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Once Upon a Time—and They lived Happily Ever After? **The Pure Relationship and Love Relationships in the Italian Context**

Abstract: The purpose of this essay is to examine whether the theory of the pure relationship advanced by Anthony Giddens can be used to explain love relationships in Italy.

The essay is structured as follows: we start with a presentation of the pure relationship (§ 1) and why I hold that to remain as faithful as possible to the essential presuppositions of this model we need to study the phenomenon of the free union between two people (§ 2). In the third section I present statistics from the 2003 ISTAT study *Multifunctional analysis of the family* and move on in the fourth section to draw conclusions taking this data into account.

Keywords: intimacy; structure; pure relationship; virtuality.

The Pure Relationship: Contingency (amorous and other) to the *nth* Power

Intimate relationships, Giddens affirms (1991; 1992) as a result of the profound changes they have faced, increasingly gravitate towards the “pure relationship” model. For him, even if the pure relationship is the prototype of all the social relations of personal life, we analyze this model referring to *the transformations of the intimacy*.

Before this phenomenon appeared we had romantic love with the inevitable marriage “till death us do part:” today we have confluent love. This “presumes equality in emotional give and take, the more so the more any particular love tie approximates closely to the prototype of the pure relationship” (Giddens 1992: 62). What keeps a couple together is the simple question of fair exchange: “what holds the pure relationship together is the acceptance on the part of each partner, ‘until further notice’, that each gains sufficient benefit from the relation to make its continuance worthwhile” (*id.*, 63).

First we had modesty, shame and separate beds; *today* we have *plastic* sexuality: “decentred sexuality, freed from the needs of reproduction [...] from the rule of the phallus, from the overweening importance of male sexual experience” (*id.*, 2) and the same sexual identity could be the product of different combinations of anatomical traits and behavior (*id.*) Thus we can easily understand that in the new relational structure posited by Giddens, sexuality plays a critical role since “the achievement of reciprocal sexual pleasure” is “a key element in whether the relationship is sustained or dissolved” (*id.*, 62).

These relationships are increasingly founded on the emotional and emotive purity of the *here-and-now*. In Giddens' word: "a relationship which becomes established and is maintained in pursuit of its own ends—for the gratification that a relationship with another, or others can provide" (Giddens 1994). Here lies, in my estimations at least, a key point. Let's see it.

Giddens holds that, in the development of the self in modern times, a fundamental component of daily life is choice (Giddens 1991:80). Obviously—he continues—"no culture eliminates choice altogether in day-to-day affairs, and all traditions are effectively choices among an indefinite range of possible behaviour patterns. Yet, by definition, tradition or established habit orders life within relatively set channels. Modernity confronts the individual with a complex diversity of choices and, because it is non-foundational, at the same time offers little help as to which options should be selected. [...]. All such choices (as well as larger and more consequential ones) are decisions not only about how to act but who to be. The more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking" (*id.*, 80–81).

The pure relationship is one of these non-institutional/non-foundational choices regarding one's emotional and love life. But what exactly does "non-foundational" mean? It means that the pure relationship is not something confined to heterosexuals, that it can be undertaken and dissolved at any moment, and it must not be subject to any ties or limits.

But it also means something else that escaped Giddens. If "reasonably durable sexual ties, marriage and friendship relations all tend to approximate to the *pure relationship*" (Giddens 1991: 87), this would signify that without exception, all social relationships should have the same structure as the pure relationship, as a bond that can be taken forward, suspended or modified according to the *practical conscience* of the subject, where practical conscience refers to everything that the individuals know but cannot necessarily put into words, something that may not be directly and consciously accessible to the same individuals but which enables them to go ahead with the routines of social life (Giddens 1979: 1984).

This is implicitly what Beck and his partner seem to say when they describe the modern family in the following terms:

"the distinction between family structures and the family consciousness is no longer productive. What individualization of the family essentially means is that the perceived family *is* the family structure, and that consequently both the perception and the structure vary individually between members both within and between 'families'" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2004: 508).¹

The practical conscience that individuals have of their family *is* the structure of the family itself.

There may not be many critics of Giddensian theory but they do nevertheless exist.² I have no intention of discussing them one by one but it is illuminating to

¹ I refer also to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2001: 98)

² Jamieson (1999), Mouzelis (1999), Guizzardi (2001; 2008), Gross and Simmons (2002), Prandini (2006), Bawin-legros (2004), de Singly (2004), Martignani (2008).

see how Giddens himself responds. To be quite frank, Giddens has never striven to “defend” his ideal relationships model against those who have demonstrated its limitations. Whenever he has returned to the subject of the pure relationship, he has never referred to the criticisms laid against it or attempts to discredit it or to reformulate his theory. On the contrary, he has consistently emphasized how love and sexual relationships, relations with friends and family—practically all the relationships that the individual can undertake—increasingly tend towards the ideal model of the pure relationship, towards bonds based exclusively on emotional communication and on the immanence of the emotions themselves. So what, in a nutshell, is the pure relationship? I will leave the answer to Giddens, extremely concise and all-embracing as it is: “It is as though it were something floating freely” (Giddens 1991: 116).

From Theory to Practice: a Proposal as to how to “Test” the Pureness of the Emotional Relationships of Italians

The essential characteristic of the pure relationship is liberty. This affords the possibility of starting or terminating the relationship at any time on the basis of exquisitely emotional grounds: a tie between two people governed by the rule of *as long as it pleases me*.

The question that arises is : how can we test the *social* diffusion of the pure relationship between individuals? I propose to examine three indicators as part of the test.

The first series of indicators to analyze free unions is relevant, in my opinion, in so far as free unions of bachelors and unmarried women represent on an *institutional*, and hence *public* level the highest development of the *conditioned* liberty (perhaps the Polynesian term *embedded* would be a more appropriate term than “conditioned”) of the pure relationship. Neither of the participants has any public obligation towards the other and the relationships last as long as the desires of the single *partners*. Why my emphasis on the terms bachelor and unmarried? Because any “pure relationship” in which one or both of the parties were still married would not be so pure as that established by two people whose free state is publically attested (or entered on the identity card—as has been the practice in recent years). Until the qualifying period for divorce has elapsed, neither can contract a new marriage. Without entering into the real reasons, but confining myself to demographic data we can thus eliminate those free unions in which their *raison d’être* lies beyond the free will of the individuals, one or other of which might wish to marry but cannot do so. This would be an incomplete purity, the relationship representing a state contrary to the real intentions of the participants, a temporary recourse—perhaps not particularly appreciated—until the relationship can be made official, public and binding. In addition, given the status of perfect equality of the sexes promised and made feasible by the pure relationship, the pure relationship itself would have to be the particular preference of the women: can this be so?

I might summarize our first hypothesis regarding the pure relationship in this way: *Goodbye to the Cunningham family?*

A second series of indicators concerns whether or not the relationship is generative—even if Giddens has never clarified the position of the child within this relationship. If I might offer an element of explanation here. On the one hand, a child can have no place in the pure relationship since the child lasts a great deal longer than the desire of the individual! In other words—and more appropriately—raising a child places the effects of the relationship in a timescale that goes amply beyond the duration of the concept of *as long as it pleases me*. On the other hand, however, the pure relationship could be the relationship that best suits the person who wants a child but not the father (or more rarely the mother). This is the reason for my interest in the incidence of single-parent nuclei and their internal structures. It will be interesting to discover whether their existence can be considered as completely dependent on the desires of the single individuals or not.

In brief the second hypothesis on the pure relationship would be: *Can a pure relationship be generative?*

A third series of indicators will shed light on whether—from an Italian perspective—the family is effectively an outmoded, archaic and above all oppressive institution. With the pure relationship as the cornerstone of the new architecture of love, emotional and sentimental relationships, individuals would only be prepared to establish bonds that guarantee utter freedom (no marriages and therefore no children) and would view conjugal and procreative relationships in a terribly negative light.

Our third hypothesis, therefore, might be framed in this way: *Is the family doomed in Italy?*

Now I move on to examine the pureness of sentimental and loving relationships in Italy.

Data, Behaviors and Attitudes in Relation to the Emotional and Love Lives of Italians

1. First hypothesis examined: *Goodbye to the Cunningham family?*

As far as the situation regarding couples in Italy is concerned, we should remember that in 2003, these numbered about fourteen and a half million, the same figure as ten years before, despite a fall of two hundred thousand units compared to 1998. If from 1993 to 1998 the proportion of couples of the total number of families remained more or less the same—from 69.8% to 69.2%, in 2003 there was a drop of about five percentage points to 64.8%.

Coming to our specific interest, cohabitation, ISTAT figures show that in addition to the traditional family form, the married couple, a growing trend in recent years has been that of cohabiting couples. Free unions can be formed of unmarried individuals, or of individuals whose previous marriages have ended in separation, in divorce or the death of the partner. The following table provides data on the extent of this phenomenon.

Compared to the total number of couples, and even though they are slowly rising, the free unions are only a small proportion. They represent only 1.8% of the total

Table 1

Free Unions of Bachelors and Spinsters, Unmarried and Married Reconstructed Families—Averages for 1993—1994, 1998 and 2003 (source: Istat 2003a)

	1993–1994			1998			2003		
	Abso- lute data (in thou- sands)	of whom with children	per 100 couples	Abso- lute data (in thou- sands)	of whom with children	per 100 couples	Abso- lute data (in thou- sands)	of whom with children	per 100 couples
Free unions of bachelors and unmarried women	67	30.2	0.5	149	31.0	1.0	264	35.9	1.8
Reconstructed unmarried families	160	55.0	1.1	193	51.3	1.3	292	53.5	2.0
Reconstructed married fami- lies	443	59.2	3.1	362	58.9	2.5	429	58.5	3.0
Totals	670	55.3	4.6	704	50.9	4.8	984	51.0	6.8

number of couples. This is a low figure, but it is four times the figure for the beginning of the nineties (from 67 to 264 thousand). We also learn from Istat that cohabitation is more prevalent in north-eastern Italy than in the south (2.9% as opposed to 0.6%) as it is in communes in the centre of metropolitan areas compared to those in smaller centers of population.

On the internal composition of cohabiting couples compared with those of married couples the following table provides us with some interesting information.

From 1993 to today, the portion of the unmarried reconstructed families in which one of the two is *single* has not changed perceptibly. However those in which the partners come from a previous marriage which ended in divorce or separation have increased by 4 percentage points, while those terminated with the death of the spouse have risen in similarly dramatic style (about seven percentage points). More specifically, making here a distinction between men and women, it is especially the divorced or separated woman who does not wish to enter into a new marriage with her partner, opting instead for free cohabitation. This could be due, as Istat rightly points out, to the fact that these women have almost always been entrusted with the children—and this could be a factor mitigating against their forming a new family—and their relatively advanced age at the conclusion of their marriage.

The table below illustrates the breakdown of reconstructed families by the presence of children, while the table following that shows the various types of family union by age class of the woman, comparison of the educational levels of the *partners* and *their* relative work status (whether both work for example or whether she is a housewife while he works etc.).

Table 2

Married Reconstructed Families by the Marital Status of the Partners Before Marriage and Unmarried Reconstructed Families by Current Marital Status of the Partners (in percentages) (source: Istat 2003a)

Marital status	Unmarried reconstructed families		Married reconstructed families	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1993–1994				
Bachelor/spinster	33.0	29.6	31.6	48.1
Separated	29.0	24.7	—	—
Divorced	22.6	20.5	42.6	35.4
Widowed	15.3	25.2	25.9	16.5
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
1998				
Bachelor/spinster	31.1	30.1	32.5	54.7
Separated	32.8	25.0	—	—
Divorced	24.2	26.4	38.1	28.1
Widowed	11.9	18.5	29.4	17.2
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
2003				
Bachelor/spinster	32.9	30.8	31.2	52.6
Separated	32.0	25.4	—	—
Divorced	26.1	24.6	42.1	29.7
Widowed	9.0	19.3	26.7	17.7
<i>Total</i>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 3

Reconstructed Families by Presence of Children (total amounting to 100% and all values as percentages) (source: Istat 2003a, *my re-elaboration*)

	No children	With children of each of the partners	With children of one of the partners or with one of these and of both of them
1993–1994	41.9	40.6	17.5
1998	43.8	35.6	20.6
2003	43.6	35.3	21.1

And following table.

What conclusions can be drawn from this data? Various conclusions could be reached here. In the vast majority of the cases, reconstructed families are without children or with the children of each of the partners, while those in which the reconstruction involves not only the couple but also filiation (that is the children of one of the partners springing from the previous relationship plus those born to the new union) make up little more than a fifth of the total. As regards the age of the woman,

Table 4

Free Unions of Bachelors/Spinsters, Unmarried and Married Reconstructed Families by Age of Woman, Comparison of Educational Levels and Work Status of Both Partners, 2003 Averages (Total equivalent to 100% and all values as percentages) (source: Istat 2003a)

	Free union of bachelors and spinsters	Unmarried-reconstructed families	Married reconstructed families
<i>Age of the woman</i>			
Up to 34	68.7	20.9	7.9
35–54	28.7	54.7	52.9
55 and over	2.6	24.4	39.1
<i>Educational qualifications</i>			
Hers are higher	32.5	19.4	26.6
Equivalent	47.4	55.4	43.8
His are higher	20.1	25.2	29.6
<i>Work status</i>			
Both work	66.4	47.1	32.4
He works, she is a housewife	12.0	16.7	17.6
He is retired, she is a housewife	1.0	4.1	12.8
Other conditions	20.5	32.2	37.2

free unions are relationships that are almost entirely the preserve of young adults. In contrast, this model is not one that finds particular favour among women of more mature age.

Young adult singles (under thirty-five years old) seem to be the most disposed to form a free union, rather than a marital relationship (68.7% as opposed to 7.9%). Increasing with age, this tendency lessens: 52.9% of the women who opt for a reconstruction of their family via marriage are of mature age (between thirty-five and fifty-four years old). The 54.7% of those reconstructed but not married families characterized by the presence of women between thirty-five and fifty-four years old can be explained in terms of several factors: the inability of one of the partners to contract a new marriage because they have not yet obtained a divorce from their previous marriage partner, or conversely, those who despite having recently obtained a divorce, have no wish to commit themselves publically to a new matrimonial contract.

Moving on to the comparison of educational qualifications and work status, it is possible to find the odd point in favour of the pure relationship. The pure relationship presupposes perfect equality between the sexes just as it predicts reciprocal autonomy and independence. Neither of the parties involved can depend on the other because what would they do when the partner chose to break things off? In other words, can we call pure a relationship in which one person depends economically on the other and one is inferior to the other? I do not think we can—if the pure relationship is, as Giddens says, fruit of the democratization of the couple, or the interconnected democracy of private life (Giddens 1990). In 32.5% of the free unions between sin-

gles, the woman has a higher educational qualification than the man, and 66.4% of women work, as do their partners, against 20.1% and 12% in the pairings displaying diametrically opposed characteristics. Wherever the relationship is less pure, in the sense that the relationship is publically regulated—through the marriage contract—it seems that the wind of democratization has not blown with the same vigour. As regards educational background, the frequencies diminish, but not very markedly (in 26.6% of the cases it is the woman who has the higher educational qualifications, for 43.8% the qualifications are the same, while for 29.6% of the relationships the male is better educated).

As regards work status and therefore a more than deducible financial and economic dependence on the part of the woman in relation to the man, in only 32.4% of the cases do we see both partners engaged in work, and in 17% the woman is a housewife. It is also true, however that cases in which “he” is retired and “she” is a housewife are more frequent (and secure in the knowledge that reconstructed families tend to be characterized by the relatively advanced age of their components) we can safely say that both parties will have passed retirement age. Thus, and Giddens would approve, this is not a case of discrimination between the sexes. Cases in which both partners are in work also diminish in unmarried reconstructed families. This observation supports the notion of the pure relationship. In other words, wherever we have a free union—a pure relationship—there is a democratization of the equality and independence of the sexes. Even if a single *demographic* data does not allow us to construct an entire sociological theory, I do not believe I am wrong when I make a similar deduction. However, for the very reason that we have just seen, that the free union is particularly common among young women, I hold that it is by no means unreasonable to conclude that rather than chose the pure relationship as a model for emotional and family life, women seek in it the professional self-realization that reflects their own professional training. It may be that the woman who meets her Prince Charming, far from being a poor Cinderella, is an established lawyer, postgraduate etc.³

2. The second hypothesis examined: Can the pure relationship be generative?

Now we move on to consider data from single-parent families. How can we explain this focus? Because if the pure relationship is the archetype of the family (of friendship etc) then the family is reduced to a simple biological fact or to a simple private love relationship.⁴ If this is so, there should be an exponential growth in the number of single-parent families, each one being, in its singularity, or singletude, a family. Let us therefore consider the next two tables.

Here I would limit myself to two observations. The first is that single-parent families are extremely rare where they result from individual, carefully considered decisions. It is not the young, or the *single*—as today we see written on identity cards—who make this parental choice. This is the province of the more mature of age, the separated or the divorced, the widows or widowers who *find themselves* alone

³ Kaufmann (1999).

⁴ Here I refer to Donati (2001) and Prandini (2001).

Table 5

Single-parent Families by Gender and Age of the Parent (all values are percentages)
 (source: Istat 2003b, *my re-elaboration*)

Age class	1994–1995		1998–1999		2002–2003	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Under 35	3.7	7.6	3.5	8.8	3.2	8.7
35–44	11.0	16.2	13.1	15.8	11.6	19.1
45–54	20.6	22.3	21.5	19.8	23.0	22.4
Over 55	64.7	53.9	61.9	55.6	62.2	49.8

Table 6

Single-parent Families by Gender and Marital Status of Parent (all values are percentages)
 (source: Istat 2003b, *my re-elaboration*)

Marital status	1994–1995		1998–1999		2002–2003	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Bachelor/spinster	3	8.3	5.7	7.5	4.2	7.4
Separated or divorced	28	27.9	32.8	29.8	38.8	38.3
Widowed	69	63.8	61.6	62.7	57.1	54.4

and with children. In other words, it does not seem that this form of family, which could be seen as the exemplification of the pure relationship, arises from individual decisions based on personal desires. Parenthood as a strictly individual experience or an expression of singlehood would not appear to be the foundation on which to build one's own family life.

Indeed, we will shortly be looking more closely at the phenomenon of the single person. In Italy, the phenomenon of the of the family composed of one person, accounted, in 2003 for 11.9% of the adult population (Istat 2003, 20) rising by more than a million from 1994–1995. In theory, the more relationships are based on sentimental and love ties, the more official statistics should reflect the increasing numbers of people on their own, those who declare no official or institutional bond, because on their own they can start, break off and re-start all the pure relationships that they want.

So what the statistics tell us about this?

Up to 44 years of age it is predominantly men who live alone, not women (8.1% as opposed to 5%). With advancing age, however, this relationship is inverted. Among the population aged over 65 single women make up 38.4% of the population, while men comprise only 13.5%.

Should we interpret this as a consequence of the decision to live according to the norms of the pure relationship, or could it be linked to the higher life expectancy of women and the average age of first marriage, which is lower for women than for men? It would appear that living alone is more characteristic of that period in which the

Table 7

Single People on Their Own by Gender and Age Group (all figures are in percentages)
(source: Istat 2003b, *my re-elaboration*)

Years	Male				Female			
	Below 45	45–64	Over 65	Total	Below 45	45–64	Over 65	Total
1994–1995	5.4	5.9	12.1	6.7	3.1	8.1	36.1	12.1
1996–1997	5.6	5.8	11.3	6.7	3.3	7.7	34.5	11.9
1998–1999	6.2	7.0	11.8	7.5	3.7	7.8	35.1	12.5
2000–2001	6.7	7.5	13.9	8.3	4.4	7.7	37.7	13.6
2002–2003	8.1	8.4	13.5	9.2	5.0	8.4	38.4	14.3

Table 8

Single People by Gender, Age Group and Marital Status, 2002–2003 Averages
(all figures in percentages) (source: Istat 2003b, *my re-elaboration*)

Marital status	Male				Female			
	Below 45	45–64	Over 65	Total	Below 45	45–64	Over 65	Total
Bachelor/spinster	60.9	25.7	13.3	100	44.6	23.2	32.2	100
Separated/divorced	40.9	43.7	15.4	100	31.8	41.6	26.6	100
Widows/widowers	0.5	15.9	83.6	100	0.3	10.9	88.8	100
Total	43.6	28.7	27.8	100	15.8	17.6	66.6	100

adult identity is formed (up to 45 years of age) rather than that in which the acquired identity is maintained (between 45 and 64 and beyond). In Eriksonian terms, living alone is comprehensible in the individual in the *full flush of young love* and the phase of *experimentation*, less so when the individual enters the phase of childrearing and is—sadly—inevitable when he reaches the age of *wisdom*.

3. The third hypothesis examined: Is the family doomed in Italy?

Let us start by considering the data in the following table.

Should not the rise of the pure relationship as the predominant post-traditional cultural form of western capitalist society, I wonder, lead to the widespread belief that “marriage is an outmoded institution”? Maybe, but we might equally remark on the fact that a little over half the people between 18 and 49 years old disagreed with this statement.

On the one hand, it’s “hands off marriage,” while on the other more than 50% of people think a couple should have the choice to live a pure relationship.

Child-rearing, because it transcends the duo or the couple, would be preferable—interpreting the data—within the context of a stable relationship and not be the lot of the single woman. If we get down to particulars we see that there are no statistically great differences of opinion between men and women, 29.7% of men agree against 33.2% of women, while 25.3% of men and 20.9% of women neither agreed

Table 9

People Between the Ages of 18 and 39 by Age Group and Agreement with Key Statements, 2003
 (all figures in percentages) (source: Istat 2003a, *my re-elaboration*)

	Age group				Total
	18–24	25–34	35–44	45–49	
<i>Marriage is an outmoded institution</i>					
In agreement	23.2	19.2	16.9	15.6	18.5
Neither in agreement or against	29.3	24.8	24.2	23.8	25.2
Against	44.5	53.5	56.5	59.0	53.9
Not stated	3.0	2.5	2.3	1.5	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>A couple can live together without any intention to marry</i>					
In agreement	63.1	60.3	56.9	54.7	58.7
Neither in agreement or against	19.1	19.3	19.7	19.3	19.4
Against	15.3	18.3	21.4	24.9	19.9
Not stated	2.5	2.2	2.0	1.1	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>A woman can have child of her own without having a stable relationship with a man</i>					
In agreement	34.7	29.7	31.1	32.3	31.4
Neither in agreement or against	24.3	24.4	22.4	20.4	23.1
Against	38.4	43.6	44.4	46.1	43.4
Not stated	2.7	2.3	2.1	1.2	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>If a couple are unhappy they should divorce even if they have children</i>					
In agreement	68.4	69.8	67.7	69.1	68.7
Neither in agreement or against	20.4	19.0	19.2	18.3	19.2
Against	8.7	8.9	11.1	11.3	10.0
Not stated	2.5	2.3	2.1	1.3	2.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

or disagreed. Finally 42.7% of men and 44% of women expressed their disagreement with the statement.

As regards the question of divorce, almost 70% supported divorce for unhappy marriages, even when children were involved.

Turning now to the question of procreation, I am inclined to hold—as stated above—that the pure relationship does not welcome children, because as long as relationships with another can be freely undertaken, or broken off in response to one's own desire to maintain or finish the relationship, a child would serve to block the relationship in time, resulting in the past of the pure relationship impinging on its

future as much as on its present. Giddens does not face the issue of children when he defines his relationship model. There is no doubt, however, that a child places on the relationship an additional tie, which goes beyond the wishes of the individuals.

The following table, therefore, sets out data relating to the intention or otherwise of the individuals to have children in future, or as I would interpret things, to be more or less free.

Table 10

People Between 18 and 49 by Intention to Have Children in Future, Gender and Age Group, 2003 (figures are percentages) (source: Istat 2003a, my re-elaboration)

Age group	People not intending to have children in the next three years	Intentions of having children in the future					Total
		Certainly not	Probably not	Probably yes	Certainly yes	Not stated	
<i>Male</i>							
18–24	88.3	7.6	4.3	49.6	38.2	0.4	100
25–29	63.9	10.0	7.4	47.0	34.8	0.8	100
30–34	45.6	21.7	18.3	44.5	14.6	0.9	100
35–39	61.5	45.7	32.0	18.6	3.2	0.5	100
40–44	78.9	60.8	29.5	8.1	0.9	0.7	100
45–49	89.2	78.1	17.9	2.9	0.8	0.3	100
Total	70.6	38.8	18.2	27.1	15.3	0.6	100
<i>Female</i>							
18–24	78.5	7.1	3.5	38.2	50.7	0.5	100
25–29	45.2	15.4	12.0	44.2	27.4	1.1	100
30–34	50.3	35.0	31.0	26.2	7.3	0.5	100
35–39	72.4	56.8	32.5	8.3	1.7	0.6	100
40–44	88.0	76.2	20.5	2.2	0.7	0.4	100
45–49	93.2	90.8	7.0	1.0	0.5	0.7	100
Total	71.8	52.3	17.4	16.4	13.3	0.6	100
<i>Total</i>							
18–24	83.4	7.4	3.9	44.2	44.1	0.4	100
25–29	54.5	12.2	9.3	45.8	31.7	1.0	100
30–34	47.9	28.4	24.7	35.2	10.9	0.7	100
35–39	66.9	51.7	32.3	13.1	2.4	0.6	100
40–44	83.6	69.0	24.7	4.9	0.8	0.6	100
45–49	91.3	84.8	12.1	1.9	0.7	0.5	100
Total	71.2	45.6	17.8	21.7	14.3	0.6	100

Having children within the next three years does not seem to be the intention of the overwhelming majority of people outside the 25 to 34 age group. Teasing out the

intentions of men from those of women, I can affirm that while women who do not categorically exclude the possibility of having a child are between 25 to 34 years of age, the men in this category are compressed between the ages of 30 and 34. How can this be explained? Perhaps people in the 18 to 30 age group avoid paternity or maternity because they have yet to finish their studies, graduate, find a job, start to live independently and find a *partner*. Those in the more mature age group, from 35 to 49 years of age, might already have one or more children, or have decided not to have any, or might not be the right age—with obvious reference to the women here—as Charlie Chaplin teaches!—from the biological point of view. In the age band in between—from 30 to 34 years of age—precisely because they have already achieved financial and well as residential independence, and drawing on Kaufmann (2000: 158)—these young people has no hesitation about plunging headfirst into adult life and bringing to a close their youth, we have the smallest proportion of people who rule out the possibility of becoming mothers or fathers in the next three years.

These considerations can also be extended to the interpretation of the data on the intention of becoming, *sooner or later* a parent. There tend to be higher proportions of people who exclude the possibility of having children among those of more mature age, while the young are more inclined to enteratin the possibility of becoming parents.

The question arises, naturally enough, of how people see the effect a child would have on their lives. If *I* were to see the pure relationship as a clear model for my life I would find it difficult to view the consequences deriving from the birth of a child in a positive light. I would not be able to do what I wanted, and more importantly my relationship with the mother/father would be conditioned not only by the here and now of the relationship but by factors beyond this.

Now we turn to Table 11.

Undoubtedly people are fully aware of how a child will limit their freedom of action and the impact on their financial state. Around 50% agree that having a child will limit their ability to do what they want to do, and will worsen their financial state. However, about 60% believe that a child will bring them great joy. So on the one hand life will be more difficult, less free and more expensive, while the other side of the coin is the beauty and the joy the respondents believe they will experience in parenthood. The love relationship between the partners, on the birth of a child will improve or remain unaltered, but is unlikely to deteriorate—according to interviewees. The partners ‘sex life—and here we remember the centrality of sexuality (we refer to it as being *plastic*) in the continuation or otherwise of the pure relationship—will be unaffected. The only negative consequence brought in its train by the birth of a child, but which has little to do with the weaving of a pure relationship, is that bearing on the work opportunities of the partner. The table reveals the very different positions adopted by men and women. But, Istat tells us that for 39.7% of men the work opportunities of the partner could worsen, while 50.8% predict no change and only 3.8% expect there to be improvements in this area. 24.6% of women feel their partner’s opportunities in the world of work will decline, 64.7% foresee no change, with 4.2% expecting to see positive changes. But in these figures do we not see a reflection of the real circumstances in which women, both as workers and mothers, find themselves in

Table 11

People Between the Ages of 18 and 49 Living With a Partner, by Age Group and Their Perception of the Impact on Various Spheres of Their Lives of Having a Child, or Another Child in the Next Three Years, 2003 (all figures are percentages) (source: Istat 2003a, *my re-elaboration*)

	Age group				Total
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-49	
<i>Chance to do what one wishes</i>					
Better	2.8	4.3	3.6	2.7	3.6
Neither better nor worse	48.6	48.7	43.6	40.0	44.2
Worse	37.2	43.1	46.9	47.7	46.0
Not stated	11.3	3.9	5.9	9.6	6.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Your opportunities at work</i>					
Better	2.3	3.4	2.4	2.4	2.6
Neither better nor worse	42.7	57.5	57.2	54.8	56.5
Worse	43.7	35.2	34.5	33.1	34.5
Not stated	11.3	3.9	6.0	9.7	6.4
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Your personal economic situation</i>					
Better	3.2	2.2	1.9	2.0	2.0
Neither better nor worse	37.1	44.8	39.4	38.9	40.6
Worse	48.4	49.1	52.8	49.6	51.1
Not stated	11.3	3.9	5.9	9.5	6.2
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Your sex life</i>					
Better	5.5	5.6	3.4	3.3	4.0
Neither better nor worse	73.4	72.8	70.2	68.4	70.5
Worse	9.3	17.3	20.1	18.2	18.8
Not stated	11.8	4.3	6.3	10.1	6.7
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>The joy and satisfaction you derive from life</i>					
Better	68.8	74.7	59.1	46.1	60.4
Neither better nor worse	18.6	19.5	31.4	37.8	29.6
Worse	0.8	1.8	3.6	6.3	3.7
Not stated	11.7	4.1	5.8	9.8	6.4
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>The closeness between you and your partner</i>					
Better	61.5	50.0	31.6	25.8	35.5
Neither better nor worse	25.1	40.7	52.5	53.3	49.3
Worse	2.1	5.2	9.9	11.2	8.9
Not stated	11.3	4.1	5.9	9.7	6.4
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Your partner's work opportunities</i>					
Better	7.3	5.4	3.7	3.5	4.2
Neither better nor worse	66.3	68.0	63.9	62.6	64.7
Worse	13.9	22.4	26.1	24.1	24.6
Not stated	12.5	4.2	6.2	9.8	6.6
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Italy? Rather than saying something about the pure relationship these findings spring from a clear understanding of the welfare state system and the policies balancing work and the bringing up of children. This deduction is borne out by the data set out in the following table.

Table 12

People Between the Ages of 18 and 49 Years of Age Living With a Partner by Gender and the Perceived Impact on Various Areas of Life of Having a Child or Another Child in the Next Three Years, 2003
(all figures are percentages) (source: Istat 2003a, *my re-elaboration*)

	18–49 years of age	
	Male	Female
<i>Your own work</i>		
Great effect	12.8	13.9
Considerable effect	21.2	24.3
Little effect	28.5	22.0
No effect	31.5	32.2
Not stated	6.1	7.6
<i>Your partner's work</i>		
Great effect	12.4	9.0
Considerable effect	22.8	18.3
Little effect	25.7	26.8
No effect	32.3	37.7
Not stated	6.8	8.3
<i>The help you will receive from your partner in the bringing up of the children</i>		
Great effect	14.0	11.4
Considerable effect	26.1	25.4
Little effect	23.9	26.9
No effect	29.7	28.7
Not stated	6.4	7.6

The woman seems to be confident that her partner will help her in the task of looking after their children and her companion does not view the maternity of his partner as having a negative impact on her prospects of work.

It appears to me then, that there is not the same purity⁵ in the bond between the couple, in terms of the intrusion of factors beyond pure pleasure and the pure desire of the single individuals involved. The purity is tainted by the reciprocal dependence of the two partners, especially when a child is concerned. The purity of the single couple is compromised by the consequences of the generative family bond.

The final data that I wish to examine are those relating to the behavior of young people growing towards adulthood.

⁵ To take up a point developed in Guizzardi (2001).

Let us take, for example, a recent study (Mazzucco *et al.* 2007) which compares two cohorts of young Italians, the first born between 1966 and 1970, and the second group between 1976 and 1980. Even though the researchers note that there has been both a rise in the number of young people who opt for cohabitation, as much as a substitute for marriage as a form of pre-marital cohabitation and in the proportion of young people who leave their family of origin to live with their partner, the researchers do not view these young people as the precursors of a trend destined to increase, for the reason that the young Italian male will continue to leave home to marry. I would hazard therefore to use these conclusions to affirm that the pure relationship, as a form towards which the architecture of the emotional and love experiences of young people is tending, seems not to have caught on.⁶ Could this be the case?

Let us now consider the following table.

Table 13

Young People from 18 to 39 Years of Age Who Intend to Leave Their Families of Origin in the Next Three Years by Reasons, Gender and Age Group, 2003 (all figures are percentages) (source: Istat 2003a)

Age group	People who intend to leave their family of origin	Reasons for leaving family of origin						Total
		Marriage	Cohabitation	Work	Study	Need for autonomy and independence	Other	
<i>Male</i>								
18–24	26.3	20.6	8.1	36.2	6.2	28.2	0.6	100
25–29	53.0	38.8	13.3	18.9	0.8	27.5	0.6	100
30–34	62.4	50.4	14.1	15.5	—	19.4	0.6	100
35–39	43.6	51.3	13.6	7.6	—	27.0	0.4	100
Total	42.0	38.1	12.1	21.7	2.0	25.5	0.6	100
<i>Female</i>								
18–24	37.5	37.7	11.8	18.1	9.0	23.0	0.4	100
25–29	66.8	53.9	12.4	11.4	—	21.5	0.9	100
30–34	58.6	49.0	14.7	10.3	—	25.3	0.7	100
35–39	41.0	41.1	1.7	18.5	1.0	37.7	—	100
Total	48.6	45.8	12.0	14.4	3.8	23.5	0.6	100
<i>Total</i>								
18–24	31.6	30.3	10.2	25.9	7.8	25.2	0.5	100
25–29	58.9	46.1	12.9	15.2	0.4	24.6	0.7	100
30–34	61.1	49.9	14.3	13.8	—	21.3	0.6	100
35–39	42.7	47.9	9.6	11.2	0.3	30.6	0.3	100
Total	44.8	41.7	12.0	18.3	2.8	24.6	0.6	100

⁶ I refer here to Stranges (2007).

Leaving home to cohabit is the fourth reason in order of magnitude. Leaving to marry came even before the desire to achieve autonomy and independence, followed by work reasons, with departure from the family to cohabit bringing up the rear. The percentages are very significant: 41.7% of young people intended to leave the family

Table 14

Young Bachelors and Spinsters Between 18 and 39 Years of Age Who Live With at Least One Parent by Age Group, and Predictions of How Leaving Their Family in the Next Three Years Would Affect Certain Aspects of Their Lives, 2003 (all figures are percentages) (source: Istat 2003a)

	Age group				Total
	18-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	
<i>Your independence</i>					
Better	54.4	53.4	56.6	38.0	51.6
Neither better nor worse	39.4	42.2	47.9	53.7	42.6
Worse	6.2	4.4	5.5	8.3	5.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Your work opportunities</i>					
Better	15.3	12.6	10.2	10.5	13.4
Neither better nor worse	78.1	82.9	86.8	85.4	81.4
Worse	6.6	4.5	3.0	4.1	5.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Your financial situation</i>					
Better	14.6	14.9	13.4	8.5	14.0
Neither better nor worse	37.1	47.7	50.1	52.0	43.3
Worse	48.3	37.4	36.5	39.5	42.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Your sex life</i>					
Better	43.6	47.4	44.5	36.5	44.2
Neither better nor worse	55.0	51.2	53.5	61.3	54.2
Worse	1.4	1.5	2.0	2.2	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Other people's opinion of you</i>					
Better	9.2	10.5	14.1	12.6	10.6
Neither better nor worse	86.0	87.4	83.5	84.9	85.9
Worse	4.8	2.1	2.4	2.6	3.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>The joy and satisfaction you receive from life</i>					
Better	33.9	37.1	35.2	27.8	34.5
Neither better nor worse	62.2	61.5	62.5	68.0	62.5
Worse	3.9	1.4	2.4	4.2	3.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

hearth to get married, as opposed to only 12% who were intending to do so in order to live with their partner. If we break down these figures by gender and age we note that marriage as a reason for leaving the family nest is more characteristic of women than men, while this difference is not apparent in the context of cohabitation: neither young men nor young women saw this as a compelling reason for leaving home.

Could it be that the emotional and sexual liberty guaranteed by cohabitation, that is the pure relationship, has no great appeal for young people?

Becoming totally free, and no longer living under the same roof as one's parents, does not procure further or new liberties for young people. On the contrary, young people know that once flown the nest, there will be an inevitable tightening of the purse-strings. As far as independence is concerned, there is only a very slender percentage difference between those who think this will improve and those who see no change. The professional life of the young people will not be any different and their sexual life—a point of fundamental importance in our study of the pure relationship—is expected to remain the same for half of the respondents and improve for 44.2%. As for the other items, leaving home seems not to result in significant change, either positive or negative, in the young peoples' lives.

Conclusions: an Explanation of the Pure, Desire-dependent Relationship

The pure relationship does not appear to be bidding a certain goodbye to the Cunningham-style family, because the formation of free unions is limited to that stage in life in which a certain volatility in love relationships *is permitted* as the fruit of the pure *will* of the individual. It does not seem to be the ideal relationship around which to shape one's life as an adult.

The pure relationship has little to do with the desire to have children in the context of the desire for *single* maternity or paternity in so far as single-parent families arise from factors unrelated to the sole desire of the individual, but are rather the result of social—in the wake of a divorce or separation—or biological factors—the death of the partner.

The pure relationship does not appear to offer the *happiness*⁷ sought by the individual in his or her life as part of a couple and on leaving his or her family of origin.

What conclusions can we draw from this? Can we say that without the pure relationship there can not transpire, all those things that, as Giddens would hold, can only happen through it: from the sexual revolution to the autonomy of the individual, de-traditionalization and negotiation as equals in the love relationship? On the one hand the pure relationship allows flexible bonds to be woven, entirely founded on the imperatives of desire and pure interaction.⁸ On the other, the pure relationship does not allow ties which go beyond the moment of pleasure (individual) to be created.

⁷ To paraphrase Bruni and Stanca (2007).

⁸ For Donati too, this dimension of freedom from one's one desire is central (Donati, 2007: 48).

The pure relationship is all very well so long as the person—and as we have seen these are young people—wishes to lead a free life and has no desire for commitment so soon after achieving independence from his or her parents. But when the individual seeks a relationship that gives a reason to act independently of the desires of the moment, linking their biological dimension (the biological calendar of filiation or the sexual urge etc.) with the personal or psychological (projects and desires and the like) and the social (the love bond, marriage and so on), it is the family and not the pure relationship that offers the best solution. The family is the institutional relationship that gives the individual a reason for acting independently of the dictates of desire, fusing those three dimensions of life—the biological, the personal and the social. The basic pre-requisite is the will of the individual to take on responsibilities (have children, etc.) that transcend the contingency of momentary desires.

It would appear that the practical conscience of the Italians, outside that relating to the pure relationship, is well aware of this, and can be styled the practical conscience of the happy life.

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