BOLOGNA

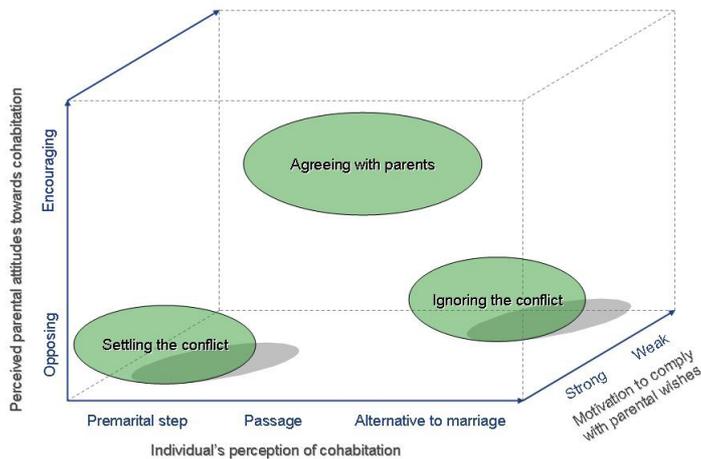
We grouped the interviewees along all dimensions and found three main clusters in the Bologna sample (see Figure 3):

- *Settling the conflict*: In the first cluster there are women who see cohabitation as a premarital step. They have a strong motivation to comply with parental wishes and perceive that their parents have opposing attitudes on cohabitation. The vast majority of these women approached their parents when deciding to cohabit; only a few women opted for keeping their union secret. Actually, after approaching their parents, they discovered that the parents indeed had negative attitudes towards cohabitation. Although all of these women decided for cohabitation as a premarital step, that is, their union was aimed towards marriage right from the start, parents had considerable difficulties with that choice. Parents tended to ask their daughters to marry right away. Generally, this conflict was settled as soon as women entered marriage. About 30 percent of cases belong to this cluster.
- *Ignoring the conflict*: The second cluster contains women who also assume that their parents have rather opposing attitudes towards informal unions. However, these women have a weak motivation to comply with parental desires. This cluster is characterized by the fact that adult daughters tend to have different attitudes from their parents towards cohabitation – and this difference is rather long-lasting. Whereas parents want their daughters to enter marriage, daughters choose cohabitation not as a premarital step but rather as an experience per se or even as alternative to marriage. These women do not respond to their parents demands, but

tend to ignore this underlying disagreement. About 30 percent of women belong to this cluster.

- *Agreeing with parents*: In the third cluster we find women who perceive their parents to encourage entry into cohabitation. These women have a strong motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. In fact, these women experienced strong parental support when entering cohabitation. In some cases, parents even proposed that their daughters take this step. Women in this cluster chose cohabitation as experience or alternative to marriage. This cluster is the largest of the three, with 40 percent of the sample.

Figure 3: Strategies identified among interviewees in Bologna



4.1. Settling the Conflict

About one-third of the interviewees comprise this cluster. These women see cohabitation as a step that is aimed at marriage right from the start. Two women stated, for instance:

“As far as I see it, cohabitation is a step that leads to marriage.”ⁱⁱ

“I feel the need to have a family and not only to cohabit, which is nice, but it’s not enough for me. I want to have more than just a cohabitation.”ⁱⁱⁱ

These women have a strong motivation to comply with parental wishes and perceive that their parents oppose cohabitation. Actually, parents wanted their daughters to marry right away. Half of the women in this cluster originally come from the South. Several of them grew up in small villages, and their families continued to stay there. Although all these women have lived

in Bologna for many years, they are regularly confronted with the rather closed attitudes of their parents. Most women declare themselves as religious. All women in this cluster regard marriage as desirable; nevertheless, they yearned to live together before marriage. Most of them reported that they entered cohabitation because they wanted to spend more time with their partner or because of convenience:

“We planned to live together and to marry anyway, also because my husband is not from Bologna, he’s not from this city, thus it was difficult to meet – so the choice was made simply because we wanted to spend more time together.”ⁱⁱⁱ

“I did not have the rented flat anymore and instead of searching for a new one, we started to live together at that moment.”^{iv}

Being aware of their parents’ opposing attitudes on cohabitation, women in this cluster tried to settle the conflict with them. This attempt ranged from settling the conflict via negotiation to settling it via entering marriage after a secret cohabitation. Yet, most interviewees sought parental acceptance. They tried to prepare their parents for cohabitation by putting their intention carefully to their families, by entering slowly into their new living arrangement, and by calmly negotiating a solution. Emanuela,² now aged 36 and married, announced that she had “grossi progetti” (big plans) such as marriage and having children. This conciliatory declaration calmed her parents down and opened the way to informal union formation:

“[My parents] accepted it but for sure they are not enthusiastic about it because in the end they would have preferred marriage right from the start. But they understood the situation and did not stop me. They always said that they prefer marriage to us living together, but once we told them what we wanted to do, even they were o.k. with our decision.”^v

This way, cohabitation generally serves as a premarital living arrangement that evolves into marriage. The possible failure of this premarital cohabitation – expressed in some couples’ separation – is not taken into consideration at all. From the outset, cohabitation is on target for marriage. In Emanuela’s case, we believe that an informal union that was not aimed at marriage would have caused many more problems and difficulties with her parents. Emanuela managed to negotiate a compromise, as did most other women in this cluster. However, the compromise is only temporary, as parents accept cohabitation for the time being but not for an indefinite period.

At a certain point, parents usually tended to (re)start asking for marriage. Daughters generally gave in and finally decided for a wedding. Whereas most parents continued to insist upon the Catholic rite, some of them minimized their pretensions and were pleased with any kind of

² For reasons of anonymity, we have changed the names of our interviewees and of all the people they talked about. This applies also to islands, cities, and villages.

marriage. Here, the adult child's behavior also influenced the attitudes of parents. Parents who initially demanded a church wedding changed their minds and were satisfied even with a civil wedding at the registry office. Nevertheless, the majority of parents insisted on a church wedding.

Interestingly, when discussing cohabitation and marriage, it is the mother, almost exclusively, who makes the approach to the couple. In most cases the mother rather than the father acts as the direct negotiator. In turn, women in the sample also tended to refer to their mothers, rather than their fathers, when announcing intentions or decisions.

Previous research from the United States provides evidence for a strong mother–daughter bond. It has been found that after they leave their parental home, daughters have more intensive relationships with their mothers than do sons (Greene and Boxer 1986). Furthermore, mothers' preferences and attitudes have a strong influence on daughters' family formation process, e.g. timing of first birth and number of children – independently of the adult child's own preferences (Barber 2000; Barber and Axinn 1998; Axinn et al. 1994). Barber and Axinn (1998) suppose that children respond directly to their mothers' preferences. And Axinn and Thornton (1993) assume that daughters are more inclined than sons to see their mothers as role models, and thus behave in accordance with their mothers' opinion. According to social learning theory, girls learn to be like their mothers by consistently and positively being reinforced when they imitate their mothers' behavior (Boyd 1989, referring to Weitzman 1984). In fact, all mothers of this cluster were married and as interviewees reported, they tended to discourage their daughters from cohabitation and encouraged them to enter a conjugal union right away. Almost all interviewees described their families as “traditional” with having a rather “closed mentality”:

“I grew up in a very traditional family, in the South of Italy, thus in an atmosphere very different to where I live today, very traditionalistic, very closed. It was a small village in the South, with a very restricted mentality. Thus, with certain things I had many restrictions during my youth. Up to a certain age I could not even go out with boys and such things.”^{vi}

“[My parents] are ... I don't say rigid, but less open. The principles of the family on certain roles, on certain things ... have always been fixed, all in all.”^{vii}

Benedetta (34), for instance, reported that her family used to live in a rather isolated situation. She emphasized that her parents never had lots of contact with other people. Moreover, Benedetta is the only child of her parents. The relation she has to her mother is very close: She describes herself as a friend, as a confidante of her mother. Partially her mother's isolation from other people is because she is a housewife and not working outside her home. In fact, about half of the mothers in this cluster were housewives throughout their lives. As

regards parental education, we observe that low levels of education among both mothers and fathers are common among this cluster, although this does not apply to all parents. We assume that the rather closed mentality of parents is a result of their isolation from modern attitudes and behaviors. Many families live in small villages and only have contact with people with the same traditional attitudes and values. In addition, mothers tend to have even fewer opportunities to mingle with people of modern attitudes and behaviors, as they usually have fewer contacts outside their home. However, there are also cases where mothers play the role of mediator between daughter and father. In our sample, fathers rarely had an important role as negotiator. One of these few exceptions was the case of Giuseppina (34) and her father. When entering cohabitation she mainly talked to her father and less to her mother. She described the discussion as follows:

“It’s always the father/dad who (laugh) is a bit jealous of the daughter’s partner (...) after all, he asked us: ‘but what intentions do you have?’, he wanted to have the assurance that we do not ... cut a caper (...) that it’s not just living together, just for wasting one’s time.”^{viii}

The quotation also reveals that cohabitation without the intention to marry subsequently is seen as “whiling away one’s time.” Thus, neither cohabitation nor any other alternative living arrangement (such as living on one’s own) is seen as worth striving for – often it is not even considered. Only marriage is perceived as the final goal of every couple’s relationship.

As mentioned, only a minority of interviewees among this cluster kept their informal union secret. These few women opted to settle the conflict by entering marriage without announcing their premarital cohabitation. This way, they cohabited without fearing any consequences. At a somewhat later point in time, these women simply accommodated their parents’ desires for marriage and settled the conflict before it could break out openly. Among them is Lorella (37). Her family lived for a long time in the south of Italy and is Catholic. Lorella is religious too and values marriage highly. Since her partner separated from his first wife, the couple had to postpone marriage until the divorce was valid. Nevertheless, they desired to live together. To avoid any struggles with her religious family, Lorella decided to conceal the fact that her partner had moved into her flat. Lorella emphasized that she did not want to give pain (“procurare un dolore”) to her parents and therefore opted to hide her union. Indeed, the absence of a second surname at the entrance of the flat testifies to her purpose. However, after few months of cohabitation the couple entered marriage. Actually, Lorella assumed that her parents might have suspected cohabitation. She supposed that for her parents it was somehow uncomfortable to imagine that their daughter might cohabit. Nevertheless they never mentioned it. The same is reported by Alessandra (30), who let her parents know about her

cohabitation only after several years but still hid it from her extended family. Alessandra said this:

“... all know about it, that’s what I think. Yes, because I take in my relatives [for a couple of days] and my boyfriend is always there ... but ... yes, all know about it, but everybody keeps silent, everything is fine. That’s how it works.”^{xix}

In both of the latter cases it is likely that parents and family members knew about the informal union. However, they did not address this sensitive subject. Instead, they kept their knowledge secret and gave their silent agreement to these temporary decisions. Hagestad (1979) used the concept of ‘demilitarized zones’ to refer to such strategies, and “silent mutually understood pacts regarding what not to talk about” (Hagestad 1979: 30). Through this strategy parents and adult children avoid serious conflicts over differences in opinions and attitudes. That is exactly what Lorella and Alessandra were doing; they knew about their parents’ attitudes and could not imagine that their parents might change their minds. Knowing that they and their parents had different ideas about union formation, but still influenced by strong family ties, both women were afraid to hurt their parents’ feelings. The only way out, they saw, was to hide a behavior that opposed parental wishes.

Interestingly, not only when entering cohabitation, but also when leaving home (for studies or work) women in this cluster had to negotiate with their families. Again, mothers were the main partners in negotiations. However, in contrast to the cohabitation situation, mothers generally understood their daughters’ desire to leave home. Fathers, on the other hand, had much more difficulty accepting that decision:

“My mother understood it better ... My father didn’t cope with it that well, in the sense that he stayed in a bad mood. He thought I would leave home because I did not want to stay with them anymore; of course later we talked about it. I insinuated him that this is not true.”^{xx}

“My father said to me ‘But who will take care of you? You have to prepare your food, you have to clean up, you have to cook ... who will take care of you?’ (laugh). My mother instead said ‘go, go’. Later, however, also she was sad, also she, because they were not used to that idea. It wasn’t easy in the end.”^{xxi}

In general, women in this ‘settling-the-conflict’ cluster had fairly severe difficulties or worries when it came to daughters leaving home. They feared that their parents and especially their mother might suffer from their moving out. Alessandra reported that for her it was easier to leave home than actually to stay away. One year after she left home, Alessandra’s mother wanted her to come back home and to continue her studies at her parents’ place. Although the economic aspect was of importance too, it seems that Alessandra’s mother suffered from the absence of her daughter – which finally was the real motivation for her query:

“But after the first years of staying there, they asked me to come back. But I had already met my current boyfriend. So I said ‘Mum, if you take me home I stop attending University’ and my mother answered ‘O.k. stay there’ but she suffered ... and we spent a lot of money because I paid the rent whereas in Torino I wouldn’t have to. My sister, for example, attends University and attends it in Torino, also because my mum said ‘It’s enough! One o.k., but not two [who stay outside the city to study], also because I left home to study and I stayed afterwards.’”^{xii}

Thus, the process of negotiation and discussion did not begin with cohabitation, nor did it end there. It often started when the question of leaving home arose, and it also affected the decision about *when* and *how* to enter marriage. Since the compromise daughters negotiated with their families was always aimed at eventual marriage, it was only a temporary and conditional agreement.

Indeed, Greene and Boxer (1986) argue that the emotional departure from the parental home occurs over a span of years. This consequently results in a situation of familial renegotiation, which takes place gradually and within a context of strong and continuing family attachment (Bengtson et al. 1976). This is in line with findings by Axinn et al. (1994) in the U.S. who argue that mothers’ preferences continue to affect changes in children’s preferences as they make the transition to adulthood. At least in their desire to have children, women in this cluster conceded to the wishes of their parents. Thus, parents not only interfered in their adult children’s choice for cohabitation but also influenced its length. Since childbirth outside marriage was not accepted by parents in this cluster, the desire for offspring was often the final push for marriage. Matilde (35), married and mother of two small children, pointed to the “problems, discussions, and sorrow” that might evolve between daughter and family when choosing to bear a child outside marriage:

“In general, families are very unhappy when children are born outside marriage, so yes ... problems, discussions, disfavor might happen. But until there are no children ... at least, with myself and my surrounding, there is no big pressure from the family. However, if children are born it displeases, displeases the parents that the children are born outside marriage. It is better for all to make the relationship more regular, for the children in the end.”^{xiii}

Also Alessandra (aged 30, cohabiting and childless) argued against childbirth outside marriage by referring to the respect she had for her parents:

“No, I don’t like it [to have children outside marriage]. I don’t like it, I don’t know ... it’s something I don’t like maybe also because of the respect I have for my parents. I don’t know ... I would like to marry first and then have children. I always used to say I wouldn’t have children before marriage. No children.”^{xiv}

The question that inevitably emerges is why these women accommodated the views of their parents. Since they had only slightly different attitudes and values from their parents, *socialization theory* might explain parts of the puzzle. Through socialization, parents affect their child’s behavior. Preferences parents have for their child shape the child’s attitudes and values. Given the fact that children and parents are influenced by the same social forces, such

as social position, background, and experiences, parents and children share similar attitudes and preferences (Bengtson 1975).

On the other hand, parents might influence their children's behavior independently of the children's attitudes via *social control* techniques. In this way, some parents try to interfere in their children's choices in order to prevent undesired behaviors. Parents attempt to succeed by using methods such as punishment or rewards (Gecas and Seff 1990; Smith 1988). In fact, Axinn and Thornton (1993) in a U.S. study found evidence for the social control hypothesis regarding entry into cohabitation. They suggest that adult children decide against cohabitation in order to meet parental expectations or to avoid negative sanctions such as refusal of economic support. Particularly, young adults might be more vulnerable to social control since they are not yet financially independent. In the Italian context, previous research assumes exactly the same connection (Di Giulio and Rosina 2004; Holdsworth and Irazoqui Solda 2002). Analyzing the economic situation of women in this cluster, however, we found that nearly all of them had a more or less stable employment position and were economically independent (including when entering cohabitation). One woman was a housewife and another was employed, but she and her husband were not able to maintain their family by themselves. This was the only exception where a couple was really dependent on parental economic support and where economic dependence might explain entry into marriage. All other women in this cluster received economic support, mainly for the purchase of a flat/apartment, home renovation and/ or furniture. Interestingly, in nearly all cases support was given, but strongly connected to the actual marriage: either shortly before the wedding or afterwards. Nevertheless, no single woman emphasized such a relation. It seems that it is not economic dependence per se that explains a young adult's accommodation but the *prospect* of financial help to meet housing and furniture needs.

Actually, Silverstein and Bengtson (1997) found that, when defining intergenerational relations, not only the *actual* exchange of goods is of importance but also the *potential* of future support. They use the term 'latent solidarity' to indicate that members of relationships with high levels of affinity hold also a potential for future exchange – even if currently there is no such support. Another factor that might promote entry into marriage is whether parents have the economic opportunity and willingness to finance the wedding of their adult children. Indeed, Barbagli et al. (2003) found that even nowadays parents generally tend to pay for the wedding menu. Axinn and Barber (1998) suppose that parents, who have certain preferences e.g. many grandchildren, use their money to facilitate their children's marriage. As regards the first cluster, most couples were supported economically when entering marriage. Parents

generally paid for the wedding dress, the meals for the guests and the ‘bomboniere’ (small gifts the couple usually gives to all guests as souvenirs).

Non-economic support is an important factor as well. Generally, parents in this cluster were strongly involved in the lives of their adult daughters. Women, for instance, had emotional support after childbirth. Interviewees also emphasized that they sought spatial proximity. In today’s Italy non-economic support, such as childcare, is highly important for young families. Women know that they have to rely on families’ non-economic support when having children, all the more if they wish to continue work. This fact might promote accommodation towards parents’ wishes too. In respect to childcare, Alessandra emphasized:

“If I live ... in Turin for instance, I will be more calm because my parents would be there. So I could work and could be sure that someone looks after my children, (...) if we think about the future, how one should organize when there are children? It’s a problem. I see the couple who are on their own here. It’s really very exhausting, you don’t have time for yourself anymore, for nothing. The only thing you do is running through the city like maniacs and that creates anxiety.”^{xv}

Clearly, all these women regarded their families as very important. These strong emotional ties between adult daughters and parents – especially mothers – explain the power of parents. To conclude, women in this cluster tended to differ from their parents only slightly in attitudes towards family formation. They evaluated cohabitation as a first step that leads to marriage, whereas their parents preferred a direct entry into marriage. Actually, these women perceived (and got to know later) that their parents were strongly against cohabitation; however they showed a strong motivation to comply with the parents’ desires. This high motivation seems to be result of two factors: First, the economic and non-economic support that parents might give in the future; second, the fact all women in this cluster show very strong family ties. In the end, these women opted for settling the conflict between their own desires to cohabit and the parental preference for marriage.

4.2. Ignoring the Conflict

Among this somewhat smaller cluster we find women who also perceived that their parents opposed cohabitation. However, one major difference between this and the previous cluster is the motivation to comply with parental wishes. Whereas women in the previous cluster showed strong motivation, those in this cluster tended to have a weak motivation to comply with parental desires. These women did not act in line with their parents’ wishes on family formation. They perceived cohabitation not simply as a premarital step, but rather as a trial, or

even as an alternative to marriage (in fact, two cohabiting women had already given birth to their first children). Some women in this cluster stated:

“We are doing well, but it is not that we say we want to marry. There are such intentions, but it’s not a final thing. It’s more an experiment that can work smoothly or may fail.”^{xvi}

“I believe that a relation between two persons has to be exclusive, there has to be an emotional tie and not a legal one.”^{xvii}

None of these women had decided for marriage so far, although some of them might opt for a marital union later on. Thus, they differ from the first cluster in that their union was not aimed at marriage right from the start. Though parents had opposing attitudes on cohabitation, they did not usually pressure their adult daughters to enter marriage. Thus, the conflict between both parties had not broken out (yet it lingered at the subliminal level). Parents only sporadically encouraged marriage. This encouragement, however, had little influence on adult children. In general, women tended to ignore the fact that their parents were against cohabitation. Here we find a range of different types of ‘ignoring’: Whereas most women simply do not care when parents announce their contrary opinions, one woman opted instead to hide her informal union. However, this behavior differed from that found among the first cluster. In the previous cluster, women made an effort to keep their union secret, whereas here – as we will see later – cohabitation is hidden less actively.

As to family relations, we observed that in most cases the child–parent relationship was tense, not only in respect to the underlying conflict but also past family relations. Sofia (39), for example, experienced the marriage of her parents as a disaster. Although her parents had a very bad working relationship, they never separated or divorced. Sofia suffered from that situation and saw in herself no need to decide for marriage. Instead, she preferred to stay in cohabitation as only the absence of any legal bond seemed to ensure that her partner would stay with her, that is, for affective reasons rather than legal bonds. Valeria (40), on the other hand, had experienced serious quarrels with her parents when a teenager. When deciding to leave home and to start studying, she refused any support from her parents. Especially in the Italian welfare state, which focuses on the family as the main actor of solidarity, this decision had strong consequences for her. Valeria had to make demanding efforts to overcome her economic problems and to finish university. As a result, step by step, Valeria gained her parents’ respect. This respect allowed her to decide independently about her life – even if her parents had a completely different point of view:

“ ... I know that this is the result of exhausting and painful work, because I also had ... moments – in the past when I felt vulnerable, with problems, even some big ones, also some economic ones and ... it wasn’t easy to have ... in addition it was very difficult for me to say ‘Mum, Dad, I’m in a deep mess, help me’. Thus, it was quite hard, ... but it developed this kind of relationship which I like a lot, of great respect, so I think that ... maybe they have

the desire, but ... because of a question of respect for my choices they never entered it, I mean also regarding the fact that I have a child out-of-wedlock, my mother never ever influenced ...^{xxviii}

The early emotional and economic separation from her family allowed Valeria to develop a relationship with her parents that was characterized by a high degree of equality. A similar pattern – although the result of a completely different situation – is found in the case of Simona (42). When Simona got pregnant twelve years ago, the couple intended to marry soon. However, Simona had a miscarriage and afterwards the couple could not have children. In that situation, both Simona and her partner saw no further reason for entering marriage. As a consequence, the couple continued cohabitation. In the meantime, the (traditionally oriented) parents of Simona's partner had to enlist the assistance of the couple, as one of the parents had severe health problems. Although these parents never pressed her to marry, Simona always perceived that they – and especially his mother – had this desire:

“The relatives of the parental side of my partner are numerous, very numerous, they all live in Calabria and all of them are married and have children. The weddings are events that are particularly important. So, he's the only one who hasn't done that and in this sense ... one notices it: in the stories about the weddings of the cousins ... and we are the only ones who have not marr ... but apart from that, it's quite, there has never been a push or a specific request.”^{xix}

The dependence of Simona's in-laws upon the couple's support explains to a very large extent the parents' chary position regarding marriage. In both cases (Valeria's and Simona's), the breakup of conventional support patterns (on the one side, the declining of parental economic help, and on the other side, the reversion of support and thereby change of power structure in favor of the couple) gave way to independent decision-making about family formation.

Interestingly, only women in this cluster perceived and emphasized a connection between parental economic support and parental interference in the relationship. Thus, most of these women avoided financial help. Only a few younger ones were constrained to rely on financial assistance from their parents – and were often afflicted with that situation. Marcella (29) pointed to the direct connection between economic support and demand for non-economic support:

“ ... if they help you there is always a price to pay {laugh}, that means that they give you..., but they also ask you for something in return (...) in the end, for sure, there is always a power relation. It's always like that ... in the end it's the money.”^{xx}

As mentioned, among this cluster is one woman who opted for keeping her informal union secret: Carlotta (26) cohabited with her partner in a double-room of a student's apartment. Although her parents and her partner knew each other, Carlotta told her family that he still

lived in his parental home. Most interesting is Carlotta's reasoning about her decision to hide her cohabitation:

"First of all, my parents do not agree with this, thus they don't know about it, because they ... o.k., my family is, I don't say traditional, but with certain things they are traditional, with others they are not. And I can imagine that they would fear that the things don't work out and thus I haven't told them ... first, I want to see how we manage and then I will tell them, because just in case the things go badly I don't want to cause any worries, let's say it like that ... In addition, they are Catholic and therefore rather prefer that two people marry and not that they live together before possibly getting married. For me, however, it is not even ... marriage does not represent a goal I have in my life."^{xxi}

Thus, Carlotta perceived her union as some kind of experiment that might fail or might lead to a more serious kind of relationship. Only when reaching this next step within the relationship, did Carlotta intend to tell her parents about her informal union. She argued that her parents would probably be against this kind of cohabitation, that they would be afraid, and that it might hurt her parents' feelings. It seems as if she was quite afraid to confront her parents with this situation. Nevertheless, Carlotta did not actively keep her cohabitation a secret; when her parents came to visit her, for instance, she did not hide her partners' belongings. In this context, it is interesting to know that Carlotta, who finished university and worked part-time, had to rely on parental economic support. Although she tried to avoid such help, she had to ask regularly for financial means. In the interview, Carlotta recurrently emphasized the precariousness of today's life, both within work and within relationships. In this respect, the only constant factor in her life was her family. That might be an additional reason why she mainly relied on her family and worried that much about her parents' psychological well-being. Recurrently she emphasized that it would be a "trauma" for her parents to see her daughter living in cohabitation. Nevertheless Carlotta had no intimate relation to her parents. She pondered what to tell her parents and what not to tell. In general, she talked with her family about current political and social issues, but much less about her intimate thoughts and feelings. However, Carlotta's situation differed also from that of women in the first cluster in that she did not intend to enter marriage at all, as she said: "Marriage is not a goal in my life."

All women reported that their parents had rather traditional attitudes and values. Analyzing their educational background, we found that some parents had low and others a high level of education. In some cases, mothers were housewives; others worked. The interviewees, in contrast, had rather modern value orientations. However, these women experienced only an underlying conflict. Two factors seem to explain the different consequences of cohabitation for these women: First, the *affective distance between parents and child* and second, the *absence of economic dependence* (with Carlotta being an exception). Actually, previous research in the U.S. found that children with distant relationships with their parents were more likely to behave in ways that contradict their parent's expectations (Myers 1997; Weinstein

and Thornton 1989). In addition, we observe that some women had rather bad experiences as far as their parents' marriage was concerned. It is likely that these women perceived their parents to live by double standards in terms of traditional values such as marriage.

Since several of the women in this cluster had a relationship that was not aimed at marriage, they were aware of a possible future separation. Furthermore, some women had already experienced the end of cohabitation with a previous partner. As one strategy resulting from these experiences, some couples tried to avoid too much contact with the partner's families, or even between both families. Earlier experiences taught them that it was much more difficult to separate when family members were 'involved.' Carlotta, for instance, stated the following:

"In the end, we try to keep our parents out ... because in previous experiences they entered the couple relationship and they became fond of the partner and when one separates it's a trauma, also for the family, so it's better to avoid."^{xix}

In this way, several women opted to keep distance between their partner and their families.

So, to sum up, women in this cluster decided for cohabitation as a passage or as alternative to marriage. These women were aware that their parents would oppose cohabitation. Nevertheless, they followed their own desires and ignored their parents' desire for them to marry. Both the absence of close kinship ties and of economic support seem to explain the low motivation to comply with parents' wishes; neither socialization nor social control techniques induced interviewees to act in accordance with parental desires. These adults simply ignored conventions. As a result, we find a high potential for social change among this cluster.

4.3. Agreeing with Parents

A third pattern of behavior observed is 'Agreeing with parents.' This cluster has the highest number of women in the sample. These women have a strong motivation to comply with parental wishes and perceive encouraging attitudes towards cohabitation. One major difference compared to the first and second cluster is the fact that parents in this cluster supported their daughters when entering cohabitation and even pushed them to take this step. These parents tended to have relatively tolerant attitudes on cohabitation – this applied also to informal unions that were not aimed at marriage at all. Most women decided for cohabitation as trial, passage, or alternative to marriage:

“It is a choice that is linked to the fact that for me and also for Alessandro, my boyfriend, cohabitation resembles marriage.”^{xxiii}

Here, mothers themselves had often had experienced cohabitation, separation, divorce, or remarriage. They had cohabited or separated in years past and some of them were among the first who used the option of legal divorce, introduced in Italy in 1970.³ These mothers can be seen as constituting a select group, since both cohabitation and divorce was even less diffused at that time. In fact, Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1998) assume that parents who went through the divorce revolution welcome a ‘new life course’ for their children. Parents in this cluster often had a very high level of education (university degree) and in some cases mothers had a higher education than their partner. Moreover, mothers were largely employed and worked as teacher, white-collar worker, or freelancer.

Again, daughters confided in their mothers when taking important choices. But in contrast to the first pattern presented (see section 4.1), these mothers often supported their daughters when entering cohabitation. They encouraged their offspring to leave home and/ or to enter cohabitation, as in the case of Eleonora (34). She was childless and had cohabited already for about seven years at the time of the interview. Her parents experienced cohabitation previous to marriage – even today they have separate bank accounts. Eleonora ‘inherited’ the emancipated attitudes of her parents and defended them also when the family of her partner made inquiries about marriage. Indeed, when she reached the age of 26, her parents pushed her to leave home:

“It came up actually, at the beginning my family wanted to push me into ... my own parents said: ‘You are working now. It’s also the moment that ... we have a [second] flat, so leave.’”^{xxiv}

In this cluster, parents not only supported their daughters’ leaving home or entering cohabitation but also probably did not even disagree when daughters decided for birth outside marriage. Although none of the women in this cluster had a child yet, several intended to give birth soon. These women generally did not expect their parents to have opposing attitudes on that choice. The acceptance of the adult daughter’s decisions by parents was also rooted in the respect and confidence parents had for their child. Recurrently women emphasized this aspect:

“As to that, however, they never tried to hinder me and from my point of view they respect me and hence I respect them.”^{xxv}

“... they always used to trust in my judgment, so if it was o.k. for me it was o.k. for them, too.”^{xxvi}

³ Despite strong opposition of the Christian Democrats and the Catholic Church, the Italian government passed the divorce law in 1970. A referendum failed in 1974.

Thus, in contrast to the previous cluster (section 4.2), women had strong emotional ties to their parents – particularly to their mothers. This was also found among the first cluster. Frequently this strong mother–daughter bond had its origin in the kind of living arrangement both experienced during the daughter’s childhood and youth: Since some mothers were separated or divorced, they reared their daughter on their own. Fathers had generally no or much less importance; this strengthened, of course, the mother–daughter tie. Actually, previous research supposes that female-headed households exhibit unusually low intergenerational conflict (Goldscheider and Goldscheider 1989).

The failure of the parental marriage induced some women to see marriage in general in a critical way. Mara (36), for instance, experienced the divorce of her parents when she was a child. Later on, her mother found a new partner and cohabited. Her partner had his own children as well. When Mara got older, her mother decided for marriage and Mara experienced a well-working ‘patchwork family.’ In this spirit she saw no need to decide for marriage herself, and her mother never asked her to marry:

“They lived through divorce, thus they don’t think that marriage is an indispensable institution and in particular they don’t think that they have to convey this to their children – due to the fact that they were the first who disrupted their own marriage, isn’t it? Thus, if my mother would tell me ‘ah, you have to marry’ ... I would tell her ‘why?’. But not in the sense to make reproaches because of the way she lived her own life, but ... thus, why should it be that important for me if it hasn’t been for her at that time, ... she was the opposite ... my parents even divorced ... (...) so she has shown that marriage is not lasting forever. So why should one start it? If it’s something that might end, why should on start it at all?”^{xvii}

As regards economic support by parents, women in this cluster generally abstained from financial help, although in some cases where the daughters were still students, parents supported them economically. The renunciation of financial help was often motivated by the fact that parents were already supporting them (often for their education) and daughters found it embarrassing to ask for further help. If parents were willing to provide supported nevertheless, women in this cluster generally accepted it, but with hesitance. Eleonora, for instance, insisted on paying a monthly rent to her parents when living in their second flat. Only after several years, when her parents decided to sign it over to her, did she stop paying the money.

As in the first cluster, women in this cluster were strongly influenced by their parents. The mechanism, however, worked differently. Family formation experiences of mothers and the strong mother–daughter bond induced women to have tolerant attitudes on family formation too. Interestingly, none of the women perceived their mother’s living arrangement as something bad or unacceptable. Their knowledge about the mother’s way of life (e.g.

experiencing a family model other than the classic one), led women to behave in a similar way. In contrast, parental influence through economic support was of no importance here. It seems, in fact, that parents and especially mothers influenced their daughters via socialization, but much less so via social control techniques.

4.4. Conclusion: Parental Influence in Bologna

The analysis revealed the different levels of acceptance that parents had with regard to cohabitation. Traditionally-oriented parents tended to criticize the informal union of their adult daughters, although the daughters themselves defined their cohabitation as a premarital step. Parents with modern values and attitudes, in contrast, accepted any kind of cohabitation, i.e., cohabitation as alternative to marriage or as a trial. And they did so without imposing any conditions.

Especially in cases where daughters and parents had strong emotional family ties, as in the first ('Settling the conflict') and third ('Agreeing with parents') patterns, adult daughters tended to approach their mothers when deciding upon important matters. Thus, the strength of their family ties seems to explain their higher motivation to comply with parental wishes. Whereas the mothers who regarded marriage as an important step in a woman's life tended to push their daughters to enter a marital union, the mothers with more tolerant attitudes on family formation encouraged their offspring to go ahead with both leaving home and entering into cohabitation. As for the daughter leaving home, fathers usually had the same opinions as their wives, but in the cohabitation situation fathers were often absent due to separation or divorce.

We found that parents who opposed the daughters' decisions were usually married and religious. Some of them came from Southern Italy and still live there in small villages. 'Encouraging parents,' on the other hand, had gained experience with other kinds of living arrangements and had no religious affiliation. As indicated previously, our statistical analysis on the entry into informal union in Italy provided evidence for the positive impact of the mother's level of education – also in relation to the father's level of education (Schröder 2006). Thus, we were interested to see whether this factor was of importance in our qualitative sample too. In fact, we found that low levels of education among both mothers and fathers were more common among the first cluster, although this did not apply to all parents. The third cluster consisted to a higher extent of parents with a very high educational level (university degree) and mothers with a higher level of education than their partner. Additionally, about half of the mothers in the first cluster were housewives throughout their

lives. Mothers in the third cluster, in contrast, were largely employed and worked as a teacher, white-collar worker, or freelancer. Given the differences in educational and employment career, it is not surprising then that mothers in the third cluster had more liberal attitudes relative to mothers in the first cluster. Thus, it seems that the higher extent of emancipated values among mothers facilitated and accelerated the daughters' entry into cohabitation. Interestingly, these mothers accepted informal union formation on their own – confirmation by the father was not necessary.

Women in the first and third clusters were strongly bound to their parents, unlike women in the second ('Ignoring the conflict') cluster. Whereas adult daughters with strong emotional attachment to their parents tended to replicate their parents' attitudes on family formation, daughters with shattered relations generally developed value orientations that contradicted those of their parents. Their motivation to comply with parental desires was much lower. In short: Only parents with good relations to their offspring transmitted their own values successfully. However, the transmission of modern or traditional values also affected the power relation between child and parent. Adult daughters from traditional families had a great deal of respect for their own parents. They esteemed parents' psychological well-being almost more than their own beliefs. In contrast, women who held liberal values and attitudes emphasized that parents should have trust in their daughters and respect their choices.

A second factor that seems to explain the strong motivation to comply with parental wishes is the prospect of future economic and non-economic support. Women in the first cluster, who settled the conflict with their parents when choosing cohabitation, did not mention this connection at all. Most of them received parental support shortly before or after their wedding, indicating that in most cases support is conditioned by parental approval of the current living arrangement. Parents contributed to the purchase of a flat or they bought the furniture for the flat. This pattern shows that parents indeed use economic resources as means of social control. However, it is not economic dependence per se that explains women's accommodation, but rather the desire for economic support. Thus, women who want to rely on parental support accommodate their parents' attitudes and desires without even mentioning such a connection. Possibly they are not even aware of it. In this sense, parents use their economic power to interfere in the choices of their adult children, whether they do it intentionally or not. Women in the second cluster, on the other hand, avoided any economic support. Women with tense family relations were the only ones who emphasized the connection between parental economic support and interference. Since parents failed to transmit their own values via socialization, they might have tended towards the use of financial help as a means for bringing pressure to bear.

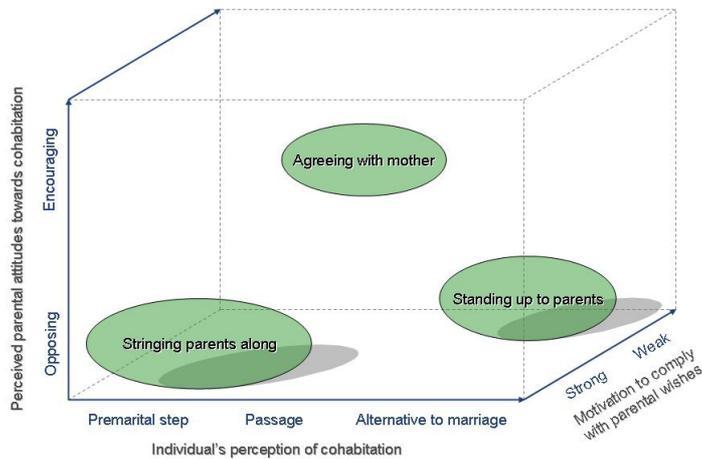
5. THE CASE OF CAGLIARI

In the Cagliari sample, we again clustered our interviewees according to the three dimensions: the individual's perception of cohabitation, perceived parental reactions, and motivation to comply with parental wishes. We found three main clusters; however, we identified several differences among those clusters between the Bologna sample and the Cagliari sample. The clusters may be characterized as follows:

- *Stringing parents along*: Although the informal union of these women was aimed at marriage, the couple had to postpone the wedding. The lack of secure employment positions for both partners as well as inadequate housing induced the couple to perceive cohabitation as if it were a passage within their life, rather than a premarital step. Women in this cluster showed a very high motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. In almost all cases, the relation between family and adult daughter was characterized by very strong ties. Since parents generally opposed cohabitation and daughters saw no way to marry soon, they tended to 'string their parents along', i.e., they kept their parents on hold to wait for marriage to happen. Women, however, postponed the wedding until they have reached the economic security they perceived as a *sine qua non* to marry. About half of the interviewees belong to this cluster.
- *Standing up to parents*: Cohabitation was generally perceived as a long-lasting passage or alternative to marriage. Although women were aware of their parents' opposing attitudes towards informal unions, they decided for cohabitation. Moreover, they stood up to parents and realized their preferred style of union. Whereas some parents reacted in a very negative way and did not accept cohabitation at all, others became resigned to it when they saw that it was at least a serious decision. All women reported that they had weak ties to their families and parents rejected assisting with housing or furniture when daughters entered cohabitation. About one third of the interviewed women belong to this cluster.
- *Agreeing with mothers*: Women in this cluster were strongly supported by their mothers when entering cohabitation. Most women decided for an informal union as alternative to marriage. Although in some cases fathers were not satisfied with the cohabitation decision, mothers stepped in and convinced their husbands. The relations between parents and daughter, but especially those between mother and daughter, were characterized by strong ties. Both emotional and economic support were

common among this cluster. Approximately twenty percent of women belong to this cluster.

Figure 4: Strategies identified among interviewees in Cagliari



5.1. *Stringing Parents Along*

In terms of the number of cases, the ‘Stringing parents along’ cluster is the largest cluster in the Cagliari sample. Here we find mainly women who stated the desire to marry sooner or later. However, the couple’s economic situation did not match the preconditions they considered necessary for marriage. In most cases these preconditions would include both partners having a more or less stable job and the opportunity to purchase a flat. Parents generally opposed cohabitation as they desired their daughter to marry right away. Although daughters in this cluster wished to marry, they strung their parents along, as in their current economic situation they did not see any possibility of realizing marriage. Thus, though cohabitation was aimed at marriage, it did not necessarily end up in a conjugal union. Women instead experienced their informal union as a (sometimes long-lasting) passage:

“We wanted to stay together and for the wedding one needs more time, even if it was our plan (...) It was a whole range of things that lead us to live together, but it’s not necessary before marriage. Absolutely not. At least in our case, we have known each other for a long time and we didn’t need to live together to get to know each other.”^{xxviii}

“If we manage to stay economically secure, maybe one day we will marry.”^{xxix}

Women in this cluster showed a high motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. But as their economic situation did not allow for marriage, parents accepted or had to accept cohabitation. To a certain extent parents were able to relate to the decision for cohabitation as the labor market situation was rather tense in Sardinia. However, some parents had huge

difficulties with their daughter's choice. One interviewee, for instance, feared parental reactions so much that she asked her sister to talk to the parents. Even though most parents reacted less unpleasantly than expected by the interviewees, parental response still tended to be negative. As regards the interviewees who had decided for cohabitation already several years before, they reported that cohabitation was seen by their families as "something absolutely not to do" and as "shameful." A woman who lived in cohabitation was considered as a "concubine." Clara (40), who had married after a previous cohabitation, remembered that her mother had strong prejudices against cohabitation:

"Because Sant'Antioco is an island and as it is true for all islands, there is a [certain] mentality. Today it isn't anymore like that but it used to be like that. From 1995 to today, 11 years have passed. Who lived with a partner was a 'concubine'. That a daughter lived with another person was seen as something shameful in the village."^{xxx}

The experience of Giuliana (31, married and childless) is prototypical for the women in this cluster. Giuliana left home for cohabitation at age 22 and reported the following:

"Both were against it. As far as mentality is concerned, living with a partner is something not to do – absolutely. From engagement to marriage without cohabitation (...) The reaction was very negative. Because from their point of view I was too young and they didn't like cohabitation, for them it was something shameful. They were very mad the first two months, so much that they did not want to talk to me anymore. Later, they got to know my current husband better and better, and step by step accepted that choice."^{xxxi}

In the course of time, however, Giuliana's parents reevaluated their perspective. Whereas at the beginning they did not want to talk to their daughter anymore, later on they accepted cohabitation and even felt confident in their daughter's choice. Giuliana stated that this process started when they gradually got to know her partner better. A similar stepwise acceptance of cohabitation by parents was observed among several interviewees. As time passed and parents renegotiated with their daughters, informal unions were more and more tolerated.

Especially those parents who lived in the smaller villages of the Sardinian countryside were less willing to accept cohabitation. About half the women in this cluster came from Cagliari – they faced much fewer difficulties with parents than women from rural areas. Parents in this cluster tended to have low or medium educational levels and almost all mothers were housewives. All these factors might explain their rather traditional view on cohabitation.

However, although parents at a certain point accepted cohabitation, they accepted only for the time being. Parents generally continued to expect marriage, as in the case of Viviana (36 and still cohabiting). As her mother understood the necessity to save money for the wedding party, she gave her temporary agreement. However, she continued to insist on marriage:

“My mother is waiting that we marry, because, of course, she has a certain mentality. She does not agree very much with living together before getting married, although she understands very well that this is the situation we are in right now, a necessary transitional stage, as the marriage demands much more time. But of course, what she’s asking me every time we meet, is ‘well, and the marriage?’”^{xxxii}

Once a certain economic situation was achieved, several women complied with parental wishes and entered marriage. Although these women emphasized that their decision for marriage was not driven by the desire of their parents, they admitted that this fact was of importance too – not only when choosing to marry, but also whether to marry in church or through a civic ceremony:

“... moreover, the fact that around us there would be a positive reaction, an acceptance, better, the pleasure, the desire of my parents and my relatives allowed us to feel better. But we took this decision irrespective of that (...) and than also because my parents believed firmly in this and therefore I wanted also to meet their desire.”^{xxxiii}

“To please my parents, because my father and my mother stick to see me marrying in church and thus, maybe to please them or out of tradition.”^{xxxiv}

The experiences of Patrizia and Leonarda demonstrate the high importance of parental approval to women in this cluster; in both cases women perceived their parents to have negative attitudes towards cohabitation. As a consequence, Patrizia and Leonarda stepped back from any choice for cohabitation. Patrizia (38) had been oscillating between her partner’s flat and her parental home. In prospect of a future marriage, Patrizia’s father bought several pieces of furniture for the flat her partner had recently purchased. Surprisingly, one day Patrizia’s mother proposed cohabitation:

“... when I came back one morning my mother said to me: ‘But why don’t you go and live with him?’ and I took this advantage, I snapped at the chance and left. What my parents might have thought, was a big impediment for me. I knew that they were against it and I didn’t want to make them sad. The moment I had almost their agreement, I left.”^{xxxv}

Parental approval was crucial for Patrizia’s decision to leave home and to move to her partner’s flat. Furthermore, she emphasized that previously she had set that choice aside since she did not want to hurt her parents’ feelings:

“... I did not want to make them sad and I didn’t feel like breaking up completely. With their agreement I felt more calm and I have done it.”^{xxxvi}

Although Patrizia’s parents understood that the preconditions for marriage had not yet been attained by the couple (since neither Patrizia nor her partner had a permanent job), they continued to hope for an early marriage. Leonarda (age 33, currently married and mother of a child) was very surprised too, when her father offered the possibility of helping her move in with her partner:

“... my parents decided to move. I still lived with my family and then – given that my father saw me suffering, because I was 28 years old, and for the lack of privacy with Massimo, for the lack of a project, of planning a common outlook of life – my father said to me: ‘Since we change the flat, if you want, I will help you. Do you want to live with Massimo?’.”^{xxxvii}

Until then Leonarda had found her father to be conservative. Since she was aware that cohabitation without parental economic support would not have been feasible for her, she was very grateful to her father. She described cohabitation as a desire she and her partner had and as a dream (‘un sogno’) – in her description, cohabitation seemed to be an unreachable state, which tells much about the possibility she personally perceived to live in an informal union. However, both women intended to enter marriage as soon as possible, and the parents desired a wedding – actually, Leonarda married one year after the beginning of her informal union. Both examples show something else: They demonstrate to what extent women make mistakes when assuming parental attitudes. Due to this tendency, we suspect that in general many women are discouraged from entering an informal union even before discussing the issue with their family. They might opt to abandon the idea to cohabit, even before giving some thought to it.

As described, the parental acceptance of cohabitation within this cluster lies somewhere between slight approval and resigned acceptance. A typical reaction is that experienced by Diana (30). Her mother was happy that her daughter was doing well. Nevertheless, she announced to her daughter that she would be even happier if Diana would marry. Actually, when talking about a future wedding, Diana confessed that although she and her partner were not very religious, she intended to have a church wedding. The reason for wanting the religious rite was rooted in her wish to satisfy her mother, who would highly appreciate such a step:

“... he’s not religious and does not adhere to it. He’s not interested in it. I’m religious, but I would rather do it for my mum ... who adheres to it.”^{xxxviii}

This reasoning recurs in several of our interviews. However, Diana also emphasized that she would not be able to bear any tensions with her family:

“I would suffer a lot, if I struggled with anybody of my family, now and in the future. I wouldn’t manage to sustain it.”^{xxxix}

One precondition for cohabitation is leaving the parental home, be it with the intention to enter cohabitation right away or without such intention. Our interviews provide evidence that moving out was not a definite step, but rather a long-lasting and sometimes recurring process.

Whether parents supported their adult child depended also on whether they tolerated that choice or not. And this decision, in turn, came down to the reason for moving out. Attending university or further training was generally accepted as an excuse to leave the parental home. Parents nevertheless expected their adult children to return home as soon as feasible. The experiences Clara (40) related exemplify this reasoning: Clara came from a small village on the Sardinian coast and moved to Cagliari for her studies. After finishing university, she moved back since she had found a job at her parents' place right away. However, suffering a 'boring' life, she moved back to Cagliari two years later. Whereas her parents approved her leaving home for her studies, they disapproved of her choice of leaving again:

"So, at that point it was hard for my parents because they felt I abandoned them. There was no longer the excuse of going to university, because I was actually choosing to go away."^{xi}

The decision to leave home was seldom taken in isolation from the family and its current living situation – in fact, adult children tended to weigh their choices. Several women reacted to external circumstances: In one case the family needed an extra room for the high-maintenance grandmother. In another case, the interviewee moved to live with the grandmother, who needed home care. Anna, for instance, postponed leaving her parental home, since she felt the need to help her parents with domestic work – although she had five grown-up siblings.

"However, my family had also demands, so I couldn't leave my parents alone. I tried to meet both demands."^{xii}

The tendency to ask adult children to return home after university and to expect them to leave home via marriage contributed certainly to the high age at leaving home. It might also explain why most of our Cagliari interviewees spent more years in their relationship before entering cohabitation than was the case in Bologna. Thus, leaving the parental home is the first large barrier to take when intending to live in an informal union.

According to our interviewees, parents tend to judge informal unions differently when a son decides to enter one. Several women reported that their partner's family coped better with cohabitation than their own parents. Interesting also is the diffusion of cohabitation among the families of the interviewees. Many women reported that previous to their own cohabitation, their brothers and/or sisters as well as the partner's siblings had also cohabited. Whereas parents tended to rebel against the first cohabitation in the family, they often accepted subsequent informal unions of their other children, as in the case of Chiara:

“When my sister left to live with her fiancé, it was terrible. She [the mother] did not want to meet her, she had problems to cope with it. But later, as time passed the things got better, and things settled down (...) When I arrived here, she had already been in this situation with my sister, she saw that it wasn't terrifying.”^{xlii}

The fact that one of the adult children had already experienced a separation or divorce had an influence on the parents' reaction on cohabitation too. Katia (26) reported that her partner's family was very much in favor of a premarital cohabitation as one of their daughters had experienced a failed marriage. We also found evidence that – the other way around – cohabitation of the interviewees had an influence on the living arrangements of siblings, cousins, and even friends. Clara (40) emphasized that when she entered cohabitation, it was seen as very negative in her home village. However, later on her cousins decided for cohabitation too and had less opposition. If the entry into cohabitation results in a higher acceptance of informal unions among parents and even among aunts and uncles, one might suppose that cohabitation will spread more rapidly as soon as these first barriers are overcome.

Again, we found that most interviewees approached their mothers when it came to informal union formation. Most women reported that they had rather intensive relationships with their families. Some interviewees visited their families and home villages every two to three weeks. Sometimes this behavior was driven by the desire to see their family; in other cases it was caused by parental need for support and care. Several quotes demonstrate the high importance family has in Cagliari. The family is seen as pivot for the most important decisions in life, among them the decision to leave home and the choice of when and how to enter a couple relationship. It is not surprising that adult children face difficulties in announcing their intention to enter an informal union. Diana for instance, decided for a stepwise procedure. First, she proclaimed to her mother that she would enter cohabitation when her own and her partner's economic situation improved; then she stated that they would move in together when her partner found a job in Cagliari. In the end, Diana just said: “Mum, we decided to live together.”

As for economic support, most interviewees had been supported already prior to the time of entering cohabitation. It is striking that the male partner's family usually contributed to the purchase of a flat, whereas the woman's family tended to pay for the furniture. Although support is given at the beginning of cohabitation, it is often aimed at the couple's future. Even though there is no promise to marry, parents seem to invest their money with the prospect of a future wedding – as shown for instance in the statement by Patrizia's father. Disappointed about the fact that his daughter still did not enter marriage, he said, “If I would have known, I

wouldn't have done it."^{xliv} Other parents announced support for a marriage, e.g. for the wedding party. Viviana (36) for instance, reported:

"Look, from my parent's side, I can tell you for sure yes, because they already told me that they set money apart and that it is for the wedding. Actually, my mother told me: 'Don't come and tell me that you will not marry and then ask me for this money, this money is for the wedding. So, if you don't marry, don't ask me for it, I will not have it'."^{xliv}

Since the couple lived in a situation of economic uncertainty with almost no planning reliability, it is noticeable that Viviana's mother did not consider supporting her daughter now, when money was needed. Instead she stashed away money for the wedding. Actually, the peculiarities of the Italian welfare state contribute to the great importance of the family as provider of social security. In this regard, it is critical whether the family supports an adult child or not. Thus, the relation to parents and economic security are highly interwoven. We found that parents tended to support more extensively when they expected their daughter to marry. However, the peculiarities of the Italian welfare state together with the Italian housing situation generate excrescences that cause huge difficulties for couples.

A colorful example is the case of Patrizia (38): As soon as her partner's family inherited some amount of money, his parents decided to invest it in a flat for their son. Although he did not feel comfortable about leaving home at that time, his parents preferred to make a prepayment for a flat than to keep the money in the bank. Soon, Patrizia's partner and his mother were searching for a flat which in the long run would serve as the couple's future home. Patrizia felt so excluded from this action, which couples usually take on their own, that especially in the first months of living in the new flat she felt like a stranger.

A tight housing situation plus a social security system leads to the possibility of parents intruding into a couple's affairs. It is not uncommon for parents to make use of such an opportunity, thus restricting the couple's liberty; sometimes parents donated building land to their child in order to push for living near to the family of origin. Sometimes parents provided an already-owned flat for the couple. However, only parents decided what to renovate within the flat and in which manner.

To conclude, women in this cluster tended to postpone marriage until they reached a certain degree of economic stability. Parents generally were not satisfied at all with that situation, but since they knew about the precarious economic situation of their adult children, they more or less accepted that choice. We assume that very strong ties with family led to the wish to comply finally with parents. Additionally, we found that several parents invested high

amounts of money for furniture or housing previous to the young couple's marriage. In view of this investment, adult children might have felt obliged to take the step their parents expected them to make. Moreover, parents often provided money towards the wedding party.

5.2. Standing Up to Parents

The middle-sized cluster 'Standing up to parents' consists of women who perceived cohabitation as an important and rather long-lasting passage or as alternative to marriage. Three women had already given birth to a child. Women of this cluster advanced their view on cohabitation very self-confidently. For instance, they argued:

"And from that point [the birth of the child] the family was born. Thus, from that point, married or not married, we are a family. We don't have anything more or anything less than a family where the couple is married and has children."^{xlv}

"Because I think cohabitation is a personal issue. I do not understand why I have to sign a contract if I've decided to refrain from a contract that obliges me to respect. There shouldn't be anybody who tells me 'you have to respect'."^{xlvi}

Most women in this cluster moved to Cagliari to study or find a job. They grew up in rather small villages on the island of Sardinia. These women experienced strongly negative reactions from family when entering an informal union or even when announcing the intention to cohabit. Some interviewees were afraid to tell their parents about their informal union. Tiziana (40), for example, told her family only after several months that she had moved in with her partner. Other interviewees just informed their families about cohabitation and did not really care about their reactions. Arianna (40) said clearly and briefly: "I informed her [her mother] and that was that!"^{xlvi} Lara (37), who had no close emotional ties to her family, emphasized that she told her family about her decision to cohabit "without any discussion." Although all the women had expected strong reactions, they still decided for cohabitation. They had a low motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. In fact, all women in this cluster had stood up to their parents as far as cohabitation was concerned. Whereas some parents became resigned to it after several years, others did not settle easily with their daughter's choice. By far the most resistance was encountered by Fabiola (44). When she left home for cohabitation her mother strongly rebelled against that choice. In the end, the relation between daughter and mother started to shut down completely and the whole family suffered in that situation.

"I had problems with my mother who did not accept that I started living with a man. Thus, for several years the relation with my mother was non-existent (...) For my mother it was important that I 'would leave home in my wedding gown', but this had no importance for me (...) In fact, the first I lived with someone, the whole family suffered of the problems I had with my mother, because I wasn't there at lunches, at festivities, at Christmas."^{xlvi}

It seems that for Fabiola's mother it was more important to enforce the commonly accepted way to leave home – namely via marriage (which was contrary to Fabiola's intentions) – than to keep a good relationship with her own daughter. Also when she lost contact with Fabiola, the mother did not reconsider her attitude. Obviously marriage was so important for Fabiola's mother that she was willing to risk the consequences of her rigid action. It is striking that Fabiola, as well as other interviewees, characterized their mothers as severe, dominant, or rigid. Among this cluster, it was especially the mothers who had problems in accepting their daughter's choice for cohabitation. Generally they never thought of the possibility that their daughter might leave home before marriage. Often they were disappointed, frightened and tried to convince their daughters to rethink their decisions. These mothers asked their daughters to 'regularize' their union and finish with this phase of 'uncertainty'. Though fathers often held the same position as their wives towards cohabitation, they frequently reacted in another way. In Fabiola's case it was actually the father who took the initiative and convinced his wife step-by-step to rebuild relations with their daughter. After three to four years the relationship started to improve. Some interviewees emphasized that their father had finally become aware that his daughter had reached an age where she was able to decide on her own which path to take. Although often having an opposing attitude, fathers conceded to allow the daughters to learn from the experience. However when doing so, they made the point that in the end their daughter had to answer for her own mistakes:

"He told me 'In principle you are an adult person', at that time I was 32 and 'you are grown-up, if necessary you need to pay for your choices'."^{xlix}

In contrast to mothers, fathers were often perceived and described as affectionate and respectful towards the daughter's decisions. It is remarkable that despite these differences, interviewees mainly confided in their mothers when choosing to live in an informal union. However, this behavior seems to be part of the Sardinian family tradition: In Sardinia, mothers always used to have a high decision-making autonomy (Oppo 1991, 1992). Among this cluster (but also among the whole Cagliari sample), women rarely addressed their father directly. Fabiola, actually, believed in a relation between parental attitudes and their personal experiences of life:

"He was an artist, thus he was very open, whereas my mother was a housewife. She stayed at home, took care of the children and had no opportunity to open up mentally. She visited the nuns, who were almost the same. They were actually a pillar for this mentality. Thus, my father had his experiences outside home and managed to accept – very respectfully – the decisions his children took: 'All the things that are o.k. for you, are also o.k. for me. The important thing is that you are fine'. And my mother, on the other hand, was like: 'No, I want my daughter to do this and if not, I will have nothing to do with her'."^l

The commonly negative attitude of parents towards modern living arrangements such as cohabitation seems to be connected to their relative isolation from societal innovations. Most of them lived in smaller villages; they generally had low or middle levels of education, and mothers tended to be housewives. Moreover, religious traditions and canons were important for them. The higher acceptance of informal unions among fathers might be explained partially by their higher exchange of information and attitudes at work. With reference to this rather closed mentality, it is not surprising that some parents opted for hiding the informal union of their daughter to the entire family. Interviewees, for instance, reported that none of her family members – apart from her parents – knew that she cohabited.

Whereas some parents showed serious difficulties accepting their daughter's choice, others reacted in another way. Nicoletta's (36) parents showed indifference when their daughter left home and started cohabiting. They did not approve of her leaving home (to study abroad), nor did they like to see her cohabiting. Nevertheless, they never criticized her. Nicoletta, however, perceived this indifference as their way of dealing with the issue:

"I left without any encouragement from my parent's side, in no way. And this, because they did not like that I left, that I left to live abroad and thus distant from them. But for sure, they didn't like it either very much that I started to live with someone. Even if I wouldn't have left to staying abroad and would simple have said 'tomorrow I move out three kilometers away from home', they wouldn't have liked it either. Actually, the fact that I went abroad excused it somehow (...) There was no big reaction. I repeat, there wasn't any form of incentives. There was a kind of incentive maybe in this attitude of indifference almost, which at the end was no indifference, you know? Almost as if it wouldn't happen. No, but they never told me anything."ⁱⁱ

The parents of Letizia (age 39, cohabiting and mother of a child) asked her to choose marriage too when she started to live together with her partner. After a while they capitulated and started to regard the couple as being married:

"Maybe they resigned! They do not even take into consideration or maybe for them we are simply married, I mean after twenty years. They never asked me anything."ⁱⁱⁱ

Actually, only when they noticed that Letizia took a 'serious' decision, did they start to reevaluate their daughter's choice. It seems that parents tended to associate cohabitation with a temporary passage and possibly with a change of partners. This, however, was assessed negatively by parents. When they saw that a solid relationship had developed, some of them started reevaluating the daughter's decision and learned to accept it. Thus, parental acceptance depended to a great deal on the type of cohabitation young women decided on. Almost all women intended to stay together with their partner throughout their life. Hence, most women took a serious decision when entering an informal union.

It is striking that almost none of these women were in the habit of relying on their parents when having problems or when taking important decisions. Generally these women had weak ties to their families and parents. Barbara (32), for instance, stated that in her view family relations were often burdened by feelings of guilt and emotional blackmail:

“As I see the family as it is structured at the moment, it doesn’t have much sense ... I prefer to see families composed by people who decided to live together. The relationship between parents and children, for God’s sake, are loaded by many positive things. However, other factors come into play as well, such as feelings of guilt, let’s say, emotional blackmail (...) For sure, there are also families that do not fall into this category, but I think that the major part does.”^{liii}

As regards economic and non-economic support, we observed that most women were already financially independent when deciding for cohabitation. These women were not financially supported when entering their informal union. Whereas parents of the ‘stringing parents along’ cluster offered support for housing and furniture, these parents did not. Some of the interviewees pointed out that since there was no approval of cohabitation, there was no help for realizing it:

“I bought everything, for instance the pots and all things of that kind. I bought everything. Because, not agreeing completely [with cohabitation], there was no such help.”^{liiv}

In short, women in the ‘standing up to parents’ cluster perceived their union as passage or alternative to marriage. Although their parents opposed cohabitation, they stood up against their reactions. Whereas some parents tended to oppose very strongly, others became resigned after some years and accepted their daughter’s choice. Thus, in the end the daughters asserted themselves. All women showed a low motivation to comply with the wishes of their parents. This, in turn, seems to have been caused by very weak ties to family members and parents. Additionally, parents refused any economic support for housing or furniture. However, as women themselves were economically independent, they did not have to rely on such support.

5.3. Agreeing with Mothers

Only a few women in the Cagliari sample can be assigned to the ‘agreeing with mothers’ cluster. These women were characterized by regarding cohabitation as alternative to marriage. In particular, their mothers tended to have rather modern values and attitudes. Thus, they supported their daughters when entering cohabitation. Most of the interviewees came from Cagliari, and their parents represented all strata of education, although some mothers had higher levels of education than their husbands. Moreover, most mothers worked; only a few were housewives. This cluster is mainly distinguished by the transmission of values of

independence by mothers, as in the case of Erica (age 33 and married), who experienced the separation of her parents during her youth. She emphasized this:

“I lived alone with my mother, with an independent woman who taught me independence and to value myself.”^{lv}

When Erica entered cohabitation neither her mother nor her brother were surprised. To a certain extent they expected such a step and were even relieved when Erica started to live with another person rather than on her own. Only Erica’s father was skeptical and said: ‘It’s your life. If you make a mistake, you have to correct it’^{lvi}. Valentina (52) also stressed the respect her parents had towards her decisions – this applied especially to her mother, who loomed large in her life. Valentina admired her for always having an opinion of her own – sometimes even opposing her husband – although she had always been a housewife and therefore dependent on him. Valentina describes her mother as follows:

“She’s a very liberal woman, although she grew up with a certain education, she has always been ... my mother is one of there maybe few persons at her age who – for personal conviction – was in favor of abortion. Although believing and being a person with a certain culture, she has been a person who has always chosen. It’s not by accident that I have certain convictions. I believe that the maternal education has a lot of influence. My mother is 85 years old and she’s one person at her age who had a liberal mind and who proved that, although she’s a person who was a housewife throughout her life ... she’s a woman with lots of capacity and a lot of intelligence, maybe one of the few ... that I got to know. And I mean, it’s relatively easy to demonstrate certain ideas when you have a profession, when you are independent, when you have already reached something in your life (...) to have determined convictions and to be against also against those convictions of the husband wasn’t easy.”^{lvii}

Her father, on the other hand, is rather religious. Despite his different moral concept, he never interfered with the decisions of his daughter. Even today, Valentina is still wondering why he never tried to influence her. In the end, he always respected her choices. Similar experiences were related by Sabina (52). When entering cohabitation with a man who had separated and had a little child, her family accepted the decision right away. Sabina underlined that her family always respected her choices too. Her mother, in particular, conveyed independence to her daughter:

“I don’t like a person on whom I have to be dependent. I like to have my independence that has always been my desire. As a teenager already, I studied to have a job in order to maintain myself. I don’t want that anybody takes care of me in this respect. It’s the education I got at home. My mother worked and still works – it’s something I have seen already when I was a small child and thus I wasn’t looking for a man who went out for work to make ten thousand things and me at home bringing up the children and cleaning the house. That’s not my desire and it has never been.”^{lviii}

Since her father came from an older generation, he had certain difficulties understanding his daughter’s choices. However, Sabina’s mother mediated between daughter and father:

“I didn’t have problems, my mother realized that I was determined and she never made a fuss about my choices; my father was much more older, imagine, he was born in 1918, so he’s a gentleman of another generation. But my mother managed to explain him that it was my choice and them my choice was respected.”^{lix}

Alice (31) could rely on maternal support too when it came to cohabitation. When Alice announced her plan to enter cohabitation, her father protested strongly. This was particularly delicate as Alice partly depended economically on her parents. Her father threatened her with cutting all economic support and argued that at the moment she started living with her partner, she should be economically independent. In the end, Alice's mother stepped in and convinced her husband to accept their daughter's choice. He even agreed to continue to support his daughter if necessary. The behavior of Alice's mother is quite interesting as it contradicts the way other mothers in this cluster behaved: She not only defended her daughter when negotiating with her husband; she actually suggested that her daughter enters a premarital cohabitation before deciding to marry:

“Yes, I first talked to my mother, because she's a much more open person. My mother has fewer, how to say, social prejudices. She is more understanding. I first talked to her about it, I told her the situation and she absolutely agrees with me, better, I have to be honest, my mother actually advised me to live with someone before I get married. She told me: 'My daughter, it is not necessary that you marry' – almost preventing. I don't know whether this is because of personal experiences or not, but let's say, she's more content that I start cohabiting.”^{lx}

Alice underlined that her mother had an open mind and was rather tolerant. It is noteworthy that despite being a housewife, she had a higher level of education than her husband. We suppose that her high level of education is one piece of the puzzle that contributed to her open mentality.

Among this cluster, the mothers of our interviewees had a decisive role: They educated their daughters towards independence and autonomy. Several mothers exemplified this autonomy to their daughters throughout their own life by being employed and hence economically independent. Especially Valentina pointed to the relationship between being employed and representing one's own convictions even when in contrast to the belief of others. Additionally, these mothers supported their daughters emotionally when they decided for an unconventional way of living – also against the father's conviction. In general, women in this cluster were always supported by their families when there was a need. This applied to both economic and emotional support. Sabina, for instance, was able to leave home and to start living with some friends when she was in her twenties. Later, her parents bought a flat where she lived on her own.

5.5. Conclusion: Parental Influence in Cagliari

Women in the sample used different strategies when entering cohabitation. Women in both the ‘stringing parents along’ and ‘standing up to parents’ clusters encountered parental resistance when choosing to live in an informal union. However, both clusters of interviewees handled the situation in a different way. Women in the first cluster chose cohabitation as a premarital step. But since their insecure economic situation did not allow for marriage, they postponed the wedding – in some cases for several years. During that time, women strung parents along. In the end, however, they complied with the wishes of their parents. Among the second cluster, women chose cohabitation as a long-lasting passage or alternative to marriage. These women were not afraid to struggle with their parents and stood up to them when they rebelled against cohabitation. We assume that the strong protest of parents might also be rooted in the fact that their daughters did not intend to marry (at all or within the next couple of months) when they entered cohabitation. Perhaps parents would have accepted this choice more easily if the union had been aimed at marriage. As regards the third cluster, we saw that women encountered maternal support when deciding for an informal union. The fathers, on the other hand, opposed cohabitation more or less strongly. Here mothers had a decisive role – not only when transmitting modern values to their daughters, but also as negotiator between daughter and father.

As to economic help, we found that women who stood up to parents were generally economically independent when starting cohabitation. Some had to rely on their partner’s income and some needed additional support by parents. In general, parents refused to support the purchase of furniture or housing when the daughter started cohabitation. Among the ‘stringing parents along’ cluster, in contrast, parents were already supporting their daughters when the later chose cohabitation. However, their help was aimed at marriage, although couples did not always declare their intention to marry soon or even at all. Here, the daughter’s family tended to provide support for buying furniture, whereas the male’s family contributed to housing costs, such as prepayments. Only parents of the last cluster provided general support without any conditions or expectations regarding the daughter’s future living arrangements. Parents helped, for instance, to purchase a flat, although the daughter wanted to live on her own.

Our interviews revealed that external factors such as housing issues and employment situations have much more impact on couple’s decisions than was the case in Bologna. Since Sardinia lacks big companies and has experienced decades of mismanagement,

unemployment rates are higher than in Northern Italy. Even young professionals with high education levels face huge difficulties finding a job. In the main, employers offer only fixed-term contracts to young adults. Often, they are forced to work as a freelancer without any kind of statutory benefits. It is not surprising that under these conditions young adults tend to leave home relatively late. Actually, in the sample few women left home before union formation. Several of them passed directly into cohabitation, without experiencing a phase of living on their own or sharing a flat with other students. Additionally, young men and women met a problem when searching for adequate housing. High rents and a tight housing market made it difficult to move into a home together. Moreover, it is still rather uncommon to rent a flat; several interviewees opted to invest their money into the purchase of a flat. Under these circumstances, economic support of parents gains in importance.

As regards family relations among the first cluster, most women reported that their families were very important for them. Several women visited their parents regularly and supported them when needed. Although postponing marriage in opposition to parental desires, women tried to keep on good terms with their families. Some women even set aside their decision to enter cohabitation until their parents proposed that step. Thus, parental approval was highly relevant for them. Women in the second cluster, on the other hand, reported weak family relations. For these women, parental opinions were less important. Strong family ties were also found among the third cluster of interviewees described here. Among these women, mothers and daughters had no conflicts and regularly supported each other, including emotionally support.

Again, we analyzed parental education and found that both parents of the ‘stringing parents along’ and ‘standing up to parents’ cluster tended to have rather low or medium education. Most mothers were housewives and especially those parents, who opposed strongest, came from small villages throughout the island. On the other side, we observed that parents of the last cluster tended to show a higher level of post-secondary education, that mothers were often employed and that families came mostly from Cagliari. These factors seem to influence to a high extent parental attitudes towards cohabitation.

6. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

For the systematic analysis of parental influence on cohabitation, we employed the ‘theory of reasoned action’ by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980). Relying on their assumptions, we build a three-dimensional diagram including individuals’ perception of cohabitation, perceived parental attitudes, and motivation to comply with parents’ wishes.

As regards parental attitudes, we observed that among both samples the same factors seemed to shape parents' opinions towards cohabitation: Daughters with lower educated parents, including mothers who were housewives and/or had come from rural areas, experienced the strongest parental protest when they entered an informal union. In contrast, interviewees who grew up in the cities of Bologna or Cagliari, women with more highly educated parents and those with employed mothers faced much fewer (if any) difficulties with parents. Moreover, especially for Bologna we found that women whose mothers experienced living arrangements others than the traditional one were encouraged by their mothers to enter an informal union. These findings are in line with studies that found evidence for the impact of parental education (Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Schröder 2006; DiGiulio and Rosina 2007) and living arrangements of the family of origin (Domínguez et al. 2007) on cohabitation in Italy.

Among both samples, mothers had a decisive role when it came to informal union formation as daughters were used to approaching their mothers when taking important decisions. Mothers who opposed cohabitation tended to discourage their daughter from cohabitation. These mothers tried to convince their adult children to enter marriage as soon as possible. Mothers with positive evaluations of cohabitation, on the other side, agreed to entry into informal union – some even encouraged their daughters to dare this step. This mechanism seems to be stronger in Cagliari than in Bologna: In cases where mothers opposed cohabitation and fathers agreed, daughters faced much more difficulty when choosing cohabitation. Whereas in cases where mothers agreed and fathers opposed, mothers generally convinced their husband to accept cohabitation. The strong power of mothers in Sardinia might be explained by the traditionally higher decision-making autonomy of wives (Oppo 1991, 1992).

Actually, we found that in both settings the way young women perceive their informal union is highly interwoven with their motivation to comply with parental desires. The more daughters perceive their parents to oppose cohabitation and the stronger their motivation to satisfy their parents, the more probable it is that they will aim their cohabitation at marriage. Whereas women in the Bologna sample entered marriage this way – only after several months of cohabitation, women in Cagliari tended to postpone the marriage until their economic conditions allowed for celebrating the wedding. Interviewees, who perceived their parents – and especially their mothers – to have favorable attitudes towards cohabitation and who, in general, had a high motivation to comply with parents, saw their informal union rather as a passage or as alternative to marriage. And, last but not least, those women with a weak motivation to comply with parental desires did not satisfy parental wishes for marriage. This

applied in both regional settings. These women chose a lifestyle that was completely different from that of their parents. Here we find the highest potential for future changes in family formation behavior.

Interestingly, the motivation to comply with parents seems to depend on two major factors. The first factor regards the strength of family ties; the second one refers to past, current, and future economic support from parents. As to family ties, we observed that the more important the family is for the respondents, the more they accommodate towards the views and attitudes of their parents. At a certain point women in both the Bologna 'settling the conflict' cluster and in the Cagliari 'stringing parents along' cluster accommodated their parents' desire for them to be married – these women had strong ties to their families. On the contrary, women in the Bologna 'ignoring the conflict' cluster and women in the Cagliari 'standing up to parents' cluster did not meet their family's expectations – these women had weak relations to their families. It is likely that family is much less important for these women and that they rely on their own attitudes and desires when making choices.

As regards economic factors, we found that future economic and non-economic factors played a stronger role in Bologna, whereas past and current financial support was more important in Cagliari. It seems, actually, that women in Bologna who finally accommodate their parent's expectations to marry are well aware of support parents will give after marriage (such as the prepayment of housing property or money for furniture). Additionally, these women knew that they had to rely on non-economic support when giving birth to a child. Bernardi et al. (2007) found in fact that women in Bologna usually combined family and work, whereas in Cagliari women instead used to leave the labor market when giving birth to their first child. These findings explain why women in Cagliari refer much less to the importance of parental support for childcare. As regards Cagliari, past and current economic support (even before marriage) played a stronger role. In general, external factors such as housing and the employment situation had a stronger impact on young adults than was the case in Bologna. The lack of adequate and affordable housing as well as missing job opportunities strengthens the importance of the family as provider of social security. As a consequence, young adults in Cagliari face stronger barriers when leaving the parental home. Actually, leaving home is the first big step to take when intending to live in an informal union. It is not surprising then, that most Cagliarian couples had very long-lasting relationships before they entered cohabitation, whereas this was not the case in Bologna. Additionally, parents who might expect their daughters to marry later on tended to support economically for housing and furniture. We assume that daughters responded to these pre-marital investments in that they complied with parental expectations.

The analysis, especially of the Cagliari context, shows how much several factors impact the diffusion of cohabitation and how strongly they are interwoven. External circumstances such as housing and employment market reinforce the power parents have on their children. Not having the opportunity to leave home and earn money leads to an increased importance of parental support. In Bologna, in contrast, young adults have more of these opportunities. Thus, a complexity of factors hinders young adults in Cagliari from deciding for an informal union. In Bologna this is the case too – however, to a lower extent. It seems that, compared to Cagliari, young adults in Bologna have more opportunity to act in line with their attitudes concerning union formation. We assume that, due to the factors cited here, a high proportion of young adults in Sardinia step back from cohabitation. Our findings confirm, in fact, that it is not sufficient to analyze informal union formation in Italy on a national level. The regional perspective revealed strong differences in the way diffusion of cohabitation is influenced in both contexts of the study.

The observed behavior has serious implications for other demographic events in Italy: The later young adults can afford to start living with their partners, the later they enter cohabitation, marriage, and parenthood. Our qualitative data showed that interviewees in Bologna gave first birth on average at age 31.5; interviewees in Cagliari did so at approximately age 34. In addition, several interviewees were not aware of the fact that their ‘biological clock’ restricted fertility. Some women at age 40 still intended to have their first child “somewhere in the future.” Especially among the Cagliari sample we found women who started trying to conceive very late in life. Their attempt resulted in unwanted childlessness. In this respect, the slow and hampered diffusion of cohabitation needs to be considered in relation to the low rates of fertility that have started to be typical for Italy.

Regarding the future development of cohabitation in Italy, this study indicates further growth in the practice. Our findings point to the importance of parental levels of education and mothers’ labor market activities in the acceptance of cohabitation. We assume that the increasing numbers of more highly educated and working mothers will accelerate non-traditional living arrangements such as cohabitation. Nevertheless, this change will probably take some time. We also found hints that realization of cohabitation influenced living arrangements of younger and older siblings and vice versa. It is not uncommon that a failed marriage of a sibling induces parents to accept cohabitation of other adult children more easily. Thus, we argue also that a horizontal diffusion of cohabitation among one generation is taking place.

Since our analyses provide evidence for the strong influence of the emotional bonds between adult children and their parents on informal union formation, the incorporation of questions on this topic into survey questionnaires would certainly be useful for future research.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For their useful advice and suggestions I am grateful to Laura Bernardi, Peter A. Berger, Sylvia Keim, Andreas Klärner, Monika Mynarska, Paola DiGiulio, Esther Geisler and Wenke Apt. I also highly appreciate the comments made by Alessandro Rosina when presenting an earlier version of this article at the *Giornate di Studio sulla Popolazione* 2007. For language editing I thank Susann Backer and David Harrison.

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ⁱ Per come la vedo io la convivenza è un passo che porta al matrimonio.

ⁱⁱ Io ho bisogno di sentire di avere una mia famiglia e non solo una convivenza che comunque è bello ma non è abbastanza per me. Voglio di più di una convivenza.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Era nei nostri progetti vivere assieme e sposarci anche perché mio marito non è di Bologna, non è della città quindi vederci era complicato e quindi la scelta è stata dettata dall'esigenza di trascorrere più tempo insieme."

^{iv} "Non avevo più la casa in affitto e piuttosto che cercarne un'altra a quel punto abbiamo iniziato la convivenza."

^v "Dunque...non erano cioè hanno accettato ma sicuramente non con entusiasmo perché comunque avrebbero preferito un matrimonio da subito però hanno capito la situazione quindi non mi hanno mai ostacolato. Hanno sempre espresso la loro preferenza al matrimonio piuttosto che alla convivenza però una volta chiarite le nostre intenzioni, anche con loro non ci sono stati problemi."

^{vi} "Io sono cresciuta in una famiglia proprio molto tradizionale nel sud dell'Italia, quindi in un'atmosfera molto diversa da quella in cui vivo oggi molto tradizionalista, molto chiusa che poi era un paesino del sud con una mentalità molto ristretta, quindi per certe cose ho avuto molte restrizioni nella mia giovinezza, poi io fino ad una certa età non potevo neanche uscire con i ragazzi o cose così insomma."

^{vii} "[Miei genitori] sono...non dico rigidi, però ecco meno aperti. I principi della famiglia su certe regole, su certe cose ... insomma sono stati molto fermi."

^{viii} "Lì sempre il papà che {sorride} un po' più geloso delle figlie (...) insomma, ci ha chiesto: 'ma che intenzioni avete?', voleva essere un po' rassicurato insomma che non facessimo...così, stupidaggini. (...) che non fosse una convivenza così, tanto per perdere del tempo, ecco."

^{ix} " ... anche se tutti lo sanno secondo me, eh? Sì, perché ospito dei parenti a casa e il mio ragazzo c'è sempre...però...si lo sanno però non si dice niente, tutti zitti, tutto bene insomma. Funziona così."

^x "Mia mamma ha compreso di più ... Mio padre l'ha presa un po' peggio, nel senso che c'è rimasto male, pensava che io andassi via perché non volevo stare più con loro, poi chiaramente ne abbiamo parlato, gli ho fatto capire che non è così."

^{xi} "Mio padre mi diceva 'ma chi te lo fa fare? Ti devi fare da mangiare, devi pulire, devi cucinare ... ma chi te lo fa fare?' {ride}. Invece mia madre diceva "vai via, vai via". Poi in realtà c'era rimasta male anche lei insomma perché non erano abituati all'idea. Non è stato facile insomma."

^{xii} “Invece dopo il primo anno che stavo qua mi hanno chiesto di tornare, ma io avevo già conosciuto il mio attuale ragazzo e ho detto ‘Mamma, se mi porti a casa non vado più all’università’ e mia mamma mi ha detto ‘Va beh, stai là’ soffrendo, però...e abbiamo speso tanti soldi perché io pagavo un affitto e a Torino non dovevo pagarlo, mia sorella ad esempio va all’università e va a Torino anche perché mia mamma ha detto ‘Basta! Una sì, due no fuori’ anche perché io sono venuta a studiare e ci sono rimasta.”

^{xiii} “In generale le famiglie sono molto dispiaciute, quando nascono figli fuori dal matrimonio, allora si ... possono nascere problemi, discussioni, dispiaceri. Però fin quando non ci sono figli insomma ... almeno per come mi rendo conto io intorno a me non ci sono grosse pressioni da parte della famiglia, quando invece nascono figli dispiace, ai genitori dispiace che nascano fuori dal matrimonio insomma. Per tutti è meglio regolarizzare la coppia per i figli insomma.”

^{xiv} “No, non mi va. Non mi va, non so...è una cosa che non mi va forse anche per rispetto ai miei genitori, non so...vorrei prima sposarmi e dopo fare dei figli. I figli gliel’ho sempre detto, io prima del matrimonio non ne faccio. Figli no.”

^{xv} “Se poi abiterò...a Torino ad esempio, sono più tranquilla perché ci sarebbero i miei genitori quindi potrei lavorare e starei sicura che i miei figli qualcuno me li guarda, (...) se pensiamo ad un futuro, con i bambini come si fa? E’ un problema. Cioè io vedo le coppie che sono sole qua, è veramente molto faticoso perché non hai più tempo per te, per niente. Si corre solo dentro la città come dei pazzi e questo fa paura.”

^{xvi} Cioè...stiamo bene però non è che questa convivenza sia finalizzata al matrimonio, le intenzioni ci sono ma non è una cosa...tassativa diciamo, magari un esperimento che può funzionare bene oppure può fallire anche

^{xvii} Credo che la relazione tra due persone debba essere c’è unicamente, ci deve essere un legame affettivo, e non un legame legislativo.

^{xviii} “ ... so che questo appunto è il risultato di un lavoro faticoso e anche doloroso se vuoi, perché magari ho avuto anche ... dei momenti cioè, nel passato quando mi sentivo fragile, con problemi anche molto grossi cioè, anche proprio di tipo insomma economico e...non è stato insomma molto facile avere ... poi mi sono fatta anche violenza nella cosa di dire “Mamma, papà sono nella cacca, aiutatemi”. Quindi è stato insomma duro, ... però ti dico ha creato questo tipo di rapporto cioè che mi piace molto, di grosso rispetto, quindi penso che ... loro forse hanno questi desideri però ...per una questione di rispetto delle mie scelte non sono mai venute fuori, dico anche rispetto al fatto di avere un figlio venuto fuori con mia madre dopo, cioè mai e poi mai mi ha fatto influire il fatto...”

^{xix} “I parenti del mio compagno dalla parte del padre sono numerosi, molto numerosi, vivono tutti quanti in Calabria e sono tutti sposati con figli. I matrimoni sono stati degli eventi particolarmente importanti. Allora, lui in pratica è l’unico a non aver fatto questa cosa e quindi in quel senso lì, ecco...si è notato. Nei racconti dei matrimoni dei cugini ... e quindi noi eravamo gli unici che non si erano spos ... però voglio dire al di là di questo in maniera molto tranquilla non c’è mai stato una spinta o una richiesta specifica.”

^{xx} “ ... quando ti aiutano c’è sempre una tassa da pagare {ride}, cioè loro ti danno ma ti chiedono anche (...) cioè è sempre un po’ sicuramente un rapporto di...di potere ovviamente. È sempre così...il denaro comunque.”

^{xxi} “Innanzitutto, i miei genitori non condividono questa cosa quindi non lo sanno perché loro...va beh, la mia è una famiglia non dico tradizionale, per certe cose tradizionale per altre no e comunque immagino che avrebbero paura che le cose non vadano eccetera e quindi non gliel’ho detto...prima voglio vedere come stiamo noi e poi lo dico perché casomai le cose dovessero andar male non voglio impensierirli diciamo e basta...Poi loro sì, sono cattolici di conseguenza preferirebbero proprio che due persone si sposassero e non che convivessero prima dell’eventuale matrimonio per me invece non è neanche...boh il matrimonio non rappresenta uno scopo nella mia vita.”

^{xxii} “Comunque cerchiamo di lasciare le famiglie al di fuori...perché in precedenti esperienze erano entrate all’interno delle relazioni di coppia e quindi si erano affezionate al partner e quando ci si lascia è un trauma anche per le famiglie e quindi è meglio evitare.”

^{xxiii} È una scelta che è legata al fatto di ... per me e anche per Alessandro, il mio ragazzo [la convivenza] equivale al matrimonio.

^{xxiv} “E’ nato anche magari, all’inizio forse spinto anche dai miei...dai miei stessi genitori che hanno detto: ‘Beh, adesso lavori. E’ anche il momento che ... abbiamo una casa, cioè vai’.”

^{xxv} “Però non hanno mai cercato da questo punto di vista di ostacolarli e questo secondo me è una forma di rispetto nei miei confronti e di riguardo io rispetto loro.”

^{xxvi} “... hanno sempre avuto abbastanza fiducia sul mio giudizio per cui se andava bene a me, andava bene anche a loro.”

^{xxvii} “Loro vengono più da esperienze non riuscite di matrimonio, quindi non pensano che sia un’istituzione indispensabile e soprattutto non si sentono di doverlo dire ai figli visto che loro sono stati i primi a rompere il matrimonio in cui erano, no? Quindi, cioè, se mia madre mi dovesse dire ‘ah devi sposarti’...le direi ‘perché?’. Ma non nel senso di rinfacciare la vita che lei ha avuto, però...cioè perché dovrebbe essere così importante per me se non lo era ai suoi tempi, cioè...anzi poi lei è stata...i miei hanno divorziato proprio... (...) ha dimostrato comunque che il matrimonio non è per sempre. Quindi perché dovrebbe essere da iniziare? Se è una cosa che può finire perché dovrebbe iniziare?”

^{xxviii} “Avevamo voglia di stare insieme e il matrimonio richiedeva un po’ più di tempo, anche se è nei nostri progetti (...) non è un passaggio perché non è che lo ritengo almeno nel nostro caso non penso sia stato un passo necessario, assolutamente necessario. Sono state una serie di cose che ci hanno portato alla convivenza, però non un passo necessario prima del matrimonio. Assolutamente no. Perlomeno nel nostro caso, ci conosciamo da tanto tempo e non avevamo bisogno della convivenza per conoscerci.”

^{xxix} “Se riusciamo a stare tranquilli economicamente forse un domani ci sposeremo.”

^{xxx} “Perché Sant’Antioco è un’isola e come tutte le isole c’è una mentalità, oggi non è più così ma prima lo era, dal 1995 ad oggi sono passati 11 anni, all’epoca chi conviveva era una concubina. Era vista come una vergogna nel paese, che una figlia conviveva con un’altra persona.”

^{xxxi} “Erano entrambi contrari, per la mentalità la convivenza è una cosa da non fare assolutamente. Dal fidanzamento al matrimonio senza convivenza (...) La reazione è stata molto negativa. Perché secondo loro ero troppo piccola e a loro non piaceva la convivenza, per loro era una cosa vergognosa, i primi due mesi sono rimasti molto male, tanto da non volermi più parlare, poi hanno conosciuto meglio il mio attuale marito e si sono convinti pian piano di questa scelta.”

^{xxxii} “Mia mamma sta aspettando che ci sposiamo perché naturalmente ha una certa mentalità. Non è d’accordissimo con la convivenza, anche se capisce benissimo anche lei che è un momento e un passaggio obbligatorio perché il matrimonio richiedeva molto più tempo insomma. Però naturalmente quello che mi dice lei è ‘allora, questo matrimonio insomma?’ tutte le volte che la vedo.”

^{xxxiii} “... poi il fatto che intorno ci fosse una positività un’accettazione, anzi il soddisfare il desiderio dei miei genitori e dei miei parenti ci ha fatto stare meglio, ma noi l’abbiamo presa a prescindere questa decisione (...) e poi perché i miei genitori credevano fermamente in questa cosa e quindi ho voluto assecondare anche il loro desiderio.”

^{xxxiv} “Per accontentare i miei genitori, perché mio padre e mia madre appunto ci tengono e vorrebbero vedermi sposare in Chiesa e quindi forse più per accontentare loro o per tradizione.”

^{xxxv} “... e una mattina che sono rientrata mia mamma mi ha detto: ‘Ma perché non vai a vivere con lui?’ e io ho approfittato, ho preso la palla al balzo e sono andata. Sentivo come un grosso impedimento quello che potevano pensare i miei genitori, sapevo che erano contrari e non volevo dargli questo dispiacere. Dal momento che ho avuto quasi un benessere da parte loro sono andata.”

^{xxxvi} “... io non volevo dare a loro un dispiacere e non me la sentivo di tagliare completamente. Con il loro benessere mi sono sentita più tranquilla e l’ho fatto.”

^{xxxvii} “... i miei genitori hanno deciso di traslocare, io vivevo ancora con la mia famiglia e mio padre in quell’occasione mi disse, visto che mi vedeva soffrire, perché avevamo già 28 anni, per la mancanza di privacy con Massimo, della mancanza di un progetto, che della costruzione di una vita insieme, mi dice: ‘Visto che stiamo cambiando casa, se tu vuoi ti aiuto, voi andare a vivere insieme a Massimo’.”

^{xxxviii} “... lui non è credente e non ci tiene. Non gli interessa. Io sono credente, però lo farei più per mia madre...che ci tiene.”

^{xxxix} “Soffrirei molto se dovessi litigare con qualcuno della mia famiglia adesso come in futuro, non riuscirei a sopportarlo.”

^{xi} “Allora lì è stata dura per i miei genitori perché l’hanno vissuta come un abbandono, non c’era più la scusa dell’Università, perché stavo scegliendo proprio di andarmene”

^{xii} “Però, avevo anche esigenze familiari per cui non potevo lasciare i miei genitori da soli e cercavo di dividermi tra tutti e due.”

^{xiii} “Quando è andata mia sorella a vivere con il fidanzato, è stata una cosa terribile, lei [la madre] non voleva andare a trovarla, l’ha vissuta male, però poi con il tempo le cose sono andate bene, si sono sistemate. (...) Quando sono venuta qua, lei aveva già vissuto quella esperienza con mia sorella, ha visto che non era una cosa terrificante.”

^{xiiii} “Se l’avessi saputo non l’avrei fatto.”

^{xlv} “Guarda posso dirti con certezza da parte dei miei genitori sì perché mi hanno già detto che i soldi sono messi da parte e sono per il matrimonio. Anzi mia madre mi ha anche detto: ‘non venirmi a dire che non ti sposi e poi magari mi chiedi anche quei soldi, quei soldi sono del matrimonio. Quindi se non ti sposi non chiedermeli, non li avrai’.”

^{xlvi} “E da lì [la nascita del figlio] è nata la famiglia e quindi a questo punto per noi, sposati o non sposati, siamo una famiglia. Non abbiamo niente di più e niente di meno di quella che è la famiglia con il matrimonio e i figli.”

^{xlvii} “Perché la vedo come una cosa personale il convivere. Non capisco perché devo firmare un contratto quando l’ho scelto a prescindere dalla firma o meno di un contratto in cui mi obbligo a rispettare. Non ci deve essere qualcuno che mi dice devi rispettare.”

^{xlviii} “L’ho informato e basta.”

^{xlix} “Ho avuto dei problemi con mia madre che non ha accettato che io andassi a vivere con un uomo, quindi per parecchi anni i rapporti con mia madre azzerati (...) Per mia madre era importante che io saltassi la porta vestita da sposa, mentre per me non aveva nessuna importanza (...) infatti quando c’è stata la mia prima convivenza e quindi problemi con mia madre ne ha risentito tutta la famiglia di tutto questo perché allora io ero quella che mancava ai pranzi, quella che mancava alle feste, quella che mancava il giorno di Natale.”

^l “Mi ha detto ‘Infondo tu sei una persona adulta’, all’epoca avevo 32 anni e ‘sei grande, eventualmente sarai anche disposta a pagare per le tue scelte’.”

^{li} “Lui era artista quindi era molto aperto, mentre mia madre era casalinga, stava a casa, badava alle figlie e non aveva possibilità di aprirsi mentalmente. Frequentava le sorelle che comunque erano uguali. Erano proprio di sostegno in questa mentalità, quindi mio padre aveva la sua esperienza anche fuori di casa e riusciva ad accettare, molto rispettoso delle decisioni che prendevamo noi figli ‘tutto quello che per te va bene, va bene anche a me. L’importante è che tu stia bene’. E mia madre invece era ‘no, quello voglio da mia figlia altrimenti non c’è nessun rapporto con mia figlia’.”

^{lii} “Io sono partita senza il minimo incoraggiamento da parte dei miei genitori, di nessuna forma e questo sia perché non gradivano che io me ne andassi, che andassi a stare all’estero e quindi lontano. Però certamente non gradivano troppo neanche che io andassi a convivere. Anche se non fossi andata all’estero e avessi detto semplicemente domani mi trasferisco a tre km da casa, non sarebbe stato molto gradito. Anzi, il fatto che io andassi all’estero lo ha giustificato in qualche modo (...) Non c’è stata una grande reazione. Ripeto, non c’è stata nessun forma di incentivo. C’è stata una forma di incentivo casomai proprio in questo atteggiamento quasi di indifferenza, che poi non era indifferenza, no? Quasi se non stesse per accadere. No, però non mi è stato detto niente.”

^{liii} “Forse si sono rassegnati! Non prendono neanche in considerazione o forse per loro semplicemente siamo sposati, insomma dopo venti anni voglio dire. Non mi hanno chiesto nulla.”

^{liiii} “Per come la vedo io la famiglia così come è strutturata attualmente non ha molto senso cioè...preferisco pensare ad una famiglia composta da persone che scelgono di vivere assieme. Quindi i rapporti che si cercano tra genitori e figli per carità sono carichi di moltissime cose positive però comunque entrano in gioco molti fattori come i sensi di colpa, diciamo ricatti affettivi (...) Sicuramente ci sono anche famiglie che non cadono in queste problematiche però penso siano la maggior parte.”

^{liv} “Ho comprato tutto io, tipo le pentole e tutte queste cose qua. Ho comprato tutto io. No, perché comunque non essendo completamente d’accordo non c’è stato questo aiuto.”

^{lv} “Ho vissuto da sola con mia madre, con una donna comunque indipendente che mi ha insegnato l’indipendenza e l’affermazione di me come valore”

^{lvi} “Del resto la vita è la tua. Se farai un errore lo vedrai tu.”

^{lvii} “E’ una donna molto libera, nonostante sia cresciuta in un’educazione di un certo tipo, è sempre stata...mia madre è una delle forse pochissime persone alla sua età che aveva votato per l’aborto per convinzione sua personale. Pur credendo ed essendo una persona con una certa cultura, è stata una persona che ha sempre scelto. Non a caso io ho certe convinzioni. L’educazione da parte materna credo che influenzi molto. Mia madre ha 85 ed è una delle persone che alla sua età aveva una testa libera e lo ha dimostrato, nonostante poi sia una persona che ha fatto la casalinga tutta la vita... è una donna di grandissime capacità e grande intelligenza, forse una delle più...che io ho conosciuto. Poi voglio dire è relativamente facile dimostrare certe idee quando si ha una professione, quando si è indipendenti, quando si ha ritagliato un pezzo nella vita (...) avere determinate convinzioni e andare contro anche quelle del marito non era una cosa semplicissima.”

^{lviii} “A me non piace una persona dalla quale io devo dipendere, mi piace la mia indipendenza, è sempre stato il mio desiderio, fin da ragazza ho studiato per avere un lavoro in modo tale da potermi mantenere da sola, non voglio che nessuno si prenda cura di me da questo punto di vista, è l’educazione che ho ricevuto da casa, mia madre lavorava e lavora ancora, è una cosa che ho sentito fin da piccola e quindi non cercavo l’uomo che andasse a lavorare a fare dieci mila lavori ed io a casa ad allevare i figli e sistemare la casa, non è un mio desiderio non lo è mai stato.”

^{lix} “Non ho avuto problemi, mia mamma aveva capito che io ero determinata e quindi lei non mi ha mai fatto storie per le mie scelte; mio padre che era molto più anziano, figurati che lui è nato nel 1918, quindi un signore di un’altra generazione, ma mia madre è riuscita a fargli capire che era una mia scelta e andava rispettata.”

^{lx} “Sì, ho parlato prima con mia madre perché è una persona molto più aperta, ha meno come dire pregiudizi sociali mia madre. E’ più comprensiva. Ne ho parlato prima con lei, le ho raccontato la situazione lei assolutamente d’accordo con me, anzi devo essere sincera che mia madre mi ha proprio consigliato la convivenza prima del matrimonio. Mi ha detto: ‘Figlia mia non è necessario che ti sposi’, quasi prevenuta. Non so se sia per esperienza personale o meno, però lei diciamo che è più contenta se io vado a convivere.”