The Elusive Intimacy. Fluidity and Solidity in Same-Sex Couples

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Riassunto: Partendo dal dato etico secondo il quale ciò che distingue un rapporto di coppia da ogni altra relazione sociale è l’intimità, la “forma” biologicamente e culturalmente condivisa dell’amore generativo è la copula eterosessuale. Le diverse “forme” di omosessualità, sul versante intimo, sono meno connotate, e si moltiplicano in modalità complesse che potrebbero forse segnalare, da parte dell’uno o dell’altro componente della coppia, una scarsa capacità di entrare in contatto con l’altro, come pure l’esistenza di “forme” propriamente omosessuali di attrazione affettiva che esulano dai canoni stereotipati dell’approccio eterosessuale. L’espressione della sexualità di coppia, tuttavia, si colloca a valle di un’intimità psicologica e relazionale che è a monte, e che può essere educata.

Abstract: Intimacy is the distinction between the relationship of a couple and a social one, this ethical fact is the starting point of this text. Heterosexual coupling is the accepted “form”, biologically and culturally, of the generative love. On the intimate side, the outlines that make the different “forms” of homosexuality are less clear, they multiply into complex modalities that may signal, on one or the other side of the couple, the scarce ability to stay in contact between each other. There are also typically homosexual “forms” of affective attraction that lie outside the stereotyped canons of the heterosexual approach. However, the expression of the sexuality of the couple lies downstream of a psychological and relationship that lies upstream, and that can be educated.

Keywords: Education, Gender, Homosexuality, Social policies.

Genesis, development and good performance of the heterosexual couple receive much scientific attention, at national and international, sociological and pedagogical level. Most of the studies on homosexuality focus their attention on real or presumed factors that are considered responsible this phenomenon, on the widespread problem of homophobia or on the need of recognition (based on drifted misrecognition) of same-sex couples. The modalities of the structure of love bonds (not mere sexual ones) between two women or men remain mostly unexplored. Nevertheless, an homo-
sexual couple cannot be assimilated to an heterosexual one, apart from the fact that they also face everyday problems. For example, it is not possible to overlap the “construction” of an intimate dimension between man and woman and the “intricate network” existing between two persons of the same sex, as this interweaving is punctuated by greater personal, social and cultural difficulties (Giaconi, 2008). The second fact is what makes the couple (healthily) different from any other type of relationship is intimacy. Or, the biologically and culturally shared “form” of generating love between two individuals free from pathologies that can inhibit the erotic approaches is the one of the heterosexual coupling. On the intimate side, homosexuality is less defined, is “generating differently”, and takes “shapes” that may (but not in practice) signal the inability, of one of the couple’s members, to make in contact with the other. Or, a self-mirroring narcissistic attitude on a real inclusive otherness represented by the partner to establish a relationship based on trust. At affective level, a couple is such when it is inclusive and trustworthy. Nevertheless, to avoid sexualing affection it is essential to remark that the expression of a couple sexuality derives from a psycho-relational intimacy that can be educated beforehand. Therefore, we may need an educational cure that comes up from the bottom, that is from the bottom of the skin (which is also sacred) going up to heart and head to analyse the intimate relationship within a couple (Corsi, 2003, 107).

Trust and inclusion dimensions

The values that cross a pedagogically oriented relationship, heterosexual or homosexual, are those of inclusion, trust and intimacy. These values and dimensions are to be “built” together, through reciprocal recognition. Because, we can stay together through reciprocal recognition when all become aware of their identity. Which, as in any other psychological example, is changing continuously, but also has a previous history. In the couple’s relationship, identity can be distinguished in biological, gender (Dini Martino, 1994, 17) and sexuality (Dastoli, 1994, 9). This three specific interpretations should be mentioned in the same order as above, because gender and sexual identities derive from biological awareness. The former corresponds to male or female nature from birth. Apart from rare cases (i.e. intersexuality), people are equipped from birth of a sexual organ that defines the as male or female. On the contrary, genre identity correspond to sexed
people’s experience of life. Being male or female does not automatically mean to belong to a specific gender. The meaning given to our genitality mostly defines its signification. In fact, gender identity may not correspond to the biological one, it is not the immediate result of a “choice” – unless the “choice” is intended as a, sometime painful, process of construction and elaboration of meanings. The “choice” of a gender is an assumption, we may accept or deny it; unlike the choice of the favourite colour.

Finally, there is sexual identity, which does not merely corresponds to sexual orientation. If the latter is ascribable to the same typologies that define genre (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual and more), sexual identity (or simply personal sexuality) is in a state of permanent becoming: maturational, progressive and highly relational, therefore, it grows inside the couple – or in the meeting with the subject-object of love – causing inferences to our genre identity. Simply, a person may have a male biological identity, a female genre identity and an heterosexual orientation.

Within this frame, he may fall in love with a woman even if he perceives himself as a woman. This does not mean that, in actual fact, he may not change his sexuality with the time, or even changing objective. Or, a person could have a female biological identity, a transsexual genre identity and an homosexual orientation. In this case, she could fall in love with a man while transiting toward a male identity since in this case the “man is the one” who feels homosexual, rather than the “woman as she was born (or was before)”. Nevertheless, it cannot be discarded that her men identity will lead her towards a woman, thus making an heterosexual sexual identity. The target of love, in the above-mentioned cases (but also in “pure” heterosexuality), may be latent: becoming manifest only when the subject finds the psychologically right time, evolving at ages that once were considered unthinkable. Sexual identity develops upon the interaction with an attractive and third party, it is dynamic and changes according to two factors. In a libertarian perspective, it changes according to the number of partners. Sexual experience changes with the different partners (from adolescence to the present, supposedly definitive, partner): each relationship is peculiar and unrepeatable. Consequently, sexuality grows in the relationship where, time after time, we decide to invest, it matures and evolves with the other – but not through the other.

In an ethical perspective, near to the pedagogical tradition, sexuality grows together with the partner. It is within this meeting that the inclusive dimension enters the scene: we learn (and grow) from the union by the measure of our availability, and feel the availability of the partner, to share
desires, fears and speculations while being inclusive (which does not mean immediate “acceptance”) and being included. The welcoming flowers blossom only on the soil of inclusion. Because of its maturational nature, ethically oriented sexuality (which is responsibility, playfulness and exploration at the same time) evolves with the time; until it becomes affection. Therefore, it is not always true that a “good” sexuality is the goal of a affectively pleasing relationship. Surely, not at all ages: the sexuality of a twenty year old is not the same of a seventy year old’s. This is the challenge faced by the, heterosexual or homosexual, couple: learning how to accept a share sexual path, since “inclusion” is synonymous of “duration”. At this point, this should appear evident that the acceptation of our biological identity (the actual fact of being born male or female) and of our genre identity (life experiences that lead to certain “feelings” rather than other) are the healthy premises for a conscious sexuality. Were such principle applied to cyber logics, it would appear evident that systemising a male biological identity with a man identity and heterosexuality is simpler than composing individually (or within the person), a male biological identity with a female identity and homosexuality. Or, a male biological identity associated to man identity and homosexuality. If anything, there is an obvious divergence (cultural and biological) between one instance of identity and the others (or other): it should be noted that it is not only bios that has original intentions (we are biologically males or females regardless of our intentions), but also the personal or social prevailing cultures that may clash at contents and values level, thus creating a dystonia. Accordingly, homosexuality carries in its nature some in-born difficulties: sometimes people’s own existences call for recognition of their sexual (or neglected) body, or, to accept the personal divergent condition and make ourselves accepted as different. This does not affect the heterosexuals as levels of their identity converge. In forming an homosexual relationship, this uneven identity level is experienced by the two interacting poles and it cannot be otherwise but a challenge. Upon reflection, the Us is the obligatory instance of a functioning couple in a relationship, even paying due consideration to the I and the You. A real Us is such when the partners will respect its limits, so that It will become the true common ground for the couple. Nevertheless, one of the two partners could not be able to share the Us immediately, yet, everyone could choose what to see in the Us (Norsa-Zavattini, 1997, 44). This may result in the two interpretations creating a “Nowhere land” rather than a shared space. The difference is self-evident in heterosexual relationships, it forces
the negotiation and “building” on a common ground. In homosexual couples (symmetrical ones, or analytic – such as couples with a big age gap that reproduce the parental relation), partners are always and invariably facing an “alter ego”, a “double” or a “similar” ones, regardless of the reasons or nature of a one’s orientation. Building an Us that starts from the presumption of a difference (even the simple anatomical one) is forcibly more difficult. The homosexual partner may look for that composure (unity) that is denied also at identity level. The mirroring dynamic (“I see in the other what I would like, or what I would like to be”), is not consolatory, since an healthy couple is not based on the complementary model but on reciprocal inclusion. According to some scholars of a not distant past, the relationships among same sex people could lead to the phenomenon of in-difference that shows through the insurmountable sense of solitude and inability to include the other for what he/she differs from me, since at the basis of the relationship there could be a search for a reciprocal likeness, which is obviously destined to fail (Overing, 1961, 55). Contemporary scholars focus mostly on the potentialities of a same gender couple: according to this view, physical concordance is seen as a possibility of total inclusion inside a context that does not favour the construction and official acceptance of divergent couples. «For a long time […], [in actual terms,] the “danger” of this similarity was underlined on the basis that it brought mirroring problems and difficulties in differentiate ourselves; these observations were often based on the presumption the genre difference was the sine qua non condition for a true relationship […]. This underestimates the role of similarity (status, appeal, vision of the world) in a satisfying heterosexual relationship» (Pietrantoni-Prati, 2011, 110-111). When it comes to inclusion three remarks about past and present visions should be made: first comes the negativist preconception about similarity since the difference of gender never guaranteed the success of a relationship; on the contrary, the second vision delves on remarking the limits of an optimistic conception of gender conversion, since the comparison between hetero and homosexual dynamics in a couple runs the risk of not assessing with due precision the deep difference between hetero and homosexual relationships – however, this subject will be argued later; finally, a third remark overcomes the previous two necessities, stating that the homosexual couple’s rapport, since it is devoid of models, can educate, and that also new forms of counselling dedicated to gay couples can educate – also this point will be treated later. Confidence, or reciprocal trust, is tied to the dimension of inclusion. At an early stage of a
homosexual relationship, intimate trust is helped by the affinities of the two bodies, it can open the way – like a heterosexual erotic encounter – to a “recreational sexuality” (Ibidem, 107). In such circumstances, gay men and women shape themselves for two relational aspects that never concern heterosexuals: firstly, being homosexual exposes to a reduction of the identity approval whereby in socialisation processes with the peers sexual preferences come before any other kind of propensity – homosexuality becomes the lowest common denominator of social relationships. Or, what is immediately “available” to start the approach to love, the relational field where to meet and overcome initial fears and embarrassments. Secondly, the exchange among peers takes up the anatomical correspondence that reduces the anxiety linked to novelties (which is typical in early approaches) through a sexual camaraderie that is totally similar to the socialising camaraderie that takes place among heterosexual men and women. An homosexual person is firstly an man or a woman (Burgio, 2008, 30): it comes naturally that the relationship between two women, or men, will have peculiar characteristics and will not develop in the same way as an heterosexual one. Insisting on a substantial similarity between gay and heterosexual love stories damages gay people, who are objectively devoid of models – other gay couple to serve as role models – and will end up playing a script that does not belong to them, or suits them and the specific dynamics of a all male, or female, love. If anything, equality concerns human rights; however, the traditional couple cannot be the self-acknowledgement of the identity of a gay couple. The latter needs indeed new instruments to understand, move and project. But, another reason arises: contemporary heterosexual couples have too many “problems” to be able to act as models. Cohabitations and marriages are increasingly exposed to the «questioning of the virility and feminine models» and also «of the models of fatherhood and motherhood» (Zuanazzi, 1994, 26). Not by chance, many (in common sense theories) ask themselves why homosexual want to be couples and get married, since heterosexual cohabitations and marriages have become frail institutions, while gays and lesbians enjoy the “naturalness” of not having to marry. On one side, LGBTQ activists have been engaged for along time for the recognition of their gender identity recognised, on the other, an opposing force (the Catholic one) exposes its reasons against it, however, there is no effort, on both sides, to find grounds for a constructive negotiation. For example, the psychoanalyst Mario Binasco ends an interview for the supplement for the newspaper “Avvenire” declaring: «the “ideological machine” of the “gender” kills the
sense of humour [...] in a time where a judge decides if you pronounced a mot d’esprit of an insult» (Moia, 2015, 14). A one wonders if it is educationally right and respectful of the Freudian code to use the most commonly trendy turns of phrases (Pietrantoni-Prati, 2011, 54) to show “irony” about the homosexual condition, since it is not clear which one is the kind of humour to refer to. The polemic tone does not spare those who side for the plurality of genders, if «pamphlets that twist the message of the Holy Scripture to the point of saying that St Paul was homophobe circulate in Turin» (Ferrario, 2015, 21). On the contrary, the dialogue between the two parties needs converging ideas leading to a conviviality of differences and a convivial difference. In such a situation, traditional couples can become a protective context for the homosexual one only in connection with the managing of every day life (Pietrantoni-Prati, 2011, 108). Instead, building trust needs something more, it has been affirmed that there is easier “access” to the exteriority/interiority of the partner between two men, or women, attracted to each other. It is also true that immediate “accessibility” may create separations, emotional distance, or induce, in time, to take the other for granted, to live the other as a simple extension of the self (if borderlines are absent), without appreciating the value of the person. This is probably one of the reasons why homosexuals, in their reciprocal distrust (or trespassing), seem to tolerate infidelity more than heterosexual couples (Barbagli-Dalla Zuanna-Garelli, 2010, 152). An itinerary of foundation and self-acknowledgement make homosexual couples pedagogically oriented but devoid of risks of emulative and vindictive stereotypes.

The paths of love trust among people of the same sex meet a provocation of intellectual nature that, with refinement, portrays contemporary mythologies of affection of most of the global societies: it is the primacy of sexual identity over all other identity forms, including the biological and gender ones. Thus, sexuality risks to become a sort of El Dorado that all want to reach even considering the caducity and limitedness of any (sexual) relationship. With a remarkable subtlety, Sigmund Bauman introduces the category of the «homo sexualis» to signify both the human prone toward sexual pleasures and the strictly speaking homosexual (Bauman, 2005, 76). According to the famous sociologist, the core of contemporary affection is not in the augmentative component of the sexual identity, but in the idea that sexuality is a “per se” value. Therefore its development does not concern the human relationship of which represents the expression but happens only as a subjective right to a one’s sexuality. In other
words, sexuality in self-expressive terms and self-referential terms beside not being sexuality – since its nature and culture is relational – lacks the agonising goal of a full accomplishment, which, if could effectively happen, would end by emptying the source of sexual desire in itself. In this view, sexual promiscuity is nothing but the search of “something” that will never happen. Considering sexuality as a goal, not a mean, betrays the reciprocal trust. Sexual identity does not truly mature through the multiplicity of the experiences (horizontal, or widened, development), but by multiplying the subjective structures of the meaning of the experience (vertical, or historical, development). Therefore, the point is not about living in a continuous pursue of the personal sexual identity – this would include the fluidity of the relationships reduced to mere experiments on identity conceivable only during adolescence (as if a label is not enough to say who I am). It needs to establish solid and lasting relationships, where sexuality (or sexual identity) is the result of a gradually acquired trust, adjusted on the basis of welcoming the other and his history. Naturally, at the source of individual sexuality is also the sexual orientation, which cannot necessarily be obtained before a long-lasting couple relationship. Yet, if society were more open toward the becoming identity of the individual, relationships of convenience and self-deceptions would be reduced in favour of a more ethical, aware, and free (in its responsibilities) sexuality, since it would be free from the anxiety linked to disapproval. In reference to homosexuality, Bauman portrays a flowing component delicately with light, almost imperceptible, brushstrokes, which consists in sentiments of unfulfilledness and incompleteness (Ibidem, 77). These sentiments may include some same sex relationships: not in the name of a mythical but (once again) missed (heterosexual) complementarity, as much as the due consideration of a complex homosexual intimacy that, as such, exposes to the danger of endless “explorations” (by the partner) whose “final destination remains unknown” (Ibidem).

**Homosexual intimacies**

Scientific research on the dynamics of homosexual couples is indeed quite recent. The reasons of this delay are not only ideological, homosexual identity became subject of investigation privileged over studies of stable (and unofficial) unions of same sex people, according to this logic they are considered “exit elements” (and not “entries”) in a present identity context
marked by plurality, multiplicity and strongly varied inside. About this last point, recently, many discuss about *homosexualities*, because gender identity is multi-shaped – for example, it is not «immediately clear what means [for a man] “feeling” like a woman» (Dini Martino, 1994, 17) –, but also because it is difficult to establish what there is behind the homologating definition of “homosexual”.

Roberto Del Favero and Maurizio Palomba remark three salient aspects of homosexuality conceived as a relational, and not individual, domain: firstly, research point out that «many homosexuals are interested to intimate long lasting relationships» (Del Favero-Palomba, 1996, p. 117); secondly, scientific investigation shows how «homosexual couples are not necessarily more subject to dissatisfaction and relational difficulties than heterosexual ones» (*Ibidem*, 119); finally, there is another extremely interesting fact which confirms, furtherly, what sustained before: «differences exist in the kind of problems that afflict gay, lesbian and heterosexual couples. For example, […] questions related to dependency and identification inside the couple might concern mostly lesbian couples. Recently, psychotherapists started to develop new programmes of counselling specifically made for gay and lesbian couples» (*Ibidem*, 119-120).

This is not an exclusive indication of the impossibility to substantially overlap the models of the homosexual couple with the heterosexual one (where the rights of the homosexual couple must be formally protected), but also of the specificity/complexity of these kinds of relationships, both on psychological and sexual sides. When the quality of the sexuality of a couple becomes a mirror (or resulting from) of the qualities and psychological resources of the couple (Zuanazzi, 1994, 27).

The (couple) sexual chemistry is therefore the real instance of development of a mature and responsible sexual identity (between the two), where, according to the ethical-pedagogical thinking, it is not the number of encounters or the width of the “potential pleasures” to make the difference, but the trust intended (starting with inclusion) to build the familial intimacy that is typical of a healthy couple. In other words: every alternative partner could hold a additional and/or augmentative specificity (be something more or in addition to the present). However, the road to maturity might run and a single track without putting our ethical and/or affective choice in danger of being corroded by possibilities in excess. On the contrary: higher intimacy in the relationship leads its to exceed and live on its internal dynamics to project and renew itself according to the
different seasons of the life couple. Educating the intimacy to intimacy is an emergency that reveals its importance especially when the couple’s intimacy is “flowing”, a thing that is difficult to define to the point that it multiplies in different intimate (and “total”) forms within the “model of the couple”. That includes whomever is able to provide one exhaustive definition of a “complete sexual relationship” within a couple formed by a man and a woman. However, what is a “complete sexual relationship” between two men, or women? What is the peak (the true stage of completeness) of homosexual intimacy? What makes, in its intimacy, an homosexual relationship “mature”? Maybe it was the difficulty in answering this kind of questions that historically brought equally “flowing” definitions about homosexuality, intended as perversion, aberration, a stop of the “emotional growth” and a unnatural or pathological trend. Homosexual intimacies were rigidly categorised as: «anal penetration» among men and the «use of dildos in relationships» among women. As if the implicit target of homosexual relationships was «to reproduce the heterosexual relationship […] seen as more natural» (Pietrantoni-Prati, 2011, p. 114). Empirical research portrays rather open scenarios where every homosexual relationship became “one of a kind”, as it was the result of a relational process where previous (and identity) preferential elements mix with “interlocking”, and combined elements that vary according to the partner that was chosen (Overing, 1961, 30).

Already in 1905 Sigmund Freud found that anal rapports was not the most widespread form of intimacy among male homosexuals. They rather preferred reciprocal or solipsistic masturbation (alone but watches by the other), or the simple “effusion of the sentiment” (Freud, 2014, 22), to the practices that emulate the heterosexual copulation; homosexual women seemed to prefer the “contact of the oral mucosa” to any other plausible intimacy (Ibidem).

In 1960, in the occasion of working day organised by the Central Catholic Association of Mental in Amsterdam, the neurologist A.F.C. Overing exposed the results of an empirical investigation carried out by the German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld in 1914 (Die Homosexualität des Mannes und der Weibes, Berlin, 1914). Overing found among male homosexual approaches masturbation, oral sex, intercruale interaction (in between legs) and anal intercourse. On the women side there were masturbation, oral sex, rubbing genitalia and the shared use of an «artificial member». The percentages about the frequency of the above practices were obtained from Hirschfeld’s studies end were the following: 40% of homosexual men and
women acted with masturbation and oral sex; 12% of them favoured intercruale interaction and rubbing genitalia; only 8% favoured anal intercourse (Overing, 1961, 31). The remaining 40% of the investigated subjects most likely did not disclose their sex practices, or indicated other ones.

The anal one as a type of rapport looked, also empirically (confirming what Freud sustained), among the less frequent inside more or less stable “couples”.

We could be led to think that today, considering the increased acceptance (at least in principles) of homosexuality, deep intercourse (natural or artificial penetration) is the most widespread. Yet, recent investigation deny this assumption, confirming that there is not only one form of intimacy among same sex persons as they may be different and fleeting. In their investigation on contemporary homosexuals Marzio Barbagli and Asher Colombo note:” [...] unlike what is believed among many, inside and outside the homosexual world, anal rapports are not the most frequent practice. It may come as a surprise that, for some homosexual men, they are quantitatively negligible, sometimes non-existent in some periods or throughout their lives. Even among those who have a wider repertoire of sexual practices, anal penetration is, on average, the less frequent technique. On the contrary, reciprocal masturbation and oral rapports performed and received by partners were signalled more frequently in the interviews” (Barbagli-Colombo, 2007, 118-119). Along with what just sustained, anal rapports (albeit not very frequent) happen more frequently when the partnership is stable (Ibidem, 119). In female erotic exchanges, the leadership goes to «performed and received masturbation» and «oral rapports» (Ibidem, 122); the use of «dildo», albeit not frequent, increases in stable couples (Ibidem, 126). The report by Luca Pietrantoni and Gabriele Prati shows in the erotic approach of two women the relevance of «reciprocal masturbation» and «performed and received oral sex»; among men, the anal rapport results as the most practiced in stable couples with 30-40% of the cases: a relatively low percentage considering the 100% of the interviews. Occasional encounters rely mostly on less “intimate” and involving practices such as «reciprocal masturbation and performed and received oral sex» (Pietrantoni-Prati, 2011, 114-115).

Overall, research shows the extreme diversity of intimate homosexual practices, avoiding the possibility to assign to only one practice the highest level of intimacy obtainable by a same sex couple. Penetration, so central in heterosexuality, becomes marginal in the homosexualities, it increases only when the relationship is stable. Nevertheless, an intimate homosexual re-
relationship becomes gratifying and, somewhat, “mature” even if it does not end up in a real or surrogate penetration act. The couple’s sexual menage can vary according to the moment, or what pleases the partners time after time. It does not have to perform an anal penetration or use a penis surrogate for intimacy to become “complete”. On the contrary: penetration may or may not be part of the couple’s intimacy. Anal rapports or the use of a “dildo” may be anatomically “uncomfortable”, since they need environments physically comfortable and a precise “preparation for the use”, but also, sometimes, sexual same sex relationships can be a contact on the “surface. In similar cases, affection – as shown by Freud – is the real “going deep down” of a couple. Scientifically, the common denominator of the homosexual couple is not co-penetration, but the affective attraction (the one for/in the other), if the feeling is ethically turned to discover the personal specificity in the couple, or the instrumentalisation (of the one on the other), if otherness is reduced to mere corporeality or as confirmation of the self. This is the reason why fusional dynamics might be more present in a homosexual couple than in a heterosexual one, and, once again, within lesbian couples who are «on average more prone» than gays «to have sexual rapports within meaningful affective relationships […]» (Pietrantoni-Prati, 2011, 113). The fact that using a “dildo” is more frequent in stable female couples does not mean that the shared desire, of imitating men, latent in sapphic love, or gradually reaching a greater psychological intimacy, and “co-penetration (in physics: soldering a solid to the other), may be synonymous of “belonging to each-other”.

The dangers related to such complex and multi-form intimacies are at least two: complexity may be the mirror of a reciprocal difficulty of entering the other (a soluble problem, not a structural one), or that, with time, the couple lost its borderlines, since erotic practices among homosexuals are very similar to the ones of the adolescents, that is of those looking for a defined identity (Stramaglia, 2011a, 106-109).

In homosexual contexts, it is usual to remain in good (and constant) relation even after the end of a relationship (Pietrantoni-Prati, 2011, 115). However, there is also the possibility that sex, free from its ethical and generative functions (once that the centrality of the sexual preference and the definition of a homosexual identity are proved), may become the main channel to build up or maintain a friendship (Ibidem). Nevertheless, “generative” is not synonymous of “generating” or “procreative”, but to give yourself totally (or exclusively) to the other. That is an oblate liaison. The only form of relation that can be defined as ethical coupling.
Pedagogical counselling for homosexual couples

In strictly pedagogical terms, the education of homosexual couples should be supported in their difficult trail toward the construction of a sable life in two. The difficult trail is not supported by the contextual social institutions (in Italy, there are no recognised homosexual couples, and also studies of their dynamics); since the sexuality of couples can vary from case to case, it incurs the danger of the affective fluidification of the relationship (which can, therefore, fold back on the stereotype of homophile friendships, open couples – which separates sex from affection – or of the same treatment for the present and previous partners). And, because this trail, especially in male homosexuality, moves away from the accusation of immorality putting the cult of «aesthetic seduction» (beauty as “form” for the good, or moral good) before «the need of finding a sphere of intimacy» in the «real meeting of two people who have the humble project of growing together» (Del Favero-Palomba, 1996, 141-144).

A pedagogue fully trained in counselling homosexual couples could highlight the educational and co-educational aspects of the relationship, focusing on some critical points and giving room to the potentials that are inside the problems as an opportunity of pondering, mediation and rethinking the identity and affective processes in action. One indispensable criterion to make (co)educational counselling of the (recent or of long date) homosexual couple pertinent is to avoid to assimilate homosexual typologies to heterosexual ones. According to this principle, couples formed by men should be split from women’s ones, likewise, adolescent male couples from female adolescent ones: biological sex and age are fundamental for the sexual identity. It is essential to focus on people and not on reference charts or pre-established schemes.

The pedagogical (co)construction of the homosexual couple cannot but preserve the idea/guideline of “borderline”, adapting it to the changing situations. The fact that “forms” of intimacy are so nuanced and changing, sometimes according to the partners (and that heterosexual intercourse is not given, in nature, in the case of homosexuality), needs borderlines that are firstly educational, and eventually ethical and relational. A couple is such according to way it defines itself; the acknowledgment of the couple status, is nevertheless the exploitation of a canon beyond which entrance is forbidden to any outsider who appears on the scene. Furthermore, the “border” is “manifest” in heterosexual couples while homosexual couples risk to expose
themselves to greater fatigue, since they are formed by same-sex people. For example, a couple formed by two men may share appreciations on other men: the shared belonging to the male sex can lead to dynamics that are more similar to heterosexual friendships than the relationships of couples, generating disorder and making the borders between Us and the Others increasingly feeble. Some “psychological penetrability” makes a relationship stable and does not have to be carnal. This is not a suggestion “handed out by heterosexual know-out”, but from human and relational knowledge: manifesting in agreement the pleasure of the “other one” can be a way to share socially a desire of otherness while legitimising it. This manifestation probably derived from one partner ends up being confirmed in the positive (or resentful) opinion of the other (Norsa-Zavattini, 1997, 52). These kinds of scenarios are open to endless misunderstandings, if the couple cannot rely on instruments to rework the communication, it easily becomes possible that the exchange may go adrift toward total incomprehension. The “other than Us” desire is frequently the sign of the need of a real Us, but does not coincide with the person in flesh and bones. It coincides with a new examination of the fusional hidden under the fantasy of transgression. The couple that uses this kind of communication games can easily mix up with need of separation (the healthy distinction between I and You that is essential to make the Us) with a sort of a reciprocal, perverse and non affective carelessness. A couple made of two men or women does not imply that it should model itself on the “shape” of a friendly union: this is the specific space of education. Making contact with the most intimate parts of the partner can not and should not merely be formal intimacy; an easy “access” to a body similar to ours. It should be substantial intimacy, that thrives by being open to the partner and to “others beside the partner” (including, globally, homosexuals and heterosexuals, beyond their closures and intimacies), respecting the roles that nature and culture assigned to the sphere of affections. If the assumption that homosexual relationships are nuanced – for example, two women may call themselves “couple” because of intimate masturbation, another two may confine themselves to epidermical exchanges of genitality – this makes the chances for dull or equivocal relationships, relative stability (which means the un-aesthetical separation between sex and feelings), as well as socialising and legitimising some physiological weakness, can only damage the border between an healthy and “exclusive” menage and a “wider” intimacy where transgression becomes the common rule. On the contrary, pedagogical advice for homosexual couples cannot but disclose the value...
of *demarcation*, which does not propose a moralising intent, but a sexual education that “teaches” intimacy and consequently to inclusion and trust. There is no intention to denigrate the sacred role of body/materiality, but to make material expression (the jutting out) of the liaison *faithful* to the substrate (the canvas) that represents which intentions the couples have for themselves and within society as a whole; that is a relationship with clearly marked “borders” (Monguzzi, 2006, 53-57).

A further criterion to make counseling educational is to remark the link between Eros and taking care (*the tie that binds*) to transform sexual practices into care taking. In other words, a ethically (and educationally) oriented eroticism does not necessarily encourage the confluence of sexuality and procreation (nevertheless, the confessional is not applicable to all the models applicable to couples). But, a sexuality intended as a practice to promote “a good life” for the self and for the partner (Mortari, 2015, 116). Even considering that caring is not applicable to Eros (*Ibidem*, 126), ethically oriented eroticism (or couple’s sexuality) cannot but being a peculiar “form” of reciprocal caring. The latter is independent from the sexual orientation of the members of the couple, to the point that it is possible to affirm that if properly educated any “kind” of orientation is an open possibility of caring (if education is “allowed to be” or developed as a mature co-identity) orientation of any “form” (Mortari, 2014, 18). Taking care becomes the essential characteristic of heterosexual and homosexual relationships; albeit in different fashions. «We mean taking care in the broadest sense (which is not pedagogical or therapeutical): a deep attention and dedication toward the other person and the bounds shared, to appraise and make the singleness of the relationship last. Taking care can make the relationship generative, while neglecting can make it degenerative» (Bertoni, 2007, 18). Simply, in a male only relationship, a *wavering devolution* of traditional processes of duties and roles can be co-clenched resulting into challenges posed by the commonly accepted “forms” of sexuality and by the re-invention established by the couple with caring practices which corrode themselves drifting in “relational paradoxes”. Therefore, one partner may receive the gift of a rose and then be invited “to go back home alone because he is a man”. In similar cases, pedagogical guidelines regard different levels: firstly, “kindness” as ethical virtue should be matter of teaching (Ferrucci, 2006) explaining that accompanying home a person is not just what is expected as a role behaviour, but should be a “cordial” care taking – which means *caring about the other*; secondly, “tenderness” is an ethical
dimension that should not be overlooked, it is masculine (tenax: “capable to sustain”) and feminine (teneo: “to contain”) (Ciccolini, 2001, 10). Every caring gesture should be supported by a tenderness that understands and supports, such an essential ingredient should never be missing in homosexual couples – “I am taking you home because I care about and feel for your feminine side, I nourish it like the rose that I gave you; in final analysis, the interpretation about the other should be de-subjectivised (which, in case of homosexuality, may degrade into the individual or dual hypothesis of undue convergence – “he is a man like me”) to favour a healthier implicit divergence «by which the other, the one who is not me, is my pre-condition to be a subject» (Baccarini, 2006, 11) – “the fact that my companion is a man like me does not mean that he is like me”.

Finally, a good practice in pedagogical counseling may aim to reinforce the planning nature of the couple. Although the present Italian context is not adequately prepared to protect the new “forms” of affectivity – while eleven European countries have already recognised same sex unions –, the mature aspect which belongs to any stable “form” of sexual intimacy cannot but coincide with the recognition of the couple’s status. This announces the growth of the couple in terms of integration and helps the extrinsic sources of self-recognition. In an ethic vision, the search for stability, common to many homosexual couples, shows the passage, wished by Luigi Pati, from a «sexuality […] as a set of impulsive drives» (rooted in adolescence) to the conception of intimacy/sexuality as flowing, not because it is “uncertain” or “undefined”, but because it is the «driving force of the humans, a true “provider of energy” that accompanies the lives of men, which, when properly educationally addressed, allows people to attain always higher perfecting levels» (Pati, 2004, 37). In this picture, education happens with the institution of a juridical frame (a set of norms) which enables the adoption of conscious affective choices, so that a solid and concrete (identitarian and relational) right for each individual is given to homosexuals. Educating couples to “be couples” to socialise within protected environments, but not closed ones, could be a careful action with long-term effects carried out by a pedagogue (from native families, hopefully welcoming ones, to informal and extra-familial ones). Starting from micro-contexts can effectively activate a number of resources that are inherent to couples, whom, feeling the legitimating coming from affectively important figures, can therefore «introduce [to themselves (as part of the homosexual community) and the heterosexually legislated society] a higher classification that allows to
include our groups and the others’ in a common [but not identical] category of identity» (Serino, 2001, 83). In conclusion, the mentioned already volume by Luigi Pati: Progettare la vita. Itinerari di educazione al matrimonio e alla famiglia (2004) brings along a perspicace message: marriage and family are choices of existential planning. By nature, homosexuality does not include procreative projects (“maternal gift”) or the creation of a children apt “family”. Despite this all, considering people’s right to form a family, the pedagogical protection of same sex unions becomes a strategy that enables personal progress and social regeneration: if homosexual couple are denied all the space to life projects and humanisation, we run the risk that less equipped homosexuals will remain children all life long, void of the adult horizon of taking responsibility and getting ethically involved for the other.

After all, if homosexually related intimate practices (inside and outside the couple) are flowing, if the “external legislator” (laws that legally recognise the couples) is missing (or its presence is so recent that needs trials), it should not come as surprise that the path to growth of homosexuals is attracted by the sirens of stagnation more than all other ones, this is the opposite of adult “taking care” (Erikson, 1993, 64), and also of good management of life as a couple as proper expression of adulthood (Stramaglia, 2011b, 38–39).

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