

FROM LEGAL TOLERANCE TO SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE:  
PREDICTORS OF HETEROSEXISM IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT

FROM LEGAL TOLERANCE TO SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE:  
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This secondary analysis of recent survey data from a representative sample of Romanians intends to identify individual-level variables most likely to predict variations in public attitudes toward homosexuals' civil liberties. Age, conventional beliefs, and religiosity positively and significantly predict heterosexism (*e.g.*, approximately 46% of Romanians believe that homosexuals should not be 'free to live life as they wish'). While there are no significant gender-based differences in Romanians' attitudes regarding sexual minorities' rights, education, urban residency, frequency of social contacts, and experience with nonconformist family arrangements are variables more likely to be associated with the social acceptance of homosexuals. Findings and the weak effect of the country's LGBT rights legislation on public perceptions of homosexuality are discussed within the social and cultural context of contemporary Romania.

**Keywords:** sexual minorities, homosexuals' civil rights, heterosexism, homophobia, Romania.

INTRODUCTION

People's opinions and beliefs about sexual minorities have been increasingly studied during the past three decades. In general, research focused on attitudes toward homosexual persons (*e.g.*, studies of sexual prejudice, homophobia, homonegativity), on perceptions of homosexuality as a non-normative behavior, and/or on attitudes toward homosexuals' civil and human rights, such as free speech, marital/domestic partnership rights, parental and adoption rights, and other legal and constitutional issues concerning sexual minorities (see Kite & Whitley, 1996, p. 337–339). The majority of these studies examined the effects of micro-

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level indicators on variations in attitudes toward sexual minorities, using samples mostly from the United States or other industrialized countries (*e.g.*, Andersen & Fetner, 2008a; Davies, 2004; Hayes, 1995, 1997; Schellenberg, Hirt & Sears, 1999; Steffans & Wagner, 2004; Van de Meerendonk & Scheepers, 2004; Village & Francis, 2008). More recently, research on attitudes and perceptions of homosexual behavior became more inclusive and several cross-national studies focused on macro-level correlates of homophobia or homonegativity as well (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Andersen & Fetner, 2008b; Kelley, 2001; Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009; Widmer, Treas & Newcomb, 1998).

The last fifteen years of social science research witnessed an increased attention to the public's reaction to sexual minority issues in Europe. This could be a consequence of what Stychin (2003, p. 138) characterized as "a remarkably rapid development of a range of ways in which same sex identities and relationships has come to be recognized" in EU states. In addition, recent activism and initiatives to formalize same-sex marriages or legalize civil unions have brought unprecedented public attention to the concerns of European gay men and lesbians.

During the past two decades, in România as well, scholars such as Rădulescu (1994; 1996; 1999), Rădulescu & Zolei (1999), Spineanu-Dobrota (1997; 2005; 2007), Nachescu (2005), or Turcescu & Stan (2005) addressed the ethical dilemmas, the public perceptions of homosexuality, and other social and public health concerns surrounding non-normative sexual relations. However, systematic quantitative research examining country and individual level determinants of anti-gay attitudes in România and in the other former communist countries is still undeveloped, even if in most of the new EU member states, the public acceptance of homosexuals is among the lowest in Europe (see Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009). In addition, in some Central and Eastern European countries (*e.g.*, Poland and România), there is a strong political and socio-cultural opposition to homosexuals' rights (see Štulhofer & Rimac, 2009; Turcescu & Stan, 2005).

Although several national public opinion polls carried out in post-communist România recorded attitudes toward homosexuals and homosexual behavior, to the author's knowledge, no multivariate analysis on a national representative sample has been conducted to examine variations in recent attitudes toward sexual minority rights. This study intends to identify some of the individual level variables more likely to predict differences in attitudes toward gay civil liberties in România. In particular, the main objective of the present research is to present the characteristics of persons described here as having heterosexist attitudes (*i.e.*, individuals who implicitly think that sexual minorities should not have the same rights as heterosexual citizens).

Even if in the past researchers frequently used the term *homophobia* to describe negative attitudes toward homosexuals, Herek (2000) suggested that homophobia could be better explained within an illness model because it implies

that antigay attitudes are caused by fear. In general, the term *heterosexism* highlights the parallels between antigay sentiment and other forms of prejudice, such as racism, anti-Semitism, and sexism. Herek (1990) noted that heterosexism is one component of the broader and overlapping ideologies of sexuality and gender. The author (Herek, 1990, p. 319) distinguished between cultural heterosexism (*i.e.*, stigmatization, denial, or denigration of homosexuality in cultural institutions, such as the Church) and psychological heterosexism (*i.e.*, a person's internalization of a worldview characterized by antigay prejudice). As Sears (1997, p. 16) contended, heterosexist attitudes can be briefly defined as beliefs in the superiority of heterosexuals or heterosexuality, which is perceived as the only 'normal' lifestyle. Recent research shows that these attitudes and beliefs are shared by a relatively large proportion of Romanians. In România, heterosexist attitudes are encouraged by an important cultural institution – the Romanian Christian Orthodox Church and continue to be promoted by some members of the political elite (*e.g.*, right-wing political groups, such as Partidul România Mare/Great Romania Party) (see Nachescu, 2005; Turcescu & Stan, 2005). For instance, results of a 2007 research study focusing on social minority issues, which was conducted on a representative sample of Romanian parliamentarians (N = 99) showed that when attitudes toward different social minority groups (*e.g.*, religious minorities, Roma/Gypsy people, persons with physical & mental disabilities, HIV positive persons, and homosexuals) were measured, sexual minorities registered the lowest level of acceptance. On average, parliamentarians expressed the most positive attitudes toward religious minorities in the country<sup>2</sup>.

Under communist rule, criminalization and legal sanctions characterized the homosexuals' life in România. Starting with the mid 1990s, progressive legislative changes gradually facilitated the protection of sexual minority rights, allowing homosexuals to develop their identities. However, as Nachescu (2005) observed, issues of sexual minority rights entered the Romanian government agenda mainly due to international pressure and not because the political elites were convinced that the civil rights of all citizens should be recognized. Romania wanted to join the European Union and the country had to satisfy (among other pre-accession strategy requirements) the conditions of the 1998 resolution of the European Parliament, which refused to accept as a new EU member any state that through its legislation and policies would violate the human rights of lesbians and gay men. Nevertheless, the law is only one aspect of a more complex set of social relations that may impact the life of an individual belonging to a sexual minority group. Examining the determinants of public attitudes toward homosexuals in Romania is particularly important because it could provide useful information that policy makers and

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<sup>2</sup> ACCEPT & Institute for Public Policy (IPP), „Atitudinea parlamentarilor români față de problematica discriminării și a egalității șanselor” (Romanian Parliamentarians' Attitudes about Discrimination and Equal Opportunities), May 2007, available at: [http://accept-romania.ro/images/stories/atitudinea\\_parlamentarilor\\_romani\\_fata\\_de\\_discriminare.pdf](http://accept-romania.ro/images/stories/atitudinea_parlamentarilor_romani_fata_de_discriminare.pdf), accessed January 10, 2010.

sexual minority activists could utilize to increase the social acceptance of homosexuality and the public support for sexual minority legal rights in the country.

#### THE SEXUAL MINORITIES' RIGHTS IN ROMÂNIA: BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Based on a thorough review of historical accounts and legislation referring to sexual minority rights in Romania, Buhuceanu (2003)<sup>3</sup> did not find evidence of a homophobic tradition in the country, as some conservative politicians have argued when trying to justify their anti-gay attitudes. For example, as Buhuceanu (2003) noted, during the second half of the nineteenth century and until the mid 1930s, homosexuals and heterosexuals were treated equally by the Romanian laws. Inspired by the liberal French legislation that made no references to private sexual conduct, the 1864 Penal Code of the old Romanian kingdom did not include punishments for homosexual acts. Starting with 1878, the corresponding Transylvanian-Hungarian code penalized gay men only if they engaged in violent homosexual acts, such as rape or attempted rape.

Influenced by anti-gay legislation in totalitarian fascist and communist states, the Romanian Civil Code criminalized homosexuality in the country for the first time in 1937. However, while homosexuals were treated with cruelty, were persecuted, and even killed in Nazi Germany's concentration camps, Romanian gays and lesbians were punished by the law (*i.e.*, six months to two year incarceration) only if the homosexual acts they engaged in (Art. 431) produced a 'public scandal'. Practically, the law punished only homosexual activities in the public space. Homosexual acts that involved minors were punished in the same way heterosexual acts with persons younger than 18 were punished by the law. Yet, during the communism, homophobic attitudes, intolerance, and repression of gay people gradually increased. According to the 1948 Penal Code, public displays of homosexuality were punished with prison terms that varied from a minimum of two years to a maximum of five years. In 1957, the legislation changed again and homosexuality was severely condemned. Private or public homosexual acts between consenting adults were punished with prison time that varied from three to ten years. In 1968, Article 200 of the revised Penal Code stated that homosexual relations were punishable by a prison term that varied from one to five years (see Buhuceanu, 2003).

Starting with the mid – 1960s, during Ceausescu's regime, the focus was on reproductive sexuality and on policies that would increase the national birth rate. Afraid of imprisonment, Romanian homosexuals were virtually invisible during

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<sup>3</sup> Buhuceanu, F., „Istoricul legislației antihomosexuale – tradiții românești” (History of anti-gay legislation – Romanian traditions), 2003, available at: <http://antidiscriminare.ro/pdf/IstLegAntiHomoTradRo.pdf>, accessed January 10, 2010.

these puritanical communist times, when the existence of sexual minorities was practically denied. As a result, in the early 1990s, when gay rights activists, international human rights organizations, and the European Council started to press the Romanian government to decriminalize homosexuality and ensure equal rights for all citizens, the conservative political elites and the Orthodox Church claimed that sexual minorities did not exist in Romania prior to 1989 and that homosexuality was only an undesirable product of capitalism, a life style induced by the Western democracies, and not a part of the heteronormative Romanian culture (Nachescu, 2005).

However, in 1995, Romania applied for EU membership. Due mainly to strong international pressure, in 1996, the first paragraph of article 200 was amended and only same-sex sexual activities performed in public or considered a source of public scandal were punished by the law. In 2000, Romania began EU accession negotiations and the country had to demonstrate progress in harmonizing its laws with the EU legislation. In particular, Romania had to prove that sexual minority human rights were not violated by the country's policies and legislation. And the possibility of eventual entry into the European Union had a powerful effect on legal change. In January 2001, the Romanian government adopted the Emergency Ordinance No. 89/2001, which eliminated Art. 200 of the Penal Code and adjusted other articles referring to sex offenses to avoid discriminatory treatment of offenders. This ordinance came into force in January 2002, after the Romanian President signed the new law (Nachescu, 2005, p. 74). Homosexuality was fully decriminalized and equality with antidiscrimination provisions was formally guaranteed.

Currently, there are no laws against lesbians, gays, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals. Romania does not recognize, however, same-sex registered partnership or marriage. In 2008, at the Great Romania Party's request, the Senate voted an amendment to change the legal definition of marriage, which since 1953 was described as a legal union 'between spouses'. The law effectively outlawed same-sex marriage in 2009, when a new Civil Code was proposed by the government. The Parliamentary Subcommittee responsible for the Civil Code explicitly redefined marriage as a legal union 'between a man and a woman'<sup>4</sup>.

The anti-discrimination legislation in the European Union is considered one of the most extensive in the world. In addition to the numerous laws adopted since 1975 to promote gender-based equality in the workplace, in 2000, the European Union adopted two wide-ranging laws that made illegal in the workplace six forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, age, disability, and sexual orientation. However, as mentioned in a 2008 report of the European Commission, "calling for equal rights and adopting laws to promote and

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<sup>4</sup> Amnesty International, '2009 Amnesty International Report', 2009, available at: <http://www.amnestyusa.org/annualreport.php?id=ar&yr=2009&c=ROM>, accessed 5 June, 2010.

protect them is not enough to ensure that equal opportunities are enjoyed by everyone in practice”<sup>5</sup>.

In 2007, the European Council established the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The objective of the Agency is to provide assistance and expertise to relevant institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Community and its Member States, when implementing Community law relating to fundamental rights. In this context the European Parliament asked in June 2007 the Fundamental Rights Agency to launch a comprehensive report on homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation in the Member States of the European Union. The first FRA report stressed the lack of official and even unofficial statistical data across the EU regarding discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and noted that data unavailability might indicate the persistence of the social stigma of being an LGBT individual<sup>6</sup>.

A country report regarding discriminatory practices in employment, education, housing, goods, and services on grounds of sexual orientation showed that from 2002 to 2007, there were registered in Romania 34 complaints of discrimination. From 2005 to 2007 there were organized four gay pride parades and six demonstrations against tolerance toward homosexuals<sup>7</sup>. The report for the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) shows that in Romania, approximately 45% of the respondents think that discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation is widespread in the country. At the EU level, more than half of the respondents (51%) shared this opinion. According to the FRA report, there is some indication of an increase in the Romanians’ level of tolerance toward sexual minorities. For instance, the number of Romanians saying that they would not want a homosexual neighbor has decreased from 86% in 2001 to 61% in 2007<sup>8</sup>. On May 22, 2010, Bucharest has held its sixth annual gay pride parade. As recorded in a Euronews report, ‘about 350 people came to party and to protest against homophobia (...) [This] latest edition of the Gay Fest was publicly backed by eleven countries’ embassies in România [and] the British ambassador addressed the crowd – but hardly any Romanian politicians took part’. About 150 far right

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission, ‘Special Eurobarometer 29 – Discrimination in the European Union: Perceptions, Experiences and Attitudes’, July 2008, p. 3, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_296\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_296_en.pdf), accessed 5 June, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), ‘Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in the EU Member States: Part I – Legal Analysis’, 2009, available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA\\_hdgso\\_report\\_Part%201\\_en.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA_hdgso_report_Part%201_en.pdf), accessed February 10, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Iordache, R. E. & Ionescu, I., ‘Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation – Romania’, February 2008, available at [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-hdgso-NR\\_RO.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-hdgso-NR_RO.pdf), accessed February 10, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Danish Institute for Human Rights & COWI Foundation, ‘The Social Situation Concerning Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in Romania’, March 2009, available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-hdgso-part2-NR\\_RO.pdf](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/attachments/FRA-hdgso-part2-NR_RO.pdf), accessed January 10, 2010.

demonstrators rallied in the city centre protesting against homosexuality but, different from previous years, no clashes between the two groups have been registered<sup>9</sup>.

#### PREDICTORS OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUAL MINORITIES

Societal attitudes toward homosexuality vary in time and among cultures. Recently, public opinion surveys conducted in 47 countries as part of the 2007 Pew Global Attitudes Project showed that in Canada and all six Western European nations (i.e., France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, and Sweden) included in this study more than 65% of the respondents declared that homosexuality is a way of life that should be accepted by society. Similar beliefs were expressed by the majority of respondents in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Peru. However, less than half of the interviewed Americans (49%) found homosexuality acceptable and 41% of Americans considered homosexuality a way of life that should not be accepted by society. In Africa, 89% or more of the respondents in nine countries shared this opinion as well. Except Japan, the majority of respondents from 14 countries in the Middle East, East and Southeast Asia, and in two Christian Orthodox Eastern European countries (Russia and Ukraine) also stated that homosexuality should not be accepted by society<sup>10</sup>.

As many studies suggest, public attitudes about sexual minority issues are influenced by a combination of demographic, psychological, economic, social, and cultural factors, but also, at some extent, by the country's legislation. Research conducted in the United States and other countries found that individual-level variables such as gender, race, age, education, geographic residence, religiosity, political views, and the amount of interpersonal contacts influence variations in public attitudes toward homosexuals (Herek, 1994; Kite, 1984; Larsen, Reed & Hoffman, 1980).

Reviews of research findings suggest that, in general, men tend to have more unfavorable attitudes toward homosexuality than women do (Herek, 1994; Kelley, 2001; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Kunkel & Temple, 1992). Using data from a 1997 national survey in United States, Herek (2000) also found that, when compared to heterosexual women, heterosexual men tend to express a higher level of sexual prejudice. However, while heterosexual women tend to have similar attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, heterosexual men tend to express more negative attitudes toward gay men than toward lesbians. Similar results were obtained by Steffens &

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<sup>9</sup> Euronews, 'Human Rights: Romanian Pride Tries to Break Gay Taboos', May 23, 2010, available at: <http://www.euronews.net/2010/05/23/romanian-pride-tries-to-break-gay-taboos/>, accessed June 1, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Pew Research Center, 'World Publics Welcome Global Trade – But Not Immigration: 47-nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey', October 2007, pp. 33–36; p. 117, available at: <http://pewglobal.org/files/pdf/258.pdf>, accessed 20 March, 2010.

Wagner (2004) in their analysis of public attitudes toward sexual minorities in Germany. Beside gender, age is another demographic factor that appeared to be an important and stable predictor of variations in attitudes about homosexuality in most populations. Consistently, research shows that younger adults tend to express a higher level of tolerance toward homosexuals than older adults (Andersen & Fetner, 2008a; Hayes, 1995; Jensen, Gambles & Olsen, 1988; Johnson, Brems & Alford-Keating, 1997; Kelley, 2001; Shackelford & Besser, 2007; Steffens & Wagner, 2004; Village & Francis, 2008). A recent multivariate analysis that made use of World Value Survey data (1999–2004) collected from 33 nations with complete information found that people in older cohorts are more likely to disapprove of homosexuality than people in younger cohorts. Consistent with previous research, females appeared to have more liberal attitudes about homosexuality than men. In addition, married individuals were more likely to have negative attitudes toward homosexuals than single or divorced people (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009).

Overall, most studies found that education is positively associated with tolerant attitudes toward sexual minorities (Kelley, 2001). Regarding the effect of socioeconomic status (*i.e.*, education and income) on attitudes toward sexual minorities, research results are not always consistent. While some researchers (Hayes, 1995; Jensen *et al.*, 1988; Morrison, Parriag & Morrison, 1999) concluded that increases in educational attainment and socioeconomic status, in general, are more likely to be associated with decreases in homophobic attitudes, other researchers (*e.g.*, Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Steffens & Wagner, 2004) found attitudes toward sexual minorities to be significantly influenced by one's level of education, but not by income level or degree of financial satisfaction.

Studies conducted in the United States identified religion as another strong predictor of public attitudes toward homosexuals (Burdette, Ellison & Hill, 2005; Olson, Cadge & Harrison, 2006; Rowatt *et al.*, 2006; Schulte & Battle, 2004). Finke and Adamczyk (2008) noted that personal religious beliefs might serve as a guide for attitudes where there are no clear social sanctions for certain actions (*e.g.*, homosexual behavior) or a universal agreement about the detrimental social costs non-normative sexual activities could have. Although religious people are more likely to express negative attitudes toward homosexuals and are less likely to approve homosexual behavior than non-religious persons (see Herek & Gonzalez, 2006; Kelley, 2001; Weishut 2000), attitudes are also influenced by one's religious denomination. For instance, studies conducted in the United States found that Jews, mainline Protestants, and Catholics appear to have more liberal attitudes toward homosexuals than individuals belonging to conservative Protestant denominations (see Beatty & Walker, 1984; Ellison & Musick, 1993; Herek & Gonzalez, 2006; Loftus 2001; Overby & Barth, 2002; Reimer & Park, 2001). In a cross-national comparison, Adamczyk & Pitt (2009) found that people who consider religion important were more likely to disapprove of homosexuality. However, the researchers noted that regardless of one's level of religiosity, people living in a



country where Muslims represent the majority have significantly lower levels of tolerance toward homosexuals than residents of mainly Catholic countries. No significant differences in attitudes have been found when predominantly Muslim countries were compared to nations where the majority of the people were Buddhist, Protestant, or Christian Orthodox.

Researchers also examined the effect on attitudes toward sexual minorities of other non-demographic factors that include political party preference; personal contacts with non-heterosexual persons; psychological factors, such as openness to experience; or, beliefs regarding marriage and family. Beside education and age, Hayes (1997), for instance, found that attitudes toward either pre-marital or extra-marital sexual relations were consistent influences on public attitudes toward homosexual rights in Britain. Overby & Barth (2002) found that exposure (*i.e.*, casual contacts) to gays and lesbians increased the level of tolerance toward homosexuals, which indirectly enhanced support for homosexual rights. Herek & Gonzales (2006) noted that Americans expressing negative attitudes toward homosexuals endorsed more traditional gender attitudes than respondents with positive attitudes, were more conservative politically, and were less likely to have personal contact with gay people. Shackelford & Besser (2007) also found that Americans who were politically and religiously conservative reported less favorable attitudes toward homosexuals than politically/religiously liberal individuals. Based on the analysis of 1980–1993 national surveys of attitudes regarding homosexuals' civil rights in the Netherlands, Van de Meerendonk & Scheepers (2004) contended that Dutch individuals exposed to traditional socializing agents and socializing circumstances in which traditional norms prevailed were more likely to deny equal rights for lesbians and gay men.

#### DATA, METHODS, AND HYPOTHESES

The source of the data was the European Social Survey (ESS) Round 3 (2006; 2008). Access to the data archive was provided by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), the distributor of ESS data. Data analysis has been conducted on a nationally representative probability sample of persons age 15 and over from Romania (N = 2 139). The main objective of this research was to identify a set of indicators most likely to influence variations in attitudes toward homosexuals' rights in Romania.

It has been anticipated that heterosexism (*i.e.*, denial of equal rights) will be positively related to religiosity and conventional beliefs (*i.e.*, individuals who acknowledge the importance of traditions and customs, fully respect governmental authority, find torture justified in certain situations, and show resistance to learning new things will be more likely to display negative attitudes toward homosexuals). It is expected that persons who are employed and have frequent social contacts will have more opportunities to directly meet homosexuals and, as a result, might be more likely to think that gays and lesbians should have the same human rights as heterosexual individuals. In addition, it is predicted that persons who engaged in

nontraditional family arrangements, those who live in larger urban areas, and those who have an educational advantage will be more likely to express a higher degree of acceptance of homosexuality than persons who, respectively, never lived with a partner without being married, are residents of rural, suburban, and smaller urban areas, and have a lower socioeconomic status. Based on previous research findings, it is hypothesized that men and the elderly will be less tolerant of the homosexual life style than, respectively, women and younger persons.

Data have been analyzed using multinomial logistic regression. The dependent variable, attitudes toward homosexuals, is a single-item indicator and is based on the only question included in the survey that measures respondents' perception of homosexuality. Although this question is less specific than items traditionally used in surveys that record public attitudes toward homosexuals, it can be considered an appropriate and inclusive measure of public attitudes toward homosexuals' civil liberties. Survey participants have been asked to express their level of agreement with the statement: '*Gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish*'. The original Lickert-type scale has been recoded into three categories, coded zero (positive attitudes toward homosexuals/agree and strongly agree with the statement), one (neutral attitudes/neither agree or disagree and undecided), and two (negative attitudes toward homosexuals/agree and strongly agree with the statement). Following is presented a brief description of the selected predictors to be used in multivariate analyses:

- *Gender* (dummy variable; male coded one, female coded zero).
- *Age* (dummy variable coded one for people 65 and over, zero otherwise).
- *Employment status* (dummy variable coded one for persons currently in a paid job, zero otherwise).
- *Region* (dummy variable coded one for residents of North-Eastern region of Romania, zero otherwise).
- *Residency* (dummy variable; living in a big city coded one, zero otherwise).
- *Respondent's education* (ordinal variable; takes values from zero/primary education not completed to 6/second stage of tertiary education completed).
- *Parents' education* (summative index that combines the codes corresponding to the highest level of education achieved by the respondent's mother and father; it takes values from zero, if both parents have incomplete primary education, to 12, if both parents have graduate degrees).
- *Interpersonal contacts* (respondents have been asked 'how often they socially meet with friends, relatives, or colleagues'; this ordinal-level variable takes values from one/zero meetings to seven/daily meetings).
- *Premarital cohabitation* (dummy variable, coded one if the respondent has ever lived with a partner without being married and zero otherwise).
- *Beliefs about human rights/Attitudes regarding the use of torture on prisoners* (respondents have been asked to express their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement 'torture in the country is never justified, even to prevent terrorist attacks'; the variable takes values from one – strong agreement to five – strong disagreement).

– *Conventionalism* (this is a three-item summative scale; respondents have been asked to state how important it is for them to ‘follow traditions and customs’, how important it is that ‘government is strong and ensures safety’, and how important it is ‘to do what you are told and follow rules’; the scale varies from three – not at all important to 18 – very important; Cronbach’s standardized reliability coefficient  $\alpha = .68$ ).

– *Resistance to learning new things* (ordinal measure of the respondent’s agreement/disagreement with the statement ‘I love learning new things’; values vary from one – strongly agree to five – strongly disagree).

– *Religiosity* (this 11-point bipolar scale measures the respondent’s self-assessed degree of religiosity; it takes values from zero – not at all religious to 10 – very religious).

## RESULTS

*Figure 1* shows the percentage of persons who did not agree or strongly disagreed with the statement ‘*gays and lesbians should be free to live life as they wish*’ in European states participating at the European Social Survey (ESS), Round 3, ESS 3 was conducted on national probability samples, representative for the population age 15 and older in each participant state. While most of the countries where people displayed heterosexist attitudes are former communist countries, it can be noticed that out of 23 selected European states, Romania had the highest proportion of individuals (46,4%) who considered that sexual minorities should not have the same civil rights as the rest of the population.

*Table 1* provides the summary statistics and the correlation matrix for the variables included in the present analysis. Except gender, it can be observed that the selected independent variables are significantly related ( $p < .05$ ) to the dependent variable – attitudes toward homosexuals. In addition, the correlation matrix shows that there are no signs of multicollinearity (e.g., the highest bivariate correlation coefficient equals .43). Based on the values of the Pearson correlation coefficient it can be observed that the variable with the strongest relationship with the dependent variable is parental education ( $r = -.23$ ;  $p < .01$ ). In addition, higher the respondent’s educational level, lower the likelihood of one having negative attitudes toward homosexuals ( $r = -.16$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Results suggest that respondents from families with a higher socioeconomic status (i.e., respondent and his/her parents have a higher educational level) are more likely to express tolerant attitudes toward sexual minorities. Similar attitudes are expressed by people who socialize more ( $r = -.15$ ;  $p < .01$ ), who are residents of larger urban areas ( $r = -.15$ ;  $p < .01$ ), who are employed ( $r = -.14$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and those who experienced pre-marital cohabitation ( $r = -.07$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Heterosexist attitudes are more likely to be expressed by persons who are 65 years old or older ( $r = .20$ ;  $p < .01$ ), those who appear to be more religious ( $r = .19$ ;  $p < .01$ ), individuals less interested in learning new things ( $r = .17$ ;  $p < .01$ ), persons who display a higher level of conventionalism ( $r = .15$ ;  $p < .01$ ), persons who reside in the north-eastern region of Romania ( $r = .08$ ;

$p < 01$ ), and people who have conservative beliefs regarding certain human rights (*i.e.*, those who think torture is justified in certain circumstances) ( $r = 05$ ;  $p < 05$ ).

**Figure 1**  
Heterosexist attitudes in Europe in 2006

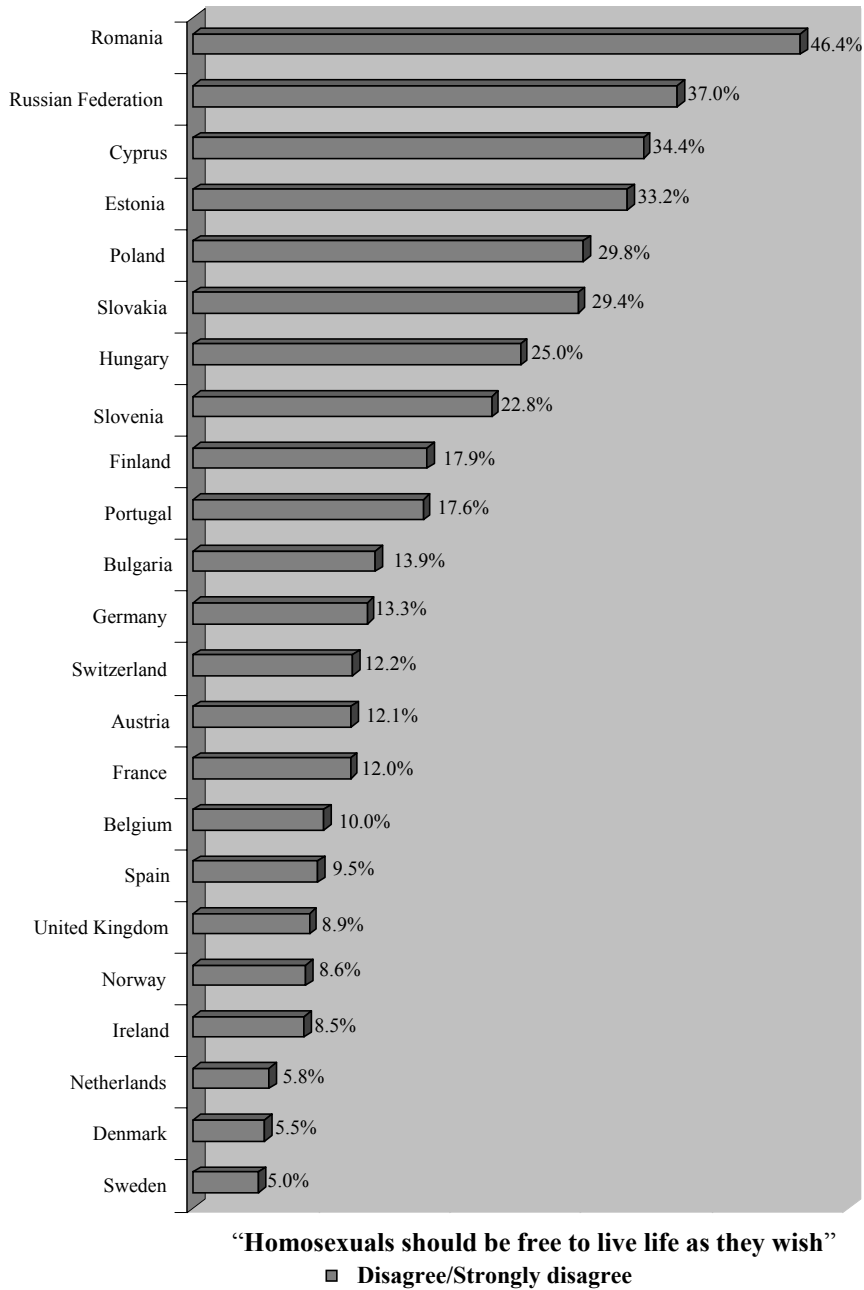


Table 1

Correlations, means &amp; standard deviations for the study variables (N = 2 139)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Heterosexism	1													
2. Gender (male)	.00	1												
3. Age (senior citizen)	.20**	.02	1											
4. Employment status (active)	-.14**	.11**	-.33**	1										
5. Region (North-East)	.08**	-.01	-.02	-.01	1									
6. Residency (large city)	-.15**	.01	-.02	.14**	-.04*	1								
7. Respondent's education	-.16**	.12**	-.31**	.43**	.02	.29**	1							
8. Parents' education	-.23**	-.03	-.33**	.24**	.02	.28**	.43**	1						
9. Interpersonal contacts	-.15**	.05*	-.14**	-.02	-.04	.01	.02	.21**	1					
10. Pre-marital cohabitation	-.07**	.06**	-.15**	.09**	.03	.08**	.09**	.01	.02	1				
11. Torture justified	.05*	.02	-.02	.03	-.06*	-.02	.02	.01	-.03	.03	1			
12. Conventionalism	.15**	-.06**	.07**	-.05*	.07**	-.10**	-.05*	-.09**	-.09**	-.09**	.00	1		
13. Resistance to learning	.17**	-.05*	.29**	-.21**	-.07**	-.11**	-.30**	-.31**	-.15**	.08**	-.01	-.06*	1	
14. Religiosity	.19**	-.16**	.16**	-.15**	-.02	-.14**	-.18**	-.15**	-.03	-.07**	-.02	.22**	.05*	1
Mean	1.22	.48	.20	.38	.16	.31	2.83	3.51	4.09	.21	2.88	14.00	2.11	6.79
Std. Deviation	.81	.49	.40	.49	.37	.46	1.21	2.31	1.78	.40	1.08	2.61	.81	2.14

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ 

In order to identify the individual characteristics that differentiate people with positive attitudes from those who have negative or neutral opinions about the sexual minorities' rights in Romania a multinomial logistic regression model has been used. This statistical model provides more efficient estimates than a binary logit model and can be used when the dependent variable consists of more than two categories. In this case, the dependent variable has three categories corresponding to positive (24,3% of the cases), neutral (29,3% of the cases), and negative (46,4% of the cases) attitudes toward homosexuals<sup>11</sup>. Table 2 presents the results of the multinomial logistic regression model. The model generated two sets of parameter estimates, comparing two levels of the dependent variable (neutral and negative attitudes) to a base level (positive attitudes). Findings of non-significance corresponding to Pearson (chi-square = 4249.57;  $p = .456$ ) and deviance (chi-square

<sup>11</sup> The categories of the dependent variable appear to be ordered and preliminary analyses used an ordered logit model. However, this statistical model did not fit the data well (i.e., the model did not pass the test of parallel lines, even when alternative link functions have been applied). Because the model assumption that relationships between the independent variables and the logits are the same for all the logits could not be satisfied, the multinomial logit model that is less restrictive and equally informative has been used instead. The fact that this model ignores the ordering of the values of the dependent variable does not impact the results (see Norusis, 2008).

= 41.74.12;  $p = .762$ ) goodness-of-fit tests demonstrate that the presented model adequately fits the data. Based on the value of the  $R^2$ -like statistics (.174) it can be observed that the strength of the association between the dependent variable and the predictor variables is moderate.

Compared to those who express positive attitudes toward homosexuals, when controlling for the other variables in the model, the persons who are undecided or express neutral attitudes are more likely to be older, more religious, and less interested in learning new things. Individuals whose parents have higher educational levels and those who have more frequent interpersonal contacts are less likely to have a neutral attitude toward homosexuals.

All things being equal, when compared to those showing a higher level of tolerance regarding the homosexuals' civil rights, the persons more likely to display heterosexist attitudes are 65 years old or older, are more religious, share conventional beliefs about life in general (e.g., think it is important to follow the rules, respect the traditions, and believe in a strong government) and about certain human rights (*i.e.*, agree with the use of torture on prisoners), dislike learning new things, and are residents of north-eastern region of Romania. As hypothesized, individuals more likely to agree with the contention that homosexuals should have the same human and civil rights as heterosexuals do are persons who experienced pre-marital cohabitation, who socialize more, live in larger urban areas, and those whose parents have a higher educational level.

Specifically, given that the other variables in the model are held constant, for a senior citizen the odds of having a neutral rather than a positive attitude toward homosexuals are almost twice larger ( $OR = 1.860$ ) than the odds for a person younger than 65. The odds of having a neutral attitude relative to a positive attitude toward homosexuals are expected to increase by a factor of 1.669 for one unit increase in the score for 'resistance to new learning'. If one's self-assessed level of religiosity were to increase by one unit, the odds of having a neutral attitude vs. a positive attitude toward homosexuals would be expected to increase by a factor of 1.074. If the parents' educational level score would increase by one unit, the odds ratio for a person having a neutral vs. a positive attitude toward homosexuals would decrease by a factor of 0.931. For one unit increase in the frequency of social contacts, the odds of having a neutral attitude relative to a positive attitude toward homosexuals are expected to decrease by a factor of 0.906.

When controlling for the other variables in the model, the odds of having a heterosexist, rather than a tolerant attitude are 2.4 higher ( $OR = 2.394$ ) for senior citizens relative to persons age 64 or younger. Similarly, the odds of having a negative attitude toward sexual minorities are 1.7 higher ( $OR = 1.719$ ) for residents of the north-eastern region of Romania when compared to people from the rest of the country. For one unit increase in the score for 'resistance to learning new things' the odds of one having a heterosexist vs. a tolerant attitude toward homosexuals is expected to increase by a factor of 1.578. If one's self-assessed

level of religiosity were to increase by one unit, the odds of having a negative attitude vs. a positive attitude toward homosexuals would be expected to increase by a factor of 1.196. This model predicts that the odds of having a heterosexist attitude relative to a tolerant attitude associated with one unit increase in a person's score for conventional beliefs would increase by a factor of 1.056.

*Table 2*  
Multinomial logit estimates for attitudes toward homosexuals in Romania (N = 2139)

	B	SE (B)	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio	p
<i>Neutral attitudes vs. positive attitudes</i>					
Conventionalism	016	024	1.016	0.970 – 1.065	.500
Religiosity	071	029	1.074	1.014 – 1.137	.014
Resistance to new learning	512	090	1.669	1.398 – 1.991	.000
Beliefs about human rights (torture justified)	045	056	1.046	0.937 – 1.169	.420
Pre-marital cohabitation	052	147	1.053	0.789 – 1.406	.726
Interpersonal contacts	–099	037	0.906	0.843 – 0.943	.007
Gender (male)	014	026	1.014	0.793 – 1.298	.909
Age (senior citizen)	621	217	1.860	1.215 – 2.847	.004
Education	034	063	0.967	0.855 – 1.094	.594
Parents' education	–072	030	0.931	0.877 – 0.988	.018
Employment status (active)	031	140	1.031	0.785 – 1.356	.852
Residency (large city)	–077	138	0.926	0.707 – 1.213	.578
Residential region (North-East)	–167	182	0.847	0.592 – 1.210	.361
Intercept	–891	558			.110
<i>Negative attitudes vs. positive attitudes</i>					
Conventionalism	054	023	1.056	1.009 – 1.105	.019
Religiosity	179	029	1.196	1.131 – 1.265	.000
Resistance to new learning	456	087	1.578	1.330 – 1.871	.000
Beliefs about human rights (torture justified)	160	054	1.173	1.057 – 1.303	.003
Pre-marital cohabitation	–299	147	0.741	0.556 – 0.988	.041
Interpersonal contacts	–148	035	0.863	0.806 – 0.924	.000
Gender (male)	153	120	1.166	0.922 – 1.475	.200
Age (senior citizen)	873	205	2.394	1.603 – 3.575	.000
Education	–011	060	0.989	0.879 – 1.113	.858
Parents' education	–111	029	0.895	0.845 – 0.948	.000
Employment status (active)	–.179	.133	.836	.644– 1.086	.179
Residency (large city)	–.397	.134	.672	.518– .874	.003
Residential region (North-East)	.542	.159	1.719	1.259 – 2.348	.001
Intercept	–1.660	.541			.002
Pseudo R-Square (Nagelkerke)	.174				
		Chi-square	df		p
Goodness-of-Fit	Pearson	4249.569	4240		.456
	Deviance	4174.119	4240		.762

Compared to those who declared they never lived with a partner without being married, Romanians who experienced pre-marital cohabitation are less likely (OR = 741) to express a negative attitude regarding the homosexuals' human rights. In order to standardize the metric of the effect size and facilitate interpretation (see Osborne 2006) the odds ratio for this variable has been converted to its corresponding counterpart that has a value larger than one. Based on the corresponding reciprocal value for odds ratio [ $e^{-b}=e^{-(-.299)}=1.348$ ] we could say that the odds of having a heterosexist attitude for Romanians who did not experience pre-marital cohabitation are approximately 1,35 times greater than the odds of those who lived with a partner prior to marriage. Similarly, persons living in large cities are less likely (OR = 672) than residents of rural or smaller urban areas to express heterosexism and more likely to display a higher level of tolerance toward sexual minorities. To create symmetry in the perception of the effect size, we could say that the odds of having heterosexist rather than tolerant attitudes for persons who do not live in large cities are approximately 1,5 [ $e^{-(-.397)}=1.487$ ] times the odds of those living in larger urban areas.

For one unit increase in the frequency of interpersonal contacts, the odds of having a heterosexist vs. a tolerant attitude toward sexual minorities would decrease by a factor of 863. If the parents' educational level score would increase by one unit, the odds for a person having a negative vs. a positive attitude toward homosexuals would decrease by a factor 895, when the other variables in the model are held constant. If odds ratios that are lower than one are converted to their corresponding counterparts, for one unit decrease in the frequency of interpersonal contacts the odds of a person having heterosexist attitudes would increase by a factor of 1,16 [ $e^{-(-.148)}=1.159$ ]. Similarly, for one unit decrease in parental educational level the odds of a person having heterosexist attitudes would increase by a factor of 1,12 [ $e^{-(-.111)}=1.117$ ]. It should be noted that 'age' appears to have the greatest effect in increasing the odds of having a negative attitude rather than a positive attitude toward sexual minorities. Based on the probability values associated with each odds ratio, variables 'gender', 'respondent's education', and 'employment status' do not have a significant effect in differentiating heterosexist attitudes from tolerant attitudes.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this study was to recognize individual-level variables most likely to predict variations in Romanians' attitudes toward homosexuals' civil rights. In particular, this analysis tried to identify the personal traits and beliefs associated with heterosexist attitudes in Romania. In general, results are consistent with research findings from other countries. As found in prior research (Hayes, 1995; Jensen, Gambles & Olsen, 1988; Johnson, Brems & Alford-Keating, 1997;



Steffens & Wagner, 2004; Village & Francis, 2008), the younger generation of Romanians is more supportive of gay rights. Also similar to people from other countries, Romanians from better educated families, residents of larger urban areas, persons who appear to be non-conventional and less religious, those who have more social contacts and therefore a higher chance to meet homosexual persons fully support the idea that gays and lesbians should have the freedom to live their lives as they wish.

Although when controlling for a set of predictors, Romanian men were slightly more likely than women to have heterosexist rather than tolerant attitudes, this research did not find gender-based statistically significant differences in opinions as other studies (*e.g.*, Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Herek, 1994, 2000; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Steffens & Wagner, 2004) did. This might be a result of the fact that compared to Romanian women, Romanian men tend to be on average better educated, less religious, are more likely to be employed, and socialize more (see Table 1). These characteristics, found to be linked to tolerant attitudes, could have had a neutralizing effect on men's conservative attitudes toward sexual minorities. In addition, by asking respondents if homosexuals 'should live life as they wish' the focus was on people's reaction to the sexual minorities' civil rights and to a lower degree on Romanians' opinions about homosexuals or homosexuality, in general. In this respect, findings are consistent with the results of other studies (Davies, 2004; Kite & Whitley, 1996), which stated nonsignificant gender differences regarding attitudes toward homosexuals' civil rights. In an analysis of the influence of gender on public attitudes toward homosexual rights in Britain, Hayes (1997) found, as well, that the respondent's gender was unrelated to opinions about the civil rights of lesbians or gay men. The researcher found that education, age, and attitudes toward either pre-marital or extra-marital sexual relations were consistent influences on public attitudes toward homosexual rights in Britain.

Similar to previous research (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Kelley, 2001; Steffens & Wagner, 2004), education does influence variations in attitudes toward sexual minorities in Romania, as well. Interestingly, this study found the parents' education having a stronger positive effect on tolerant attitudes than the respondent's education. Although this issue should be explored in future research, it appears that in Romania the family environment or the parental influence has a stronger impact on one's attitudes toward sexual minorities' rights than the school environment. It should be noted that currently, in Romania, at the public education level, social diversity courses and sex education classes, where sexual diversity and same-sex issues could be discussed, are only elective topics in school curricula, sparsely and inappropriately covered in most Romanian schools (see Neamtu 2005).

Consistent with prior research (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; Herek & Gonzalez, 2006) and as hypothesized, individuals who are more religious are also less inclined to think that homosexuals should have the same civil rights as any other

Romanian citizen. As anticipated, people who acknowledge the importance of tradition and customs in society, those who share more conservative beliefs about family as an institution (*i.e.*, did not acknowledge pre-marital cohabitation), socialize less, are not interested in learning new things, and live in rural or smaller urban areas are less likely to support gay rights. Summarizing, the individual characteristics of Romanians who tend to express less tolerant attitudes toward the homosexuals' civil rights are similar to the characteristics of those from other countries who share comparable opinions about sexual minorities.

The research findings presented in this paper are based on a representative sample of Romanian citizens. Although results can be generalized to the Romanian population age fifteen and older, the study has certain limitations that future research could overcome. The current study provides information about the relative influence of certain individual-level factors that account for variation in the public's opinion about homosexuals' rights in Romania. However, this is a secondary analysis limited by the existent data, which did not include potentially important indicators. For instance, there was only one available variable in the data set that assessed attitudes toward selected sexual minorities (*i.e.*, gay men and lesbians), an indicator that critics might consider an imperfect, elusive or narrow measure of heterosexism. Also, there was no way of knowing *why* residents expressed a certain opinion about the homosexuals' civil liberties. In addition, a considerable amount of variation in attitudes appears to be explained by factors not considered here (*e.g.*, personal beliefs about homosexuality – if it is viewed as a choice or beyond one's control; direct/indirect experience with sexual minorities; or, structural level effects, such as economic development or political stability), that future research should include and examine in order to better understand the public reaction to important human and civil rights issues in Romania. More detailed and focused studies should be used to collect information that would better serve to design viable strategies meant to decrease sexual prejudice and heterosexism in Romania.

This analysis suggests that legal rights do not translate immediately into social justice. Romanians appear to express a higher level of sexual prejudice and are less tolerant of homosexuals' human and civil rights than other European nations, especially when compared to Western Europeans. However, when examining attitudes toward homosexuals, one should take into account the Romanians' puritanical attitudes toward sexual issues in general, their heteronormative cultural values and conservative views regarding the institutions of family and marriage, the influence of the Christian Orthodox Church (that traditionally censured homosexual acts and relationships), and the short period of time that passed since significant changes in anti-gay legislation took place. Romania acquired the juridical apparatus for the protection of sexual minorities only in January, 2002 (see Nachescu, 2005, p. 74), while in France and the Netherlands, countries among those with the lowest proportion of people who do

not support the gays' and lesbians' rights, consensual sexual relations between adults of the same sex have been legal for about two hundred years (see Salden, 1987; Sibalis, 1996).

Although in Romania public manifestations of homosexuality have been decriminalized almost a decade ago, Romanian homosexuals are still relatively invisible to the public eye. While recent research showed that approximately 34% of the European Union citizens indicated they have gay friends or acquaintances, only 3% of Romanians appear to know or to have social contacts with homosexual persons<sup>12</sup>. And research showed that familiarity with sexual minorities does influence the public's attitudes toward members of these non-normative groups. For instance, in a study conducted in Germany on a national representative sample, Steffens and Wagner (2004, p. 141) found that personal contacts with non-heterosexual persons had the largest effect size on positive attitudes toward sexual minorities. Weishut (2000) also found that personal acquaintances with homosexual people led Israeli students to have more favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Similar results were obtained by Herek & Glunt (1993) from a national sample in United States. The researchers found that interpersonal contact was strongly associated with positive attitudes toward gay men and that heterosexuals who had the characteristics commonly associated with positive attitudes (*i.e.*, were highly educated, politically liberal, young, and female) were more likely than others to be the recipients of disclosure from gay friends and relatives.

Additionally, in Romania, there are no well-established gay communities or clearly defined gay groups. There are only a few civil society organizations who promote diversity, support, and advance LGBT rights, and they are mainly active in Bucharest, the capital city of Romania and in a small number of other larger cities. In general, these groups kept a low profile and no reports of impediments to LGBT groups' activities have been registered. However, only two of these organizations (ACCEPT and LGBTeam) have legal status<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, Spineanu-Dobrota (2005) observed that the distorted perception of homosexuals shared by a large number of Romanian heterosexuals could change if more public figures who are part of the sexual minority group would decide to disclose and openly discuss their life experiences and the main issues LGBT persons are facing in contemporary Romania.

Rădulescu (1996) noted that any discussion referring to non-normative sexual behavior should take into account the morals, customs, and traditions that appear to

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<sup>12</sup> European Commission, 'Special Eurobarometer 296 – Discrimination in the European Union: Perceptions, Experiences and Attitudes', July 2008, p. 157, available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_296\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_296_en.pdf), accessed June 5, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Report – Romania 'Societal Abuses, Discrimination, and Acts of Violence Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity', 2009, available at [http://romania.usembassy.gov/2009\\_rhr\\_en.html](http://romania.usembassy.gov/2009_rhr_en.html), accessed June 27, 2010.

characterize a given society. History shows that attitudes toward homosexuality are continuously changing and worldwide public acceptance of homosexuality is gradually increasing. While during the last three decades more positive attitudes toward sexual minorities were mainly witnessed in Western societies (see Avery *et al.*, 2007; Loftus, 2001; Steffens & Wagner, 2004; Village & Francis, 2008), in the near future, the intensity of sexual prejudice expressed by Romanians could diminish as well. However, the Romanian society continues to be organized around the principle of social conformity and those whose sexual behavior deviates from the norm are hardly understood or accepted. In addition, the sexual minorities' social and political concerns continue to be marginal issues in the Romanian political discourse. Moreover, the level of political activism is low in Romania and the country has no experience with civil rights battles or social movements. As a result, the transition from legal toleration to social acceptance of homosexuality could be a lengthy process, especially if only sexual minorities will bear the responsibility for attitudinal and behavioral transformations.

Decriminalization of homosexuality and the enactment of anti-discrimination laws were necessary but not sufficient conditions for immediate changes in public perceptions of a stigmatized group. The fact that the legislative changes that addressed the homosexuals' main problems were largely a result of the European Union pressure on the Romanian government prior to the country's accession to EU (see Nachescu, 2005) and not a result of an internal broad consensus over human rights, partially explains the weak effect of the LGBT rights legislation on Romanians' position regarding gay civil rights.

From a sociological stance (see Štulhofer & Sandfort, 2005, p. 5), while religion remains an important institution involved in the process of social regulation of sexuality, family and secular institutions, such as school, law, and medicine could produce new ideologies and norms that would respond to public expectations in a modern society. Although the Church, the political elites, the media, and the new generation of sexual minority activists will continue to play an important role in shaping the Romanians' attitudes toward homosexuals, as this study and others suggest, education is an essential factor that can help build awareness and understanding of non-normative group issues. At home and in school, Romanians could be taught to recognize the value of accepting diversity as represented by all social minorities, sexual minorities included. Yet, as Williams (1997, p. 7) pointed out, based on research findings and historical accounts of social change movements, individual-to-individual interaction with members of sexual minority groups appears to be a much more effective way to change sexual prejudice than 'parades, protest marches, political lobbying, workshops, and educational lectures put together'.

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