Does cohabitation provide weaker intergenerational bonds than marriage? A comparison between Italy and the United Kingdom.

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Introduction

Recent studies (e.g. Kohli 1999, Attias Donfut and Wolff 2000, Kohli and Kunemund 2003, Grundy 1999, Grundy and Henretta 2006) have documented the persistent strength of intergenerational solidarity throughout Europe, including in countries, such as the Nordic and the UK, that are usually indicated as being based mainly on household, rather than kinship ties and having a high degree of individualization. Increasing life expectancy offers in principle the opportunity for unprecedented durations both of marriages and of bi- and even tri-intergenerational relationships. It is possible to become adult and old having both parents alive, to see one's own grand children become adults and even parents, to have all four grandparents throughout one's childhood and, for a while, even a great-grandparent, usually a great grandmother (e.g. Harper 2005, Saraceno ed., forthcoming). Yet, changes in family relationships and in the way families are formed and perceived raise concern over the persistence of intergenerational solidarity in a context of population ageing. Particularly, changes in patterns of family formation and dissolution are putting at risk those same relationships which increasing life expectancy has theoretically rendered more available than in the past. Childlessness is exposing many elderly to a lack of intergenerational ties (see the two special 2007 issues of the *Journal of family Issues* devoted to this theme). Even when children are present, divorce weakens intergenerational ties; and there is a growing concern that also the increasing popularity of cohabitation instead of marriage (e.g. Kiernan 1999), representing an institutionally weaker and more instable relationship, also represents a risk for intergenerational relationships and solidarity. Marriage, in fact, has been the traditional means to connect generations, in the dual sense of being the means of legitimate reproduction from one generation to the next over time and of keeping the link with both bloodlines.

Empirical research offers only partial support for these concerns. In the case of marriage instability, evidence offers a contrasting view, depending on the generational perspective. Children, particularly daughters, who divorce, can often count on their parents' and siblings' support (Dykstra 1997, Kohli 1999, Attias-Donfut and Wolff 2000, Kohli and Albertini forthcoming). On the contrary, in all countries, divorce in the parents'

generation has a negative impact on long-term intergenerational relationships, affecting not only the parent-child relationship but also, as a consequence, the grandparent-grandchild bond. Children of divorced parents tend to live further away from and have less contact with their parents than those whose parents remained married (Lye 1996; Uhlenberg 1994; White 1994; Aquilino 1994 and the review by Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan, 1997; Dykstra 1997; Eggebeen and Knoester 2001; Amato 2003; Kalmin forthcoming; Albertini and Saraceno forthcoming). The same studies, however, show that the phenomenon is strongly skewed: it is the father-child relationship, and therefore the paternal intergenerational chain, that is most negatively affected. The maternal line is not, or is only weakly affected, due not only to the gender division of parenting responsibilities but to the legal and practical patterns of child custody that were prevalent in all countries in the recent past and are still prevalent in many of them. Divorced fathers, therefore, risk remaining isolated and without family support in older age more than do both widowed fathers and divorced and widowed mothers. And children whose grandparents have divorced risk having fewer contacts with them than children whose grandparents have remained married to each other. We have to wait until a generation of children who have experienced joint custody have grown up and formed their own families to see whether this asymmetrical weakening will change and, if so, in what direction. Furthermore, while parental divorce has a negative impact on parents-children contacts, children's divorce has often the reverse effect. Divorced children, particularly daughters, are likely to receive more support from their parents than married (Kohli 1999, Attias-Donfut and Wolff 2000; Dykstra 1997). Thus, the consequences of divorce on intergenerational relationships appear somewhat different depending on the generational location of the couple that divorces, as well as on the gender of the divorcee. What is clear is that, at least until now, the couple's relationship is still the main factor connecting generations along and across blood lines – mostly through the kin work of women.

But does this connecting role of the couple relationship work in the same way for marriage and for cohabitation without marriage? Here research data are less systematic and rich than those concerning the impact of divorce and also offer less straightforward evidence, partly because studies are often conceptually and methodologically flawed, due to the heterogeneous characteristics of cohabitation. This study intends to contribute to

clarify some of the conceptual and methodological problems. It will also offer some evidence on the issue of similarity vs. difference of cohabitation and marriage with regard to contact between parents and adult children in two countries – Italy and the UK – that differ in the degree to which cohabitation is widespread and also with regard to the overall intensity of contacts between parents and adult children. With regard to the former phenomenon, in Italy the incidence of – heterosexual – cohabitations has remained fairly stable until recently. It has increased between the 1991 and 2001 censuses; yet in 2001 it included still only about 4% of all couples. Marriage is still by large the prevalent form of settling in a first couple relationship for heterosexuals, although the last data (see Rosina and Fraboni 2004; Gruppo di coordinamento per la demografia, 2007) indicate that in the younger marriage cohorts one every 4 marriages has been preceded by a cohabitation and cohabitations have also increased in duration. At the same time, one should be aware that in Italy cohabiting instead of marrying for a long time has involved not the young entering their first partnership, but adults in their mature years who had experienced already a marriage dissolution. The impossibility to obtain a divorce until 1970 and the long process through which it can be obtained at present, in fact, impose a long waiting period during which one cannot remarry.[1] Furthermore, widows sometime prefer to cohabit when they form a new couple, in order not to loose the survivor pension or to avoid worsening the inheritance rights of their children from the first union. Only in recent years cohabitation has started to involve increasingly the young in Italy. Post-marital cohabitation was the prevalent form of cohabitation in Britain as well in the fifties and sixties when marriage was almost universal (Kiernan 2001, 2002 and 2004). In the UK, however, differently from Italy, cohabitation as a prelude or alternative to marriage has emerged in the seventies and has rapidly risen to being now the most common way to begin a first co-residential union (Ermisch and Di Salvo 1997; Kiernan 2002; Barlow et al. 2001). Among the first partnerships initiated in the seventies, around one third was a cohabitation, up to over three fourths in the nineties (Ermisch & Francesconi 2000). Differently from the Nordic countries, in the UK childbearing is still rarer in cohabitation than that in marital unions, though increasing, probably because the

[1] One must first obtain a legal separation, and then wait for at least three years (five until 1987) before applying for a divorce. As a consequence, there is a time period of at least 4-5 years between the actual end of a marriage and it legal dissolution.

duration of cohabiting unions is generally quite short. Ermish (2005) estimates a median duration of two years in the United Kingdom, after which around half of those initiated in the nineties were converted into marriage and the remaining dissolved. Cohabitations, therefore, in the UK have a marked feature of pre-marital unions. With regard to patterns of contacts between generations, it is well known that Italy is among the developed countries with the highest frequency of contacts, as well as of residential proximity between generations (see e.g. Höllinger and Haller 1990; Kalmijn and Saraceno forthcoming).

Theories and research questions

Two different, but partly interlinked, theoretical approaches lie behind the concern that the growing popularity of cohabitation instead of marriage may weaken intergenerational contacts and solidarity. The first is the individualization theory, in its various versions (Giddens 1992; Beck 1992; Beck and Beck Gernsheim 2002). According to this theory, preference for cohabitation over marriage is the result of growing individualization (Mills 2000). Individuals are no longer willing to enter institutionalised and long term binding relationships; when they enter a couple relationship, they prefer to cohabit, rather than marrying, because they wish to keep their options and their negotiations open (e.g. Wu, 2000). But this has consequences on intergenerational relationships. Since it is not institutionalized, cohabitation does not construct cross-couple kinship obligations. In Durkheimian's terms, the cohabitant couple is much more individuated with regard to kinship than the married one. Each partner does not feel specific moral or social obligations towards the other partner's family. This automatically reduces the frequency of contacts, since many contacts with one's own parents and families occur as a couple: having dinner together, visiting and so forth. If contacts are limited to individual ones (i.e. each partner visits his/her parents separately), the frequency of contacts will be almost automatically reduced - even more so since it is women who, in marriage, often keep contact – or mediate contact – also between their husbands and their in laws. If in a cohabitation women do not perform this kin work also for their partner (or do it less), the latter's intergenerational relations may be comparatively reduced.

The second approach, the diffusion theory (e.g. Braun and Engelhardt 2004), does not treat cohabitation as a uniform phenomenon. Rather, it introduces time and degree of diffusion as important dimensions to understand the meaning of cohabitation (instead of marriage) for the individuals concerned as well as for the surrounding social context, particularly family and kin (Nazio and Blossfeld 2003, Nazio, 2008). When cohabitation instead of marriage is rare and the phenomenon is just beginning, those who choose it perceive themselves and are perceived as transgressors and/or innovators. In this perspective, they may also be defined as highly individualized and their behaviour may be difficult to be accepted by their families/parents. After the diffusion of cohabitation has reached a threshold, however, it is no longer perceived as an innovative or transgressing behaviour; thus we might say that also its individualization dimension is weaker, in so far it is an accepted and even expected behaviour. As a consequence, we might expect different patterns of intergenerational relationships according to the stage of diffusion of the phenomenon. Furthermore, since cohabiting relationships are less (legally) binding unions, exhibiting a higher dissolution rate (Ermisch 2005; Wu 2000; Steele et al. 2005 and 2006; Mills 2000) than marriages; they are, also, a less secure target for the huge monetary investment that a housing purchase may require. This is particularly relevant in the Southern European countries, where buying traditionally has been relatively more convenient than renting and it has been also supported by fiscal policies (e.g. Nazio 2008; Kurz & Blossfeld 2004; Bernardi and Poggio 2004; Poggio forthcoming; Chiuri and Jappelli 2000). Especially when intergenerational transfer of capital is required, it is more likely that it takes place to benefit a married rather than a cohabiting union, strengthening the ties (and sense of reciprocation) between parental and children generations (see also Barbagli, Castiglione and Dalla Zuanna 2003, who, however, argue that in recent years, following an increased acceptance of cohabitation by the parental generation among the better educated and living in the Centre-North, in Italy this difference in supporting married and cohabiting children in buying their own dwelling is disappearing). We may, therefore, expect that there are more differences in the frequency of intergenerational contacts and patterns of solidarity with their parents between married and cohabitant adult children in countries with a recent and still

comparatively small diffusion of cohabitation than in countries where this practice is more widespread and it has been so for some time.

A recent study by Di Giulio and Rosina (2006, see also Rosina and Fraboni 2004) has offered a partly alternative formulation of the diffusion model developed specifically from the perspective of the Italian context. While Nazio and Blossfeld argue that what is crucial in the diffusion of cohabitation – among the young – is peer experience, these authors argue that in strong family ties and weak welfare state countries like Italy, which render parental support crucial, cohabitation may become widespread only when the parental generation demonstrates a clear and supportive acceptance. As a consequence, cohabitation may cause intergenerational tensions when it is rare because the parental generation is not willing to support children who chose it instead of marriage (a specific characteristic of the Mediterranean context stressed also by Reher 1998; Dalla Zuanna 2004; Micheli 2000). But it might also be the outcome of close intergenerational bonds when the parental generation is ready to support them. There seem to be some support to their thesis; in so far cohabitation increases, particularly in the Center-North, in parallel with parents' education. This is partly also Barbagli, Castiglione and Dalla Zuanna's (2003) thesis.

A third, less developed theory of possible differences between the frequency of contacts with their parents of cohabitant vs. married children is based on the assimilation of the consequences of cohabitation to those of divorce, based on the, empirically partly founded, assumption that cohabitations are more unstable than marriages (e.g. Steele et al .2005 and 2006; Mills 2000; Ermisch 2005; Wu 2000; Kiernan 2002; Blossfeld et al. 1993). This theory, however, does not concern the existence of differences in patterns of intergenerational relationships between cohabitants and married adults, but the higher vulnerability to the negative consequences of couple's break up in the case of the former. That is, it hypothesizes that, to the degree to which cohabitation becomes a widespread phenomenon reducing the space for marriage, given its higher vulnerability to break up, more intergenerational relationships will suffer the same kind of limitation or interruption found in the case of divorce.

As a matter of fact, empirical evidence on the impact of cohabitation on intergenerational relationships is not only scanty, but also conceptually and methodologically muddled. In

the first place, studies concern mostly cohabitant adult children, not cohabitant elderly, given the rare diffusion of cohabitation among the elderly in all countries. Thus, one cannot, as it happens instead in the case of divorce, measure the impact of cohabitation also in the parents', but only in the children's generation. In the second place, studies rarely distinguish between different forms of cohabitation, particularly between those entered as a temporary relationship and those entered as a form of stable life alternative to marriage, those entered when young as the first form of partnership and those entered later in life, often after a marriage. This lack of distinction biases results at two levels (see also Harper 2004, Kiernan 2000). First, a large part of cohabitations involve young people. Cohabitations, therefore, include to a larger degree than marriages people who are still involved in what developmental psychoanalysts would define the developmental task of distancing themselves from their parents in order to become their own person. Young newly married couples are also often engaged in defining their own social space, relationships and rituals, marking their difference from their respective parental homes. Once a couple is well established as such, this boundary setting behaviour may appear less necessary and at the same time new needs – the arrival of a child, a parent becoming frail - may affect intergenerational relationships. Furthermore, cohabitations among the young are often temporary and entered as such. Consequently, the partners do not particularly feel involved in each other's family and therefore reduce the space for relationship with them. Married or cohabitant couple duration, therefore, is both an indicator of stability and of life stage, at least to a degree. In order to understand whether cohabitation in the generation of adult children, compared to marriage, has actually a weakening impact on intergenerational relations, therefore, both age and duration must be kept under control. The recent findings by Daatland (2007) for Norway based on the Norwegian Life Course, Ageing and Generation Study support this. While these findings support also for Norway a negative impact of divorce on parents-child relationship, for both mothers and fathers (although more for the latter), in fact, they show no evidence of difference in the most important dimensions of intergenerational solidarity (contacts, exchange of help, feeling of closeness) for cohabitant and married children *vis a vis* their parents. In their sample, children are aged 40 and over; their couple relationships are therefore on average more established than among younger children, and the relatively

high age of their parents also is conducive to higher contact frequency than when parents are younger. These two characteristics might explain the similarity in behaviour between married and cohabitant children.

Does similarity hold only for countries, such as Norway, where cohabitation is widespread as a mode of union formation, and where – as in other Scandinavian countries – contacts between kin are relatively reduced also among married couples compared to Continental and Southern European countries (see e.g. Kalmijn and Saraceno forthcoming)? In other words, is it the outcome both of a high cultural legitimization of cohabitation and of a "loose" embeddedness of households in kinship networks? Or does this similarity point to the fact that long term cohabitation – be it a widespread phenomenon or a relatively exceptional, therefore potentially deviant, one – is assimilated to marriage in the everyday dealings of kinship by all the persons involved?

In order to answer this question one would need a complex simultaneously longitudinal and comparative study, including data on values and attitudes. More modestly, in the study presented here we wish to test the following three hypotheses.

H. 1. Following the diffusion theory, differences in the frequency of adult child-parents contacts are greater in Italy than in the UK, given the lower diffusion and therefore lower social legitimization of cohabitation in the former country. This hypothesis, however, must be qualified in the light, on the one hand, of Di Giulio and Rosina's (2006) proposal, according to which the diffusion of cohabitation among the young in Italy implies a stronger explicit acceptance by parents than in other countries. On the other hand, one must consider that the stock of cohabitants in Italy is to a large degree constituted by no longer young individuals who cannot (yet) marry. They are in a different life stage compared to the young, also in their relationships with their parents, who are on average older, a condition which is known to be positively linked to contacts and support by adult children. Thus, in Italy cohabitants might be a more selective, and at the same time polarized, group than in the UK, not only because of the characteristics of "innovation" of their behaviour, but because of the characteristics which favour, or in some case even force, cohabitation instead of marriage. For the young, this selectivity concerns also the active support by parents; for older cohabitants, it concerns the likelihood that one, or both, partners come from a previous marriage experience and are

on average of more mature age. Both these characteristics might affect positively contacts, reducing the hypothesized negative impact of cohabitation.

H. 2. Duration counts. If there are differences at all, we hypothesize that they decrease with duration of cohabitation.

H.3 Also presence of children counts, in so far children have generally a connecting role between generations and becoming a parent/grandparent may encourage more frequent contacts also in the case of cohabitation of the younger parental couple.

Data and methods

This study makes use of the Indagine Multiscopo sulle Famiglie (Istat, 2003), a retrospective survey conducted in Italy by the Italian National Statistical Office (ISTAT) "Families and Social Subjects" and of wave 14 of the British Household Panel Study (2001). The Italian survey was fielded in November 2003 and covered around 24,000 households, for an amount of about 50,000 individuals. A sub-sample of 13503 individuals living in 8163 co-resident heterosexual couples (regardless of presence of other household members) aged between 25 and 69 years with at least one living parent have been selected for the analyses, making for 21117 dyadic relationships to their parents in Italy. For the British sample, we selected 3389 individuals within 1970 households and 5496 dyads using the same exclusion rules.

The two surveys are only partly comparable, not only because the Italian one is richer, but also because when the same issues are studied, the items are not always identical.

We make use of a random effects multilevel model, which comprises three levels: the dyadic relationships of the children to their living parents (level 1); the adult children themselves (level 2); and the couple (married vs cohabitant) they are part of (level 3). The dependent variable of the regression is the frequency of individuals' visits to their respective non co-resident parents: measured on a six points scale ranging between 1=never and 6=daily for Italy and the UK. There is a slight difference between the two national scales, since the in the Italian case the scale comprises more categories towards high frequencies of visits (daily; sometimes a week; weekly; sometimes a month; sometimes a year; never), whereas the British scale comprises more categories towards the lower frequencies (daily; at least once a week; at least once a month; several times a

year; less often; never). Figure 1 presents the distribution of frequencies of this variable by marital status of the individuals (relative percentages to the total of married/cohabitant individuals in the samples). We can see that Italians have a pattern of more frequent visits to their parents than the Britons: 78% of them visit them at least once a week, against around 50% of Britons, a figure mirrored by the closer proximity in which Italians live with respect to Britons (in Italy 76% lives within a distance of 16 Km., whereas in Britain only 61% lives within half an hour from their parents). Unfortunately the two surveys used two different measures to assess distance and we are aware that they are only superficially comparable.

[Figure 1 around here]

The variables adopted for the analyses can be distinguished between the three levels at which they are specified.

At level 1 (dyads) we constructed: the dyads corresponding to the relationships between the daughters and their mothers (reference), the daughters and their fathers, the sons and their mothers and their fathers respectively; parents' age (ranging from 40 to 101 and centred around 70 for Italy; while ranging between 42 and 100 and centred around 64 for the UK); two measures of the distance between children and each of their parents, the first measured on a scale from 1 to 7 for Italy (other flat same building; within 1 km.; same city; other city <16 km.; other city 16-50 km.; other city >50 km.; abroad) and 1 to 6 for the UK (< 15 min.s; 15-30 min.s ; 30 min.s - 1 hour; 1-2 hours; > 2 hours; abroad) (centred at 3=living in the same city for Italy and 2=15-30 minutes for the UK) and the second operationalised via two dummies for medium (1/2 to 2 hours for the UK and 16-50 Km. for Italy) and large (above 2 hours or 50 Km. for UK and Italy respectively) distances; a set of dummy variables linked to parental living situations (where the reference category is living in couple without children for Italy and living in couple for the UK), comprising living in couples with (some other) children, living alone, living without the spouse but with children or living in other condition (mostly a retirement home) for Italy, and living alone or in other condition (including with other children, if applicable) for the UK; the frequency of phone calls to one's own parent, measured in a

scale from 1 to 6 for the UK (the same as for visits and distance, centred around the average value 4=at least once a month) and on a scale from 1 to 6 for Italy (the same as for visits, centred around the average value 3=some times a month).

At level 2 (adult children) we have made use of: age at interview (ranging from 25 to 69; centred around the averages of 42 years for Italy and 37 years for the UK), level of education measured on a scale from 1 (PhD) to 9 (analphabetic) for Italy (centred around the average value of 5=higher education for 2-3 years after compulsory education) and from 1 (University or CNAA Higher Degree) to 13 (no qualification) for the UK (centred around the average value of 7=GCE O levels or equivalent[2]); whether the respondent is working (inactive or unemployed is the reference category) and, for the UK only, whether he/she is working on a part-time basis (working full-time becomes the reference); whether the respondent has living siblings and, for Italy only, their number.

At level 3 (couples) we used: duration of the relationship measured in months but expressed in years[3], ranging from 0 to 47,6 years for Italy (with an average duration of 6 years for cohabiting couples and 16,3 for married ones) and from 0 to 50 years for the UK (with average duration of 4 and 11,5 for cohabitant and married respectively); type of union (cohabitation or marital); and presence of children below 16 years of age for the UK, and between 0 to 2 years for Italy[4].

In Model 5 (Tables 3 and 4) a few country specific variables are tested: for the UK at level 2 a measure of self-assessed health status of the respondent over the past 12 months[5] (measured on a 5 points scale), when judged as poor or very poor (reference being very good, good or fair); at level 3 the housing tenure, whether rented (reference being owned). For Italy, at level 1 we tested the educational level of the parents on a scale from 1 to 9 (like for children's education, but centred around the average value of

[2] This category comprises in detail: O Levels (pre 1975), O Level grades A-C (1975 or later), GCSE grades A-C, CSE grade 1, Scottish O Grades (pass or bands A-C or 1-3), Scottish School Leaving Certificate Lower Grade, School Certificate or Matric, Scottish Standard Grade Level 1-3 or City & Guilds Certificate (Craft/Intermediate/Ordinary/Part I)

[3] In the British case, this variable was built from the reconstruction of partnership histories collected in waves 2 and 3, in combination with information collected in all waves until the 11th. In case of discordant or missing information for one of the partners, the most recent (available) information was chosen.

[4] Different specifications have also been tested in the models in the Italian case, comprising the number of children below 18 and different thresholds for the age of smallest child.

[5] A similar variable was implemented in the analyses for Italy too, but is not included in the models presented here because it never proved statistically significant.

7=elementary education) and parental poor health status as assessed by his/her child[6]; at level 2 whether, since living independently from the parental family the respondent reported having incurred into "serious economic difficulties" and if so, in that occasion, whether he/she received some help from his/her parents.
Table 1 reports some descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables used in the analyses for the two countries.

[Table 1 around here]

Table 2 reports the frequency for three of the central variables used in the analyses: the frequency of visits, the distance and the frequency of phone calls. These figures highlight a substantial difference between the Italian and the British contexts: although most children, overall, tend to live quite close to their parents (over 60% lives within half an hour reach or within 16 km. in both countries, as the bolded figures in the upper part of Table 2 show), Britons tend to phone their parents less frequently (on average), and to visit them more sparingly. For example, over 28% of British adult children visit their parents less often than monthly, as opposed to only 12% of Italians; at the opposite extreme, 37% of Italians declare to be visiting them on a daily basis, as against about 11% of British. As expected, the correlation between the frequency of visits and distance is -0,69 for the UK and -0,72 for Italy, suggesting that physical proximity is an important factor in the opportunity and costs of maintaining direct contacts between adult children and their parents. However, the correlation between visits and phone calls is 0,48 for the UK but only 0,02 for Italy, and the correlation between the frequency of phone calls and the distance to one own' parents is -0,12 for the UK and 0,16 for Italy. These figures point to a more complex pattern of association between distance and contacts (either direct visits and/or phone contacts) than a closer or more distant physical proximity alone might suggest.

[Table 2 around here]

[6] The original question wording asked about a chronic illness which reduced personal autonomy up to require support for daily needs: answers of "yes, repeatedly and for major needs" was codified as "poor health", as against "no" and "yes, discontinuously and for some needs" (reference category).

What accounts for a more frequent pattern of contacts to one's own parents in the two countries? Is the type of union, cohabitation rather than a formal marriage, a significant determinant of such frequency?

Results

Tables 3 and 4 present the results of a series of random effect models for Italy and the United Kingdom, respectively (beta coefficients and standard errors are reported in the tables).

[Tables 3 & 4 around here]

For both countries, a first model (Model 1) reports the overall amount of variability at each level. Here we see a first difference between the two countries: whereas in both the largest amount of variability is to be found at the individual level, the second largest in Italy is the couple level, while in the UK is the dyadic relation to the parent. This is a first indication that, in Italy, there might be more differences tied to the type of union entered. Model 2 introduces a series of controls for the educational level, the type of union, the duration of the relationship, the age of the respondents and that of their parents. First of all, the dyads variables show how women tend to visit their parents more frequently than men (women visit their fathers significantly less frequently than their mothers and men tend to visit both their parents less than women). Here we can also see how cohabiting does seem to have a negative effect on the frequency of visits, much more so in Italy than in the UK. But in neither country being in a pre- or post-marital cohabitation does make any difference per se. Only in the UK duration plays the expected effect, whereas in both countries the age of the respondent has a negative effect on visits, while parental age has a positive effect, signalling how need (likely linked to parental older ages) and life stage (likely linked to the younger children ages) might play an important role. Model 3 integrates measures of distance to the parents, which – in both countries - display the expected pattern: a lower frequency of visits for higher distance (linearly decreasing effect), that in Italy grows exponentially with the distance. In the random part of the

model, we can see how living further away significantly reduces the opportunity to frequent visits (the variability of behaviours reduces with the distance, over 50 Km. in the Italian case, and from half an hour in the British one). Interestingly, in the British case the highest variability in behaviour is to be registered among those who live closer. In Italy, furthermore, variability seems higher for those living at a medium distance, between 16 and 50 Km. from their parents. From this cross-sectional data it is difficult to judge, however, if this result hides the taking place of residential moves (on either the children or the parents' part) in order to accommodate for the need for parental support. It might be the case that children living at medium distances are more heterogeneous with regard to propensity to maintain contact than those either living nearer to or farther away from their parents.

The high explicative power that the introduction of controls for distance has brought about (the deviance test is highly significant since we gain over 13000 and 3700 points, respectively, with only 5 degrees of freedom) must be pointed out. Distance seems also to account for much of the variability initially observed at both the individuals' and dyads' levels. In the fixed part of the model, we can observe how controlling for distance reduces dramatically the effect of cohabitation in Italy, and makes it insignificant for the UK. It suggests that the biggest part of the lower frequency of visits by cohabiting individuals compared to married ones may not be attributed to their partnership choice (or to a mechanism leading to both a preference for cohabitation and less parental support) but to their higher distance from their parents, especially in Italy. This is not to deny that another mechanism may be mediating the decisions to live further distant, to cohabit, and to visit less. It is an issue that would require exploration with different data.

Model 4 incorporates controls for the parental residential situation, for time availability (involvement in paid employment), for the frequency of phone calls and for the presence of other potential carers (siblings). Random slopes for sex, in both countries, reveal a slightly (but significantly) higher variability in men's than in women's behaviour, highlighting how a process of gendered expectations (or gendered time availability) might be in place. In the fixed part, we can observe that in both countries parents living in "other circumstances" (rather than alone or in couple) receive fewer visits, as do (to a lesser extent) parents living alone in the UK. Not a surprising result, since most of these

arrangements comprise people residing in old age retirement homes, where their caring needs are attended (maybe also as a result of the difficulty their children have in providing assistance). We find no difference between cohabitant and married couples in the UK with respect to the frequency of visits, and a slight increase in the negative effect of cohabitation for Italy, more than compensated by the strong and positive interaction effect of cohabitation with the frequency of phone calls. In other words, it seems that in Italy not only, as in the UK, children who phone more frequently will also display a higher rate of visits, but that this is more true for cohabitant than for married children. The combination of an increase in the negative effect of cohabitation with a positive interaction effect between phone calls and cohabitation in Italy suggests that there could be a difference between cohabitants who phone and visit their parents to a similar degree as the married ones and others whose contacts are somewhat looser. In other words, in Italy, phone calls are more a salient predictor of visits for cohabitant than for married individuals. This result offers some support to Dalla Zuanna, Barbagli and Castiglioni's observation that cohabiting couples behaviour might be more strongly polarised, depending on the support received from their parents.

The presence of siblings reduces the pressure to provide assistance to one's parents in both countries (in Italy, where it could be controlled, both the presence and their number matters, sign that care work is likely shared among kin). Being employed has the expected negative effect in the UK, but surprisingly has no effect in Italy. In the British case, the difference between daughters' visits to their fathers and mothers disappears in Model 4 (while the difference between daughters and sons still remains strong and significant in both countries, though a bit lower). This result signals how part of the lower frequency of contacts with children among older fathers evidenced above might be explained by their residential circumstances in the UK.

Finally, Model 5 presents country specific results that do not allow a direct comparison, because they comprise those variables that we hypothesised could account for individuals' frequency of contact with their parents, but were not available in both datasets. We can see how working part-time reduces the negative effect of being employed in the UK (affording almost as many opportunities for visits as for non working individuals, or emphasising that reduced working hours might also be

endogenous, in that it might be an option in the UK for attending to the caring needs of older parents). Contrary to our expectations, the presence of young children seems not to have an effect in the UK and a rather weak one in Italy, and only for infants. In the UK, poor health, which incentives contacts when it concerns a parent, diminishes their frequency when it concerns the adult children generation. In Italy, when the poor health pertains the parental generation, it fosters higher frequency of visits. Here, having incurred in financial difficulties generally hampers contacts; but having received financial support by parents increases them, suggesting that either financial support occurs within close relationships or that receiving financial support incentives contacts, out of a feeling of reciprocity or of obligation. Given the small n. it has not been possible to test whther there are differences in this between married and cohabitant children.

Discussion

Our data confirm that there are different patterns of contacts between generations in Italy and the UK, irrespective of the children's marital status. Italian children and their parents keep more in contact than in the UK (see Figure 1). This is partly explained by the fact that Italian adult children generally live nearer to their parents than UK ones, a well-known crucial factor in the frequency of contacts (see Table 2). Against this background, our findings support the hypothesis that there are more differences in Italy than in the UK between cohabiting and married adult children in the frequency of contacts with their parents. These differences, however, contrary to our hypothesis, are not linked to duration.

Duration, in fact, seems to have an impact in the expected direction only in the UK (where its effect is not very strong), not in Italy, where it does not have any significant effect, both for cohabitant and married children (interaction effect tested, not shown). What makes a real difference is distance, in so far cohabitant children, particularly in Italy, tend to live farther away from their parents than married ones. And distance is generally associated to fewer contacts, particularly, and obviously, face to face. Interestingly, however, once controlled for distance, cohabitants in Italy do not have substantially fewer contacts than married children (a very small effect is left). The positive effect of phone calls for cohabitants also supports the hypothesis of the specific

selectivity of cohabitants in Italy with regard to a climate of good, supportive relationship with their parents.

The longer average distance between parents' and children's households in Italy in case of cohabitation of the latter remains to be explained, however, since in this country the large majority of children's households live within 1 km of distance from at least one of the parental households, the longer distance of cohabitant children needs an explanation. With the data available, we can but make some informed hypothesis. First, it may be the consequence of the high presence of cohabitants who have had a previous marriage history and are well into their adult life. Past work, marriage and family histories may have put a distance between parents and children's households well before the decision to cohabit. Second, in a context where cohabitation is (was) little legitimised and supported, it might be (have been) easier, both for the young and for those exiting from a marriage (or entering a partnership with a person who was not yet divorced) to live far away, in order to avoid reciprocal embarrassment, community gossip and reciprocal tensions. Particularly for the young, living in a different city of one's own parents because of study or job, might have weakened social control and eased the decision to cohabit rather than marrying. The same condition – living in a different city – might have introduced an element of insecurity or a feeling of temporaneity that, according to some scholar is among the main reasons which favour cohabitation over marriage (e.g. Blossfeld, Klijzing, Mills and Kurz, 2005). Finally, parents are more willing to help buy an apartment – the main way through which a young couple access to a lodging in Italy - when children marry rather than cohabit, since they perceive the latter situation as less stable, in addition to less legitimate. Thus children who choose cohabitation must look for an apartment only based on – renting or buying - market opportunities, which might not be near their parents' residence. One or more of these reasons may explain why children who cohabit live at a greater distance from their parents than married ones. What we wish to point out is that distance, particularly in Italy, is not a neutral choice with regard to intergenerational relationships. If it may be prompted and even forced because of labour market demands, its different distribution according to the couple's status

suggests that something having to do with this status and its impact on intergenerational relationships is at play.

With regard to our third hypothesis, concerning the positive impact of grandchildren, it is confirmed only for Italy and only for very young children. On the contrary, the presence of siblings reduces the frequency of contacts: not only adult children take turns in visiting their parents, also parents divide their visits and their phone calls among their various children. Thus, from the perspective of parents, the overall frequency of contacts may increase if they have more than one child, but it decreases at the dyadic level, both for married and cohabitant children.

Also gender, both of children and of parents makes a difference. Daughters visit their parents more frequently than sons and mothers receive more visits than fathers. This happens both among married children and among cohabitant ones (not shown, results available on request). Thus, if in cohabitant relationships the woman does not perform kin-work also for her companion, his parents are more likely to be deprived of contacts than hers. This would partly confirm the possibly negative impact of cohabitation rather than marriage on intergenerational relationships: not because of the higher instability of the former, but of a different gender division of labour with regard to kin work.

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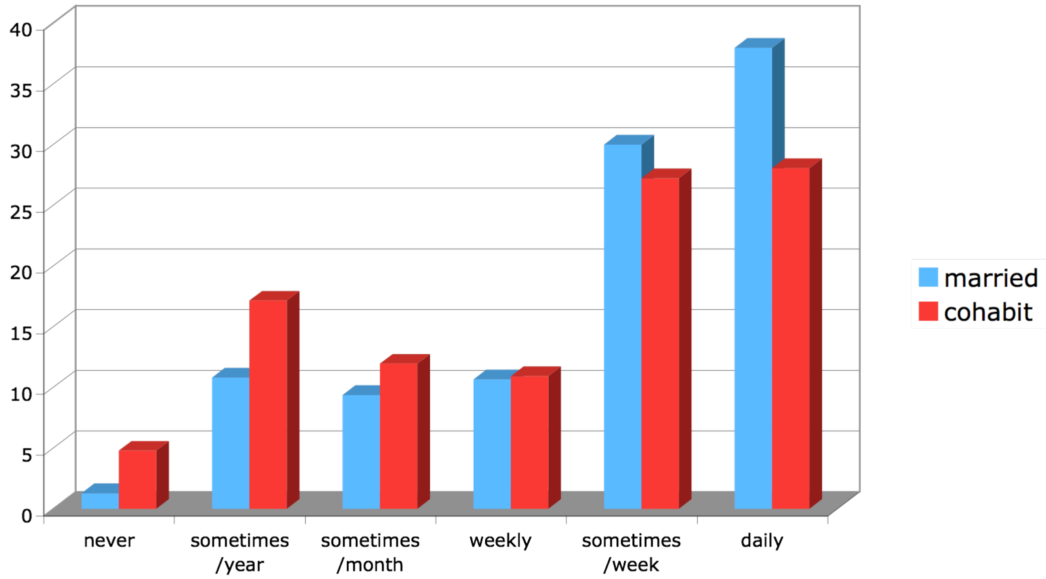

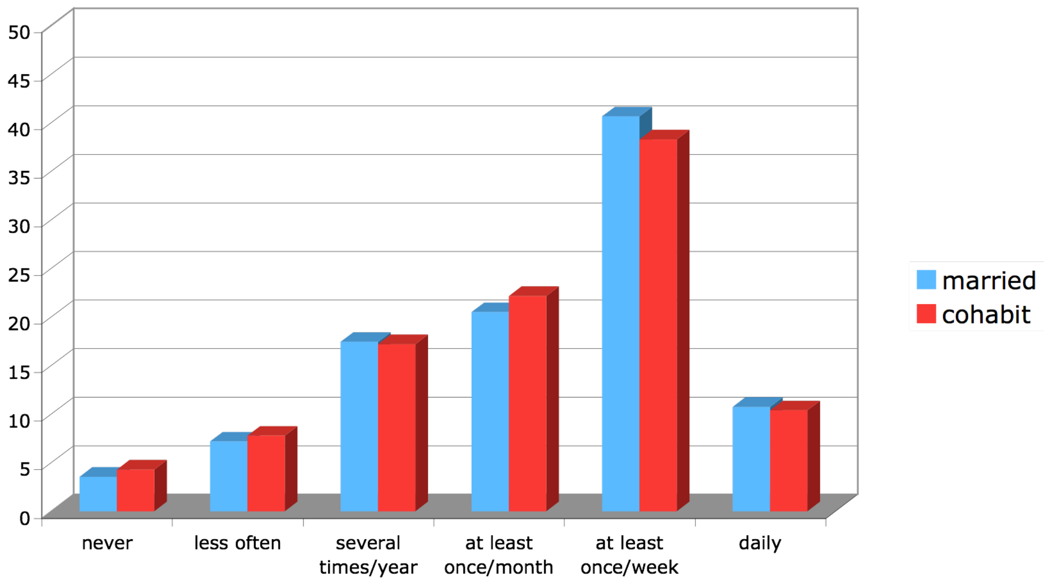

Figure 1. Distribution of frequency visits to one's own parents

Table 2

	United Kingdom		Italy
Distance			
< 15 min.s	**41,0**	other flat same building	**11,5**
15-30 min.s	**20,5**	within 1 km.	**26,2**
30 min.s - 1 hour	11,2	same city	**23,8**
1-2 hours	9,7	other city <16 km.	**14,6**
> 2 hours	14,4	other city 16-50 km.	9,2
abroad	3,2	other city >50 km.	11,5
Total (N=5441)	100	abroad	3,2
		Total (N=21706)	100
Frequency of visits			
never	3,7	never	1,4
less often	7,3	sometimes /year	11,1
several times/year	17,4	sometimes /month	9,5
at least once/month	20,8	*weekly*	10,7
at least once/week	40,1	*sometimes /week*	29,9
daily	**10,7**	daily	**37,5**
Total (N=5496)	100	Total (N=21706)	100,0
Freq. of phone calls			
never	7,4	never	13,5
less often	3,8	sometimes /year	3,0
several times/year	5,2	sometimes /month	8,0
at least once/month	16,2	weekly	**8,9**
at least once/week	**50,2**	*sometimes /week*	**34,5**
daily	**16,6**	daily	**32,1**
Total (N=5496)	100	Total (N=21117)	100

Table 3. Italy: Random effect models for frequency of visits to parents

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fixed Part										
Constant	4.67	(0.013)	4.746	(0.050)	5.207	(0.033)	5.221	(0,042)	5.19	(0.041)
Dyad: she-her father			-0.094	(0.009)	-0.083	(0.008)	-0.065	(0,007)	-0.064	(0.007)
Dyad: he-his mother			-0.037	(0.024)	-0.199	(0.017)	-0.136	(0,018)	-0.136	(0.017)
Dyad: he-his fathe r			-0.069	(0.025)	-0.215	(0.017)	-0.149	(0.019)	-0.148	(0.017)
Educational level (centred)			-0.009	(0.009)	-0.015	(0.006)	0.013	(0.006)	0.014	(0.006)
Parent educational level (centr.)			0.007	(0.006)	-0.003	(0.004)	0.003	(0.004)	0.003	(0.004)
Cohabits			-0.520	(0.078)	-0.118	(0.050)	-0.180	(0.050)	-0.237	(0.068)
Cohabits (after marriage)			-0.088	(0.126)	-0.048	(0.083)	-0.042	(0.082)	-0.048	(0.082)
Duration union (years)			-0.001	(0.003)	-0.005	(0.002)	-0.004	(0.002)	-0.003	(0.002)
Cohabit * Duration union (yrs.)									-0.002	(0.007)
Parent age (centred)			0.004	(0.001)	0.003	(0.001)	0.005	(0.001)	0.004	(0.001)
Child age (centred)			-0.008	(0.003)	-0.002	(0.002)	-0.004	(0.002)	-0.004	(0.002)
Distance (16-50 Km.)					-0.166	(0.034)	-0.074	(0.033)	-0.074	(0.033)
Distance (>50 Km.)					-1.236	(0.038)	-1.030	(0.037)	-1.041	(0.038)
Distance (centred)					-0.410	(0.009)	-0.454	(0.009)	-0.457	(0.009)
Cohabit * Distance (centred)									0.078	(0.018)
Parent lives couple with child(ren)							0.000	(0.021)	0.002	(0.021)
Parent lives alone							0.009	(0.020)	0.008	(0.020)
Parent lives alone with child(ren)							-0.029	(0.025)	-0.029	(0.025)
Parent lives other							-0.084	(0.057)	-0.109	(0.058)
Frequency phone calls (centred)							0.105	(0.004)	0.105	(0.004)
Cohabit * Freq. phone calls (centr.)							0.153	(0.018)	0.155	(0.018)
Works							-0.005	(0.019)		
Siblings (yes)							-0.057	(0.027)	-0.057	(0.027)
Number of siblings							-0.037	(0.005)	-0.037	(0.005)
Has child(ren) 0-2 years (yes)									0.067	(0.025)
Ever needed economic aid									-0.116	(0.033)
Received econ. aid from parents									0.156	(0.044)
Parent's poor health									0.046	(0.017)
Random Part										
Level 3:										
σ^2 variance	0.475	(0.027)	0.457	(0.027)	0.116	(0.011)	0.104	(-0,011)	0.105	(0.011)
Level 2:										
σ^2 variance	1.403	(0.028)	1.404	(0.028)	0.65	(0.013)				
σ^2 variance for him							0.722	(-0,018)	0.721	(0.018)
σ^2 variance for her							0.597	(-0,016)	0.595	(0.016)
Level 1:										
σ^2variance for constant	0.139	(0.002)	0.0138	(0.002)	0.103	(0.002)	0.098	(-0,002)	0.097	(0.002)
σcovariance for constant/dist2					0.023	(0.004)	0.021	(-0,004)	0.021	(0.004)
σcovariance for constant/dist3					-0.017	(0.002)	-0.023	(-0,001)	-0.023	(0.001)
Deviance	59090.77		58894.94		45282.75		44299.18		44252.50	
n	21117		21117		21117		21101		21101	

Table 4. United Kingdom: Random effect models for frequency of visits to parents

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Fixed Part										
Constant	4.178	(0.022)	4.435	(0.047)	4.589	(0.038)	4.470	(0.055)	4.501	(0.060)
Dyad: she-her father			-0.318	(0.030)	-0.197	(0.022)	0.003	(0.019)	0.003	(0.019)
Dyad: he-his mother			-0.335	(0.042)	-0.321	(0.030)	-0.119	(0.027)	-0.081	(0.030)
Dyad: he-his father			-0.492	(0.044)	-0.420	(0.032)	-0.116	(0.029)	-0.078	(0.032)
Educational level (centred)			0.044	(0.007)	-0.016	(0.005)	-0.001	(0.004)	-0.001	(0.004)
Cohabits			-0.125	(0.068)	0.042	(0.045)	0.001	(0.043)	0.000	(0.043)
Cohabits (after marriage)			0.200	(0.098)	0.008	(0.067)	0.044	(0.058)	0.047	(0.059)
Duration union (years)			0.010	(0.003)	0.004	(0.002)	0.004	(0.002)	0.004	(0.002)
Parent age (centred)			0.017	(0.003)	0.014	(0.002)	0.009	(0.002)	0.009	(0.002)
Child age (centred)			-0.035	(0.005)	-0.015	(0.003)	-0.007	(0.003)	-0.007	(0.003)
Distance (1/2 hrs. – 2 hrs.)					0.096	(0.067)	0.003	(0.058)	0.005	(0.058)
Distance (>2 hrs.)					-0.048	(0.112)	-0.135	(0.097)	-0.129	(0.096)
Distance (centred)					-0.550	(0.028)	-0.482	(0.024)	-0.483	(0.024)
Cohabit * Distance (centred)							0.028	(0.017)	0.029	(0.017)
Parent lives alone							-0.114	(0.029)	-0.116	(0.029)
Parent lives other							-0.214	(0.031)	-0.213	(0.031)
Frequency phone calls (centred)							0.313	(0.009)	0.313	(0.009)
Cohabit * Freq. phone calls (centr.)							0.041	(0.017)	0.043	(0.017)
Works							-0.046	(0.033)	-0.104	(0.036)
Works * part-time									0.115	(0.036)
Siblings (yes)							-0.088	(0.039)	-0.085	(0.039)
Has young children (yes)									-0.023	(0.029)
Poor health									-0.141	(0.054)
Housing tenure (rent)									0.012	(0.031)
Random Part										
Level 3:										
σ^2variance	0.21	(0.038)	0.222	(0.036)	0.045	(0.017)	0.020	(0.013)	0.017	(0.013)
Level 2:										
σ^2 variance	0.857	(0.045)	0.800	(0.042)	0.387	(0.022)				
σ^2 variance for him							0.349	(0.022)	0.353	(0.022)
σ^2 variance for her							0.286	(0.020)	0.285	(0.020)
Level 1:										
σ^2 variance for constant	0.535	(0.016)	0.510	(0.016)	0.391	(0.015)	0.284	(0.011)	0.283	(0.011)
σcovariance for constant/dist2					-0.530	(0.012)	-0.041	(0.008)	-0.041	(0.008)
σcovariance for constant/dist 3					-0.129	(0.009)	-0.100	(0.006)	-0.100	(0.006)
Deviance	16922.38		16635.54		12919.11		11192.36		11175.02	
n	5496		5488		5433		5398		5398	