



Predictors of homophobia in a sample of Romanian young adults: age, gender, spirituality, attachment styles, and moral disengagement

A Maftei & A-C. Holman

To cite this article: A Maftei & A-C. Holman (2020): Predictors of homophobia in a sample of Romanian young adults: age, gender, spirituality, attachment styles, and moral disengagement, *Psychology & Sexuality*, DOI: [10.1080/19419899.2020.1726435](https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2020.1726435)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19419899.2020.1726435>



Accepted author version posted online: 03 Feb 2020.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

Publisher: Taylor & Francis & Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

Journal: *Psychology & Sexuality*

DOI: 10.1080/19419899.2020.1726435

Predictors of homophobia in a sample of Romanian young adults: age, gender, spirituality, attachment styles, and moral disengagement

A. MAFTEI¹, A-C. HOLMAN¹

Abstract

Romania has surprised the European Union when, in 2018, the Coalition for Family, along with the ruling Social Democrats party, organized a controversial referendum against the LGBT community, asking to redefine marriage as only being between a man and a woman rather than “two spouses”. The present research contributes to a better understanding of the relationship between a series of demographic variables (gender and age), spirituality (spiritual openness and spiritual support), attachment styles (anxiety and avoidance), moral disengagement and homophobia, by studying attitudes of 281 young Romanian adults, aged 18 to 44, within a small period of time after the above mentioned Referendum. A hierarchical regression analysis suggested that the most important predictor of homophobia was spiritual support, followed by spiritual openness, attachment anxiety and moral disengagement. Age and gender were not found to be significant predictors in our model. Results are discussed within the social and psychological context.

Keywords: homophobia, spirituality, moral disengagement, attachment styles, gender, age

¹ “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Department of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Iasi, Romania.

Address correspondence to Alexandra Maftei, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași, 3 Toma Cozma Street, Romania. e-mail: psihologamaftei@gmail.com.

1. Introduction

The 2018 Romanian referendum against the LGBT community never passed, failing due to low turnout. Still, the two-day vote that aimed to change the Constitution, defining marriage strictly as between a man and a woman, gathered 3.857.308 votes, out of which 3.531.732 (91,56%) were supportive with the referendum's cause and 6,47% were against. According to an annual study by ILGA-Europe, an umbrella organization advocating equality (Khan, 2018), Romania ranks 25th out of 28 EU states based on legislation, hate speech and discrimination against LGBT people. Also, Romania decriminalized homosexuality in 2001, decades later than other European countries. The Coalition for Family, the official organizer of the Referendum, received public support from the Orthodox Church and other religious communities, as well as all - but one - parliamentary party.

Various analyzes were made in order to establish the associated factors for both participation and absence on the 2018 Romanian Referendum. Sandu (2018) offered a documented post-referendum perspective upon the subject, showing that the community selectivity was extremely strong, also emphasizing a strong socio-cultural determination of the decisions to vote. In the context of a more and more accentuated nationalism across Europe (Bremmer, 2017; Bieber, 2018; Kempe, 2018; Walt, 2019), it is of highly importance to explore

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

the factors and mechanisms associated with homophobia, a concept still insufficiently analyzed in the post-communist socio-cultural context of Eastern European countries, such as Romania. The rights of the homosexual community represent a goal of a free, democratic society. Therefore, evaluating homophobia and its related factors represents a primary issue in the safeguarding of the psychological and social health of the homosexual community.

2. Homophobia: conceptualization and associated factors

As Smith, Oades and McCarthy (2012) synthesized, the construct of homophobia has been defined in many different ways, based on either theoretical paradigms (Adam, 1998; Bernstein, Kostelac & Gaarder, 2003; Lyons, Brenner & Fassinger, 2005; Matthews & Adams, 2009; Smith & Ingram, 2004) or the researcher's bias (Lyons, Brenner & Fassinger, 2005; Silverschanz, Cortina & Konik, 2008). Adams et al. (1996) defined homophobia as a construct that consists of negative attitudes, affect regulation and malevolence towards lesbians and gay men. Adam (1998) explained the concept in terms of negative attitudes toward lesbian, gay and (sometimes) bisexual people, while Herek (2004) explained it as being an individual or social ignorance or fear of gay and /or lesbian people. According to Herek, homophobic actions can include prejudice, discrimination, harassment, and acts of violence and hatred. Still, Adams, Wright and Lohr (1996) conceptualized homophobia as having a broad ego-defensive function, thereby protecting one's unconscious anxiety about experiencing homosexual impulses. In the present study, we refer to homophobia following Wright, Adams and Bernat's model (1999), inspired by O'Donohue and Caselles' (1993) tripartite model. The authors conceptualized homophobia within three dimensions: cognitive, affective and behavioral. Therefore, we consider it as being the negative cognitive, affective and behavioral reactions towards homosexual men and women.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

A large amount of research has already explored predictors and associated factors of sexual prejudice and negative attitudes toward gay people. Several studies confirmed factors such as education (Steffens & Wagner, 2004), traditional gender-role beliefs (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2015; Whitley, 2001), and religiosity (Roggemans, Sruyt, Droogenbroeck, & Keppens, 2015). As Weber and Gredig (2018) stated, other important factors for sexual prejudice are social influences from significant others and socialization instances involving, specifically for youths, peers, parents and teachers.

Other findings explored age as a predictor of homophobia. More specifically, studies found that the older we get, the more homonegative we can be (Hayes, 1995; Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). Gender was also found to be a valuable predictor, as shown by a number of studies: males are more likely to show negative attitudes towards homosexuality (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Kelley, 2001; Oliver & Hyde, 1993).

In terms of religion and religiosity, Roggemans et al. (2015) found that both Christian and Muslim believers showed more negative attitudes towards homosexuality, even after controlling for authoritarianism and a more traditional view on gender roles. Chaux and Leon (2016) found that homophobic attitudes are positively associated with being male and being more religious, in particular non-Catholic Christian. Ogland and Verona (2014) explored the impact of religion upon the attitudes toward homosexuality and same-sex civil unions, and found that the most restrictive views toward homosexuality and the strongest opposition to same-sex civil unions are most prevalent among devoted followers of historical Protestant, Pentecostal, and Catholic faith traditions; meanwhile, those with no religious commitment are inclined to assume a more tolerant moral posture toward such issues.

Finally, a multilevel analysis of 79 countries, conducted by Jäckle & Wenzelburger (2014), found clear differences in levels of aversion to homosexuality among the followers of the individual religions. More specifically, the authors examined if (and to what extent) the religious affiliation and the religiosity of an individual can explain their homo-negativity. Among their results, the authors showed that 1) men are more homo-negative than women, 2) older people more than young people, 3) people with a lower education level more than those with a higher education level, and 4) religious people are, in general, more homo-negative.

2.2. Moral disengagement, spirituality and homophobia

According to Bandura et al. (1996), moral disengagement involves the interpretation of the available information in various moral situations in relation to personal standards and situational circumstances, in order to assess the correctness or inaccuracy of behavior. Moral disengagement (MD) occurs when people begin to say that violence, or any other immoral act, is excusable. MD disables or ignores the moral standards that prevent immorality in everyday life. When moral constraints are disconnected, regular, usually positive, good people can engage in different transgressions with a clear conscience. Therefore, the tendency to moral disengage determines the acceptance of certain immoral behaviors, pursuing a form of "liberation" meant to distance morality of conduct. Eight mechanisms underlie MD, as identified by Bandura et al (1996), namely *moral justification, euphemistic language, changes in consequences, diffusion and displacement of responsibility, advantageous comparison, dehumanization and attribution of guilt.*

As an ideology of heterosexual domination (Prati, 2012), homophobia may lead to dehumanization, ascription of blame, and distortion of injurious consequences, which contribute substantially to further aggressive behavior (Bandura, 1986). As suggested by a series of studies,

homophobic attitudes are associated with homophobic behavior (Poteat, Kimmel, & Wilchins, 2011; Rivers, 2011) and can be conceptualized as aggressive beliefs or beliefs that guide aggressive behavior, emphasizing once again the necessity of this study in exploring the moral disengagement mechanisms underlying homophobia.

Moral justification is used in various religions (Nolan, 2014). For example, in Christianity, God removes not only guilt, but also the penalty of sin, declaring afterwards the sinner as being righteous. Justification is also granted to the faithful people, according to Lutherans and Calvinists: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). According to Bandura (1996), MD mechanisms satisfy people’s need to look or feel morally, meanwhile conforming to the values of their role models, spiritual guides, or political leaders. Also, Bandura explains that, although various mechanisms of MD work together, the ones that contribute the most to immoral behavior are the vilification of victims and linkage of harmful conduct to worthy causes. Bushman et al. (2007) showed that individuals were more likely to administer a painful punishment and to behave more aggressively when it was thought that killing is condoned by the Bible and sanctioned by God than when God was not mentioned. Finally, Nolan (2014) showed that is not the specific religion that predicts MD, but the higher levels of self-reported religiousness or spirituality.

2.3. Attachment Style and Homophobia

The attachment theory defined by Bowlby (1973) states that attachment is “a strong will an individual feels towards a differentiated and preferred figure, who is perceived as strong and mature, to build a relationship or to seek closeness when they feel afraid, tired or sick” (Patterson & Moran, 1988). According to Bowlby (1973), attachment offers individuals a series of mental

representations of themselves and others. Adult attachment styles characterize “people's comfort and confidence in close relationships, their fear of rejection and yearning for intimacy, and their preference for self-sufficiency or interpersonal distance” (Meyer & Pilkonis, 2001, p.466).

Attachment styles are formed during infancy, usually with the person providing basic, and it carries out until adulthood and beyond, rather resistant to change (Bretherton, 1995). Based on Bowlby's theory, Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters and Wall (1978) identified three attachment styles in infants: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and anxious-avoidant. According to Gillath, Selcuk and Shaver (2008), people with positive representations or models of themselves and others, usually developed a secure attachment style. On the other hand, negative parental experiences can generate insecure attachment styles, increasing risks for several identity disorders and mental health issues in childhood and adulthood (Shorey & Snyder, 2006).

A series of researches suggested that self-reported romantic attachment styles can actually reflect two continuous dimensions—*anxiety* and *avoidance*—that emerge from the factor analyses of attachment item sets (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). According to Brennan et al. (1998), the *anxious* dimension represents people's mental model of the self, while the *avoidant* dimension represents people's model of others. A generous amount of research (e.g. Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Bartz & Lydon, 2004) also showed that *anxiety* and *avoidance* influence the type of relationships people engages, as well as a series of similar aspects in the interpersonal field.

Attachment anxiety describes individuals who are usually preoccupied with their self-worth and tend to direct excessive attention toward attachment figures by using hyper-activation (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), a defense strategy which implies a high level of “vigilance of relationship-related behaviors and information, as well as greater persistence in seeking comfort,

reassurance, and support from relationship parties” (Swaminathan, Stille, & Ahluwalia, 2009, p.987). **Attachment avoidance** captures the individual’s view of others. People with an avoidant style usually have a negative view of others and rely on themselves, counting on their own high autonomy (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). They also tend to emotionally distance themselves in their interpersonal relationships, trusting their partners less and, overall, having lower levels of relationship satisfaction (Collins & Read, 1990; Shaver & Brennan, 1992).

Even though the classic attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) is gender-neutral, and it is not a valuable predictor of the emergence of sexually differentiated styles (Del Giudice, 2019), there have been found gender differences in attachment styles, emerging in middle childhood. According to Del Giudice (2019), these gender differences are higher in Western and Middle Eastern countries, suggesting that men tend to be higher in avoidance while women are higher in anxiety.

When it comes to the relationship between attachment styles and homophobia, Schwartz & Lindley (2005) found, in a sample of female students, a negative correlation between the two concepts: the higher the avoidance, the lower the homophobia. In another study, Gormley and Lopez (2010) found that a dismissing attachment style was associated with homophobia, but only among men. More specifically, they found that males with dismissing styles reported the highest levels of homophobia, meanwhile women with dismissing styles demonstrated the lowest levels. In other words, Gormley and Lopez (2010) showed that fear of intimacy generates higher levels of homophobic attitudes, in heterosexual men.

Ciocca et al. (2015) suggested that a secure attachment style can be an indicator of low levels of homophobia, meanwhile an anxious style of attachment determines high levels of homophobia. Finally, recent work (Zauri, Ciocca, Limoncin, Mollaioli, Carosa & Jannini, 2019)

confirmed gender differences regarding homophobia, suggesting that males have higher homophobic tendencies comparing to women. Moreover, the authors suggested a strong relation between insecure attachment styles, particularly stronger within males.

3. The present study

The aim of the present research was to investigate a series of predictors of homophobia, namely age, gender, spirituality and attachment styles. Following previous research (e.g. Chaux & Leon, 2016; Ciocca, 2015; Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2014; Prati, 2012) our hypothesis was that spirituality, moral disengagement and attachment styles (Avoidance and Anxiety) significantly predict global levels of homophobia. We already know from the literature that Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), conservatism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) are important predictors of sexual prejudice (e.g. Poteat & Mereish, 2012; Stefurak, Taylor, & Mehta, 2010; Stones, 2006). But our main concern was to explore whether in such a polarizing context such as the Romanian Referendum (2018), the impact of several other different factors such as moral disengagement, spirituality, attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety on homophobia would leave the importance of these previously highlighted factors unaffected or would render them less significant.

The novelty of our research lies in both the contextual effect of the Romanian Referendum, as well as in the combination of predictors tested. Previous studies revealed the significant associations between attachment avoidance and anxiety and homophobia (Ciocca et al., 2015; Gormley & Lopez, 2010; Scwartz & Lindley, 2005; Zauri et al., 2019), as well as significant connections between homophobia, spirituality and moral disengagement (e.g. Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2014; Nolan, 2014; Prati, 2012). Still, until the present moment, these factors were not simultaneously analyzed, in the same set of predictors, together with age and gender, in

such a polarizing context as the mentioned Referendum, as in the present research. The social influences from significant others such as peers, parents and teachers are highly important in studying young adults' attitudes towards sexual minorities (Weber & Gredig, 2018). That is why, the Romanian Referendum represents a strong, polarizing social context that may confirm whether SDO and RWA (materialized by the organization of the referendum itself) remain as significant in the analysis of Romanian youth's homophobic tendencies, when a novel set of predictors is analyzed, such as the one proposed by us.

3.1. Participants

Our initial convenient sample consisted of 284 young adults. Three out of the 284 undergraduates were excluded from the study because their lack of responses for the spiritual scale (SEI-R). Therefore, our final sample had 281 students, aged 18 to 44 ($M = 21.07$, $SD = 3.32$), 88.3% females. Participants were undergraduates, studying for their bachelor's degree, all with a declared heterosexual orientation. They signed a consent form, which contained a short description of the general purpose of the study (a general profile on young adults in Romania, necessary for a marketing company specialized in IT) and some general indications about the instruments. All participants received course credits as reimbursement.

3.2. Measures

The Homophobia Scale (HS- Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999) was designed to measure cognitive, behavioral and affective aspects of homophobia. The Homophobia Scale consists of 25 statements to which participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The HS includes items that examine social avoidance and aggressive acting,

in addition to the attitudinal items found on many homophobia measures, providing incremental value for the HS that departs from other scales. Example items include “If I discovered a friend was gay I would end the friendship”, “Homosexuality is immoral” or “Homosexual behavior should not be against the law. The higher the global score, the higher the homophobia. Internal consistency analyses indicated satisfying values of HS (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.9).

The Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura et al., 1996) was used in order to measure the various mechanisms people use in order to justify immoral behaviors. The scale has a total of 32 items, to which participants answered on a 5-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Though the original instrument presents a 3-point Likert scale, we chose the 5-point Likert answering scale, following previous longitudinal research on stability and change of moral disengagement (Obermann, 2011; Paciello, Fida, Tramontano, Lupinetti, & Caprara 2008; Rubio-Garay, Amor & Carrasco, 2017). Examples include: *Slapping and shoving someone is just a way of joking* (Euphemistic language) or *Some people deserve to be treated like animals* (Dehumanization). We were interested in the global dimension of MD, and its reliability analysis indicated a satisfying consistency of .829 (Cronbach’s alpha). A high score indicated a high general level of moral disengagement.

The Revised Spiritual Experience Index (SEI-R, Genia, 1997) was used in order to measure spiritual maturity. SEI-R was developed to measure spiritual maturity in persons of diverse religious and spiritual beliefs. The scale contains 23 items, divided into two factors: spiritual support – reliance on faith for sustenance and support and spiritual openness, a subscale which measures receptive attitude toward new spiritual possibilities. Participants answered on a 6-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Lower scores on both dimensions show, according to Genia, spiritually underdevelopment and a lack of spiritual

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

rootedness and commitment. Example items include: “I often feel strongly related to a power greater than myself”, “My faith enables me to experience forgiveness when I act against my moral conscience”. Also, higher scores on the SEI-R were significantly related to lower dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity. The internal consistency values for both dimensions of SEI-R was satisfying (Cronbach’s alphas > 0.8).

The Revised Adult Attachment Scale (RAAS - Collins, 1990) was used in order to explore participants’ individual differences in adult attachment patterns. RAAS contains 18 items, divided into three subscales, each composed of six items that measure close, dependent and anxious attachment styles. Participants answered to a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (not at all characteristic to me) to 5 (very characteristic to me). Example items include: *I find it relatively easy to get close to people* (the *close* subscale); *I often worry that romantic partners don't really love me* (the *dependent* subscale); *I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like* (the *anxious* subscale). However, we used the alternative measuring way proposed by Collins (1996), based on two dimensions only: *avoidance* and *anxiety*. Therefore, we computed two subscales which we further used in our regression analysis. Both dimensions of RAAS had satisfying internal consistency values (Cronbach’s alphas > 0.8).

Pretesting procedure

All instruments were subject to a pretesting procedure, in order to test a) the accuracy of the translated instruments and potential translation and interpretation errors; b) students’ reaction to certain questions related to religious aspects, beliefs, spirituality, and homophobia (potential refusals to answer due to intimacy issues) and c) the validity of the proposed instruments. A sample of 42 students (age range 19 to 25, $M=20.76$, $SD = 1.46$, 76.2 % females) participated in the pretesting. The pretesting involved a series of scales (the ones used in our study and a 24-

item Dimensions of Religiosity Scale (DR Scale) developed by Joseph & DiDuca (1997), followed by a focus group discussing the questions contained by the instruments. Results showed that more than 90% of the participants in the pretesting group indicated that they find the SEI-R (Genia, 1997) questions more closer to what they believe to really measure their inner life in terms of faith, arguing that the parallel instrument is too much centered on values in which they are no longer found (the Bible, for example). Therefore, we used only the SEI-R scale in our further procedure.

3.3. Procedure

Participants completed the materials anonymously, in a course room at the university, on a regular course day. They were encouraged to answer honestly to the questions contained by the instruments and were informed that that they could quit the session whenever they wanted. All instruments were translated into Romanian using the forward-backward translation method. Four translated versions of each instrument were analyzed for the final version, chosen by a psychologist familiar with the main concepts, along with a professional translator. The average time for answering all the questions was 30 minutes. A single experimenter conducted the study.

3.4. Results

We first conducted a series of preliminary analysis, in order to further compute a multiple linear hierarchical regression. We tested for multi-collinearities and results showed that the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were all within accepted limits, the assumption of multicollinearity not being met (Coakes, 2005). We also normalized one of the predictors, namely the global score for moral disengagement (MD), which did not contain normally distributed residuals. We examined the residual and scatter plots, and data showed that the

homoscedasticity condition for the regression analyses was satisfied (Hair et al.,1998; Pallant, 2001). An examination of the association between the variables (see **Table 1**) revealed that no independent variables were highly correlated.

-----Please insert Table 1 around here-----

A four-stage hierarchical multiple regression was conducted with Homophobia as the dependent variable. We were interested in finding whether spirituality (spiritual openness and spiritual support), attachment styles (Avoidance and Anxiety) and moral disengagement significantly predict homophobia. Age and gender were entered in stage one, in order to control for potential differences. Attachment variables (attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety) were entered at stage two, spiritual openness and spiritual support at stage three, and moral disengagement at stage four. The variables were entered in this order due in the idea that the attachment style becomes relevant earlier than the other two predictors, which become more stable in adulthood. Regression statistics are presented in **Table 2**.

-----Please insert Table 2 around here-----

The hierarchical multiple regression revealed that at Stage one, gender and age did not contribute significantly to the regression model, $F(2, 280) = 1.38, p=.25$) and accounted for 1% of the variation in Homophobia. Introducing the Attachment variables explained an additional 6.3% of variation in Homophobia and this change in R^2 was significant, $F(2, 276) = 9.31, p < .001$. Adding the Spirituality measures to the regression model explained an additional 31.9% of the variation in Homophobia, and this change in R^2 was also significant, $F(2, 274) = 71.68, p < .001$. Finally, the addition of Moral disengagement to the regression model explained an additional 1.3% of the variation in Homophobia and this change in R^2 square was also

significant, $F(1,273) = 5.78, p = .017$. When all seven independent variables were included in stage four of the regression model, neither gender nor age and attachment avoidance were significant predictors of Homophobia. The most important predictor of Homophobia was Spiritual support ($\beta=0.47$), followed by spiritual openness ($\beta=.305$), attachment anxiety ($\beta=.140$) and Moral disengagement ($\beta=.119$). Together, the seven independent variables accounted for 40.4% of the variance in Homophobia.

3. General discussion

A considerable amount of research linked religion and spirituality and homophobia (e.g. Roggemans et al. (2015). Age (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006), gender (Chaux & Leon (2016), and moral disengagement mechanisms were also revealed as relevant factors associated to homophobia. We explored all of them, together with attachment styles (Avoidance and Anxiety) as predictors for a global dimension of homophobia, within a rather spiritual and religious population from eastern Europe. Our analysis was conducted shortly after the October 2018 events, when Romania spent over 40 million euros and extended the usual one-day vote to a two-days vote, on a referendum that aimed for banning same-sex marriages. Even after the Orthodox Church made a general re-call for voting in the second day of the referendum, participation still failed to meet the minimum threshold, even though 91.56% of the people who voted approved the measure to define marriage as heterosexual.

The present results suggested that the seven assumed predictors that we have taken into consideration accounted for 40.4% of the variance in Homophobia. Among them, the most important predictors of Homophobia were spirituality related (spiritual support, followed by

spiritual openness), followed by attachment anxiety and moral disengagement. Therefore, our results are in line with previous findings, which confirm the significant association between religiosity and homophobia (Roggemans et al., 2015; Ogland & Verona, 2014; Nolan, 2014). However, compared to these studies, we have used a measure of spirituality, not one of religiosity. Our choice was motivated by the results of the pretesting procedure, conducted prior to the study, which suggested that our target population (students) considered responding to predominantly religious-content questions “an offense to their own freedom of thought and speech”. Of course, this reaction could have been enhanced by the recent Referendum, but no matter the case, it has clearly indicated a potential overwhelming majority refusal. Still, results are comparable, but no certain conclusions can be drawn.

Also, our regression analysis data confirms Nolan’s idea, according to which higher levels of self-reported religiousness or spirituality are associated with higher levels of moral disengagement, which, according to Prati (2012) eventually leads to dehumanization, ascription of blame, and distortion of injurious consequences, which contribute substantially to homophobia. In our regression model, moral disengagement was a significant predictor, but the preliminary correlation analysis indicated a paradoxical result: lower levels of moral disengagement correlated with higher levels of homophobia. One possible explanation may lie in the self-report measurement of moral disengagement, which may have been subject to desirable answers, along with the fact that the order of the scales was the following: RAAS (attachment styles), HS (homophobia), MD (moral disengagement) and SEI-R (spirituality). If the HS answers were not desirable answers, the MD items may have been, in order to restore the moral balance. This process is known as moral cleansing (Branas-Garza, Bucheli, Espinosa & Munoz, 2013), which may have appeared due to the high sensitivity of HS items. Still, our assumptions

need further exploration. This counterintuitive result should be explored by future studies, using moral disengagement mechanisms as mediators for the relation between spirituality and homophobia.

Our results were also in line with Ciocca et al.'s findings (2015), suggesting that attachment anxiety determines high levels of homophobia, meanwhile attachment avoidance was not a valuable predictor. Still, our results contradict Scwartz and Lindley's findings (2005), who suggested a negative correlation between attachment avoidance and homophobia: the higher the avoidance, the lower the homophobia. Our preliminary analysis showed a significant positive correlation between attachment avoidance and homophobia, but yet a negative significant association between attachment anxiety and homophobia. Scwartz and Lindley's data indicated a negative correlation the two concepts: the higher the avoidance, the lower the homophobia, meanwhile in our case, we found that the higher the anxiety, the lower the homophobia. Given the rather scarce and contradictory findings regarding the relationship between attachment styles and homophobia, further studies are needed in order to clarify this issue.

Given the generous amount of research which suggested significant gender differences in terms of homophobia, related to attachment anxiety, attachment avoidance, spirituality or moral disengagement, we expected gender to be a significant predictor in our model. Still, neither gender nor age significantly predicted our dependent variable. One of the possible explanations (and limitations) for these results may lie in our sample's characteristics: they were young adults, with a mean age of 21, in an overwhelming female only proportion of 88%. The different percentages in terms of gender and age in our sample's structure determines a more cautious and, implicitly, a more limited approach to the present results.

Previous studies suggested that males' and females' attachment styles impact differently their homonegativity, and this may lead to different genders models and different positioning toward homophobia: fear of intimacy generates higher levels of homophobia in heterosexual men, but significantly lower in females (Gormley & Lopez, 2010) and insecure attachment styles determine significantly higher homophobic tendencies in men, comparing to women. Also, the unequal distribution between gender and age across our sample may reflect another potential explanation for the lack of consistency between previous studies on age and gender (e.g. Zauri et al., 2019) as significant associated factors of homophobia, and the present research. Future studies should consider a more heterogeneous population in terms of age and gender, in order to provide a clearer distinction between two competing interpretations: one refers to the possibility that our results may reflect an artifact of sample composition, and another one lies in the possibility that the current predictors used in our model may generate different models for gender or age cohort subpopulations.

Besides the sample composition, a series of additional limits to the present research need to be addressed. First, our sample was a convenient one, and a rather small one. According to Crossman, a convenience sample lowers the representativeness of that particular group. Future studies should consider exploring predictors of homophobia in a larger, and a more representative sample. Also, the measures were all self-reported, that being subject to desirability, therefore diminishing the external validity of the present study (Etikan, 2016; Sedgwick, 2013).

Has the 2018 Referendum had a significant impact on the general attitude towards the LGBT community? We can only assume the magnitude of the social impact the referendum has had on the Romanian community, further social and psychological analyses being needed in

order to establish it. We also suggest that further studies should explore the way contacts, relationships and general interaction with the LGBT community impact the general affective, behavioral and cognitive relation to homosexuality. Through an interdisciplinary effort from behavioral, developmental and social psychologists, it may be possible to reveal the impact of such social and politic events such as the 2018 Romanian Referendum on the general LGBT perspective. We consider investigations such as the present crucial for understanding the extent to which socio-political interests play a role in the everyday life and decision-making for the LGBT communities.

Ethics statement

The protocol of this study was designed in concordance with ethical requirements specific to the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University (Iasi, Romania) before beginning the study and supervised by Alexandra Maftai. All participants voluntarily participated in the study and gave written informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and the national laws from Romania regarding the ethical conduct in scientific research, technological development and innovation.

Author contribution

All of the authors contributed equally to the main goal of the study, analyse the data and write the manuscript.

References:

Adam, B. D. (1998). Theorizing homophobia. *Sexualities, 1*, 387-404.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/136346098001004001>.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

Adams, H. E., Wright, L. W., & Lohr, B. A. (1996). Is homophobia associated with homosexual arousal? *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 105*, 440–445. doi:10.1037/0021-843X.105.3.440.

Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G. V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Mechanisms of moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 364–374. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.71.2.364.

Bernstein, M., Kostelac, C., & Gaarder, E. (2003). Understanding "Heterosexism:" Applying Theories of Racial Prejudice to Homophobia using Data from a Southwestern Police Department. *Race, Gender & Class, 10*(4), 54-74. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41675101>.

Bieber, F. (2018). Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends. *Ethnopolitics, 17*(5), 519-540. DOI: 10.1080/17449057.2018.1532633.

Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss. Vol. 2: Separation: anxiety and anger*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Brañas-Garza, P., Bucheli, M., Espinosa, M.P. & Muñoz, T. (2013). Moral Cleansing and Moral Licenses: experimental evidence. *Economics and Philosophy, 29*, 199-212. 10.1017/S0266267113000199.

Bremmer, I. (2017). The wave to come. Retrieved from <https://time.com/4775441/the-wave-to-come/>.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

Bushman, B.J., Ridge, R. D., Das, E., Key, C. W., & Busath, G. L. (2007). When God Sanctions Killing: Effect of Scriptural Violence on Aggression. *Psychological Science, 18*(3), 204 – 207. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9280.2007.01873.x.

Ciocca, G., Tuziak, B., Limoncin, E., Mollaioli, D., Capuano, N., Martini, A., Carosa, E., Fisher, A.D., Maggi, M., Niolu, C., Siracusano, A., Lenzi, A., & Jannini, E.A. (2015). Psychoticism, immature defense mechanisms and a fearful attachment style are associated with a higher homophobic attitude. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine, 12*, 1953–1960. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jsm.12975>.

Chaux, E., & Leon, M. (2016). Homophobic Attitudes and Associated Factors Among Adolescents: A Comparison of Six Latin American Countries. *Journal of Homosexuality, 63*(9), 1253-1276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1151697>.

Coakes S. J. SPSS (2005). *Analysis without anguish: Version 12.0 for Windows*. Queensland, Australia: Wiley.

Collins, N. L., & Read, S. J. (1990). Adult attachment, working models, and relationship quality in dating couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*(4), 644-663. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.58.4.644>.

Collins, N. L. (1996). Working models of attachment: Implications for explanation, emotion, and behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 810-832.

Crossman, A. (2018). *Convenience Samples for Research*. ThoughtCo. Retrieved from <http://www.thoughtco.com/convenience-sampling-3026726>.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

- Joseph, S. & DiDuca, D. (2007). The Dimensions of Religiosity Scale: 20-item self-report measure of religious preoccupation, guidance, conviction, and emotional involvement. *Mental Health Religion & Culture Religion & Culture*, 6, 603-608. DOI: 10.1080/13674670601050295.
- Etikan, I. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5, 1-10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11.
- Finlay, B., & Walther, C. (2003). The Relation of Religious Affiliation, Service Attendance, and Other Factors to Homophobic Attitudes Among University Students. *Review of Religious Research*, 44(4), 370-393. DOI: 10.2307/3512216.
- Genia, V. (1997). The Spiritual Experience Index: Revision and Reformulation. *Review of Religious Research*, 38, 344. 10.2307/3512195.
- Gormley, B., & Lopez, F. G. (2010). Psychological abuse perpetration in college dating relationships: Contributions of gender, stress, and adult attachment orientations. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 25(2), 204-218. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0886260509334404>.
- Gormley, B., & Lopez, F.G. (2010). Authoritarian and Homophobic Attitudes: Gender and Adult Attachment Style Differences. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57(4), 525-538. DOI: 10.1080/00918361003608715.
- Hair, J.F.J., Black, W., Babin, B., Anderson, R., & Tatham, R.L. (2006). Multivariate Data Analysis. *Technometrics* 31(3).
- Hayes, B. C. (1995). Religious identification and moral attitudes: The British case. *British Journal of Sociology*, 46, 457-474. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/591851>.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

Herek, G. M. (2004). Beyond “homophobia”: Thinking about sexual prejudice and stigma in the twenty-first century. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy: Journal of NSRC*, 1(2), 6-24.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1525/srsp.2004.1.2.6>.

Herek, G. M., & Gonzalez-Rivera, M. (2006). Attitudes toward homosexuality among U.S. residents of Mexican descent. *Journal of Sex Research*, 43, 122-135. DOI:

10.1080/00224490609552307.

Herek, G. M., Gillis, J. R., & Cogan, J. C. (2015). Internalized stigma among sexual minority adults: Insights from a social psychological perspective. *Stigma and Health*, 1(S), 18–34.

doi:10.1037/2376-6972.1.S.18.

Jäckle, S., & Wenzelburger, G. (2014). Religion, Religiosity and the Attitudes Towards Homosexuality-A Multi-Level Analysis of 79 Countries. *Journal of homosexuality*,

62(2), 207-241. DOI: 10.1080/00918369.2014.969071.

Kelley, J. (2001). Attitudes towards homosexuality in 29 nations. *Australian Social Monitor*, 4(1), 15–24.

Kempe, F. (2018). Populism and nationalism threaten the European project. Retrieved from

<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/10/26/populism-nationalism-threaten-the-european-project.html>.

Khan, S. (2018). Romania referendum: Constitutional ban on same sex-marriage fails due to low

turnout. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/romania-referendum-same-sex-marriage-fail-low-turn-out-a8573471.html>.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

- Lyons, H. Z., Brenner, B. R., & Fassinger, R. E. (2005). A multicultural test of the theory of work adjustment: Investigating the role of heterosexism and person-environment fit in the job satisfaction of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*, 537–548. DOI: 10.1037/0022-0167.52.4.537.
- Matthews, C. R. & Adams, E. M. (2009). Using a Social Justice Approach to Prevent the Mental Health consequences of heterosexism. *Journal of Primary Prevention, 30*, 11-26.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10935-008-0166-4>.
- Nolan C. (2014). Good without god? The Influence of Religion on Altruistic Acts and Moral Disengagement. Dublin: Dublin Business School. (Unpublished Degree Dissertation). Retrieved from <https://esource.dbs.ie/handle/10788/1974> on 6th of November 2018.
- Obermann, M. L. (2011). Moral disengagement in self-reported and peer-nominated school bullying. *Aggressive Behavior, 37*, 133-144.
- O'Donohue, W., & Caselles, C. E. (1993). Homophobia: Conceptual, definitional, and value issues. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment, 15*, 177-195.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF01371377>.
- Ogland, C.P., & Verona, A.P.(2014). Religion and the Rainbow Struggle: Does Religion Factor Into Attitudes Toward Homosexuality and Same-Sex Civil Unions in Brazil? *Journal of Homosexuality, 61*(9), 1334-1349. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2014.926767>.
- Oliver, M.B., & Hyde, J.S. (1993). Gender Differences in Sexuality: A Meta-Analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 114*(1), 29-51.

- Paciello, M., Fida, R., Tramontano, C., Lupinetti, C., & Caprara, G. V. (2008). Stability and change of moral disengagement and its impacts on aggression and violence in late adolescence. *Child Development, 79*, 1288-1309.
- Pallant, J. (2001). *SPSS Survival Manual. A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS for Windows (Version 10)*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Poteat, V. P., Kimmel, M. S., & Wilchins, R. (2011). The moderating effects of support for violence beliefs on masculine norms, aggression, and homophobic behavior during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 21*, 434–447. doi:10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00682.x.
- Poteat, V.P., & Mereish, E.H. (2012). Ideology, Prejudice, and Attitudes Toward Sexual Minority Social Policies and Organizations. *Political Psychology, 33*, 211-224. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00871.x.
- Prati, G. (2012). Development and Psychometric Properties of the Homophobic Bullying Scale. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 72*(4), 649–664. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164412440169>.
- Rivers, I. (2011). *Homophobic bullying: Research and theoretical perspectives*. New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195160536.001.0001>.
- Roggemans, L., Spruyt, B., Droogenbroeck, F. V., & Keppens, G. (2015). Religion and Negative Attitudes towards Homosexuals: An Analysis of Urban Young People and Their Attitudes towards Homosexuality. *YOUNG, 23*(3), 254–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308815586903>.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

- Rubio-Garay, F., Amor, P.J., & Carrasco, M.A. (2017). Dimensionality and psychometric properties of the Spanish version of the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale (MMDS-S). *Revista de Psicopatología y Psicología Clínica*, 22, 43-54. doi: 10.5944/rppc.vol.22.num.1.2017.16014.
- Sandu, D. (2018). *Referendumul pentru familie în spirala nemulțumirii sociale (The Referendum for the family in the spiral of social dissatisfaction)*. Retrieved from: <http://www.contributors.ro/politica-doctrine/referendumul-pentru-familie-in-spirala-nemul%C8%9Bumirii-sociale/>.
- Schwartz, P.J., & Lindley, D.L. (2009). Religious Fundamentalism and Attachment: Prediction of Homophobia. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 15, 145-157. doi: 10.1207/s15327582ijpr1502_3.
- Sedwick, P. (2013). Convenience sampling. *BMJ (online)*. 347. f6304. doi: 10.1136/bmj.f6304.
- Silverschanz, P., Cortina, L. M., Konik, J., & Magley, V. J. (2008). Slurs, Snubs, and Queer Jokes: Incidence and Impact of Heterosexist harassment in Academia. *Sex Roles*, 58, 179-191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9329-7>.
- Smith, N. G., & Ingram, K. M. (2004). Workplace heterosexism and adjustment among lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals: The role of unsupportive social interactions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 51, 57–67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.51.1.57>.
- Smith, I., Oades, L. G. & McCarthy, G. (2012). Homophobia to heterosexism: constructs in need of revisitation. *Gay and Lesbian issues and Psychology Review*, 8(1), 34-44.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

Steffens, M. C., & Wagner, C. (2004). Attitudes toward lesbians, gay men, bisexual women, and bisexual men in Germany. *The Journal of Sex Research, 41*(2), 137–149.

doi:10.1080/00224490409552222.

Stefurak, T., Taylor, C., & Mehta, S. (2010). Gender-specific models of homosexual prejudice: Religiosity, authoritarianism, and gender roles. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 2*(4), 247–261. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021538>.

Stones, C.R. (2006). Antigay prejudice among heterosexual males: right-wing authoritarianism as a stronger predictor than social-dominance orientation and heterosexual identity. *Social Behavior and Personality: an international journal, 34*(9), 1137-1150(14). <https://doi.org/10.2224/sbp.2006.34.9.1137>.

Swaminathan, V., Stilley, K., & Ahluwalia, R. (2009). When Brand Personality Matters: The Moderating Role of Attachment Styles. *Journal of Consumer Research, 35*(6). 985-1002.

Walch, S.E, Orlosky, P.M., Sinkkanen, K.A., & Stevens, H.R. (2010). Demographic and Social Factors Associated with Homophobia and Fear of AIDS in a Community Sample. *Journal of homosexuality, 57*, 310-24. DOI: 10.1080/00918360903489135.

Walt, V. (2019). *How Nationalists Are Joining Together to Tear Europe Apart*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5568322/nationalism-in-europe/>.

Weber, P., & Gredig, D. (2018). Prevalence and predictors of homophobic behavior among high school students in Switzerland. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 30*(2), 128-153. DOI: 10.1080/10538720.2018.1440683.

RUNNING HEAD: Predictors of homophobia

Whitley, B. E. (2001). Gender-role variables and attitudes toward homosexuality. *Sex Roles*, 45(11), 691–721. doi:10.1023/a:1015640318045.

Wright, L. W., Adams, H. E., & Bernat, J. (1999). Development and validation of the Homophobia Scale. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*, 21, 337-347. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13072/midss.149>.

Zauri, S., Ciocca, G., Limoncin, E., Mollaioli, D., Carosa, E., & Jannini, E.A. (2019). Gender differences in the relationships among homophobia, attachment styles? *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 16(5), S74. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsxm.2019.03.237>.

Accepted Manuscript

Authors' short biography:

Alexandra Maftei is a collaborator assistant teacher in the Psychology Department of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, "Alexandru I. Cuza" University, Iasi, Romania. Her areas of research include moral cognition, child development and clinical psychology.

Andrei C. Holman is an Associate Professor in the Psychology Department of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, "Alexandru I. Cuza" University, Iasi, Romania. His areas of research include moral cognition, emotion-cognition interplay, embodied cognition and traffic psychology.

Accepted Manuscript

Table 1. Means, standard deviation and Pearson Correlation matrix for the main variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.88	.323	1	-.018	.076	.096	.010	.005	-.168**	.075
2. Age	21.07	3.32	-.018	1	.044	.082	.161**	-.147*	-.081	.064
3. Spiritual openness	36.79	7.17	.076	.044	1	-.003	.060	-.030	-.082	.329**
4. Spiritual support	43.96	17.28	.096	.082	-.003	1	-.006	.144*	.016	-.489**
5. Attachment avoidance	37.72	6.48	.010	.161**	.060	-.006	1	-.595**	-.204**	.136*
6. Attachment anxiety	15.31	5.91	.005	-.147*	-.030	.144*	-.595**	1	.260**	-.256**
7. Moral disengagement	1.79	.082	-.168**	-.081	-.082	.016	-.204**	.260**	1	-.206**
8. Homophobia	100.43	15.85	.075	.064	.329**	-.489**	.136*	-.256**	-.206**	1

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N=281



Table 2. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables predicting Homophobia (N=281)

Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE(B)</i>	β
Gender	3.74	2.93	.076	3.79	2.85	.07	4.88	2.33	.099*	3.92	2.35	.08
Age	.31	.28	.06	.14	.28	.03	.31	0.22	.06	.29	.22	.06
Avoidance				-.073	.17	-.03	.01	.14	.004	-.008	.144	-.003
Anxiety				-.721	.19	-.26**	-.443	.16	-.165*	-.375	.16	-.14*
Spiritual openness							.688	.10	.31**	.673	.10	.30**
Spiritual support							-.439	.04	-.479**	-.43	.04	-.479**
Moral disengagement										-22.95	9.54	-.119*
R^2		.010			.072			.391			.404	
<i>F</i> for change in R^2		1.38			9.31**			71.68**			5.78*	

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.