

Victor Ciobotaru

## EXPLORING SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES AMONG MEMBERS OF THE LGBT COMMUNITY IN ROMANIA

Ciobotaru Victor

National University of  
Political Science and Public  
Administration, Bucharest

victor\_ciobotaru@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

*In this paper I propose a qualitative exploration of the spiritual and religious identities espoused by members of the LGBT community in Romania using the lenses of queer theory. The spiritual and religious identities of LGBT people, the identities that are the subject of this study, are often denied and ignored by most Christian churches. As I will show in this research, in countries such as Romania, where religion plays an important role, often LGBT people are grown, socialized, and educated in religious families, thus leading to later difficulties in reconciling and integrating spiritual/religious identities with sexual orientation and/or gender identity. 14 members of the LGBT community in Romania, who identify themselves as spiritual and/or religious persons, with different Christian denominational backgrounds (Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist, Adventist, Pentecostal), from diverse social backgrounds, covering a range of ages between 19 and 78 years old, were in-depth interviewed to understand how they relate with religion and spirituality on two levels: the relationship with the church and their personal faith in god/divinity. The research also considers the impact of the climate created by the involvement of the churches in the campaign for the national referendum in 6-7 October 2018, which intended to narrow the definition of family in the Romanian Constitution with the purpose of excluding same sex families from legal recognition and protection.*

*"I would go to church, but I would go when it is empty. (...) Do you know why I don't go to church anymore? I don't go because if the priest and the people who worship there would know that I am trans, they would hate me and reject me. And then, I wouldn't want to be in the same room with those people, even if theoretically I could consider the church to also be a place for me. That's why I prefer to go in, to stay, to be silent, because I understand the role of prayer as meditation and I think it can calm you down in a way, but that's why I choose to go when it's empty and quiet."- Paul, Orthodox Christian, trans person, member of the LGBT community*

### 1. Introduction

The study of identities has been fundamentally changed by the introduction of Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectional perspective. Crenshaw (1989) argued that in order to understand the complexity of a person's relationships with society and to have a clearer picture of the multiple power structures that put pressure on it, the person's identities should not be studied in isolation but together. Intersectionality is the sum of the multiple identities that a person brings together and the effects that occur as a result of experiences generated by different layers of identity as a whole. For many, LGBT identities and religious identities "are so dissimilar as to have no continuity at

### KEYWORDS

- LGBT
- Queer theology
- Homosexuality
- Spirituality
- Religion
- Intersectionality
- Identity
- Queer theory

all” (Comstock & Henking, 1997, p.11). Meanwhile, the intersection between religious and LGBT identities has given rise to rich debate in the literature. In the Romanian context, beyond the passionate debates witnessed in the public space, mostly triggered by sexual scandals that occur in the church or those generated by the citizen’s initiative to amend the constitution, it cannot be said that there are coherent and consistent discussions that have as a starting point local sociological research on this topic.

The identities of LGBT people are denied in various ways: socially, politically, and religiously. At the political level, the denial of LGBT identities is materialized by the non-recognition of the equal rights for LGBT citizens (e.g., the rejection of all legislative initiatives for the adoption of civil partnership, lack of political will in this direction, mainstream parties supporting antigay and anti-gender initiatives etc.). The promotion by various private or public actors of a stigmatizing, homophobic and negative discourse towards the LGBT community, as well as the emergence of attempts with the potential to restrict rights, translates into the denial of identity at the social level. Religiously, the identity of LGBT people is denied by the ignorance/annulment/annihilation of their spiritual and religious identity by the institution of the Church, by clergy and lay members, both practically and through discourse.

The latest example of denying the identity of LGBT persons on all the three levels mentioned previously is the so-called “redefining family referendum” which took place on October 6 and 7, 2018, following a citizen initiative by the Coalition for Family (Coaliția pentru Familie - CpF), a network without legal status, consisting mainly of religious organizations with a fundamentalist ethos (Buhuceanu, 2019). The initiative benefited from the massive support of most Christian denominations, led by the Romanian Orthodox Church, as well as from the support of the main political parties: PSD (Social Democratic Party), PNL (National Liberal Party) and The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats, ALDE, all signed collaboration protocols with the Coalition for Family (Mărgărit, 2020). After intense internal struggles, the only party who opposed the Referendum was Save Romania Union (USR) (Voiculescu, 2017). Religion and politics came together in a virulent campaign against the LGBT community, which lasted for 3 years, from the launch of the signature collection at the end of 2015, to the resounding failure of the referendum in the autumn of 2018.

## 2. Religion and spirituality

Defining religion and spirituality is a difficult but indispensable exercise in this research. Some definitions are general and abstract, which makes it almost impossible to reach a unitary and exhaustive understanding of these terms. Both spirituality and religion are complex, multidimensional, multifaceted phenomena. Any single definition is a limited reflection of the terms, so I will review several perspectives.

Religion and spirituality seem to be interdependent. However, they are not synonymous. Joseph Runzo defined religion as the pursuit of the meaning of life beyond materialism (Runzo, 2001). John Renard described it as adherence to a set of beliefs and teachings about the deepest and most evasive mysteries of life (Renard, 2012). For Rabbi Marc Gellman and Prelate Thomas Hartman, religion is the belief in the existence of divine beings (superhuman or spiritual) and practices (rituals) as well

as the moral (ethical) code that results from this faith (Gellman & Hartman, 2002). Religion refers to a collective tradition that involves a system of beliefs, common practices and standardized experiences as well as teachings related to spirituality that guide the lives of followers. These are shared by members of a religious group (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Canda and Furman, 1999; Davidson, 2000; Koenig, 2009). Religion is generally understood to involve a number of common beliefs and practices. Andrew Yip, who has intersected religion and spirituality in the lives of LGBT people in many of his works, believes that religion refers to ritual practices that collectively bind people to a greater power. One of the most common understandings of religion is that of institutionally organized extrinsic expression of inner spirituality. On the other hand, it can be understood as the opposite of spirituality and criticized for obtuseness, institutionalization, and patriarchal archaism (Yip et al., 2010). Religion includes a religious community and religious practices (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66). Religiosity is usually defined as involvement in the doctrinal, organizational, and institutional dimension of faith-related traditions (Koenig et al., 2012).

While religiosity is understood as involvement in the standardized organization of institutional religious beliefs and practices (Tan, 2005; Stern & Wright, 2017), spirituality is defined as a personal relationship with greater power or an intrinsic belief that motivates behaviors, providing meaning and purpose of the individual (Hill et al., 2001; Hodge, 2003; Stern & Wright, 2017). Spirituality encompasses individual beliefs, practices, and subjective experiences in relation to transcendence (Aldwin et al., 2014; Allen & Lo, 2010). Spirituality refers to the sense of meaning, purpose and morality that individuals involve in their lives. It includes individual, internalized aspects of faith and belief systems (e.g., prayer: Yip, 2003). Without focusing on the institutional component, spirituality is more self-defined, with an emphasis on individual self-relationships, the sacred, transcendence, and the purpose of life. (Blazer, 2009; Hill & Pargament, 2008; Koenig et al., 2001; Koenig, 2004; Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Chally & Carlson, 2004). In other words, it can be said that spirituality is personal and subjective, while religiosity is social and institutional. Of course, spirituality can exist both inside and outside a religious setting.

Hodge and McGrew (2006) found that a significant percentage of the population consider spirituality and religiosity to be minimally or completely independent. Many individuals identify as spiritual, but not religious, while far fewer consider themselves religious but non-spiritual (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). People who are religious can also be spiritual. Religion can generate a high level of spiritual well-being (Buchanan et al., 2001; Canda & Furman, 1999; Davidson, 2000). In the general literature on spirituality and religion, the authors noted the connection of these terms (Hill et al., 2000; Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 1999). In particular, religion and spirituality can share a common ground: belief in divinity, a reality, or an ultimate truth perceived by individuals. (Hill et al., 2000, p. 66).

Because spirituality is often linked to religion, one might expect many gay men and many lesbian women to have no inclination toward spirituality. While the concepts of religiosity (affiliated with an organized religion) and spirituality (a relationship with greater power) are often, in real life, difficult to differentiate from one another, for LGBT individuals, the distinction seems to be important. Aspects of spirituality that

are independent of religiosity are correlated with the positive results of identity, while aspects of religiosity that are independent of spirituality are related to negative ones (Stern & Wright, 2017). Some studies suggest that religiosity is generally lower among sexual minorities than the heterosexual majority, with the most notable differences being in women (Rostosky et al., 2008; Sherkat, 2002). People in the LGBT community adopt spiritual rather than religious identities (Eliason et al., 2011; Halkitis et al., 2009). The embrace of spirituality may be greater among LGBT people compared to heterosexual people (Eliason et al., 2011).

### *Religious homophobia*

Most mass monotheistic Western religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) have a negative stance toward any form of homosexuality, categorically condemning attraction between people of the same gender (Boswell, 1980; Haldeman, 1996). These religions have oppressed, denied, and opposed the sexuality of gay and lesbian people (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Davidson, 2000). Throughout history, Christian teachings about sexuality and marriage have excluded homosexuality (Robinson, 1999; Adamczyk and Pitt, 2009), characterizing it as a form of depravity, a disorder, unscrupulous, degenerative, aberrant, and against the will of God (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Bellis and Hufford, 2002; Levy, 2009), causing most followers to tend to categorize homosexual behaviors as “unnatural,” “wicked,” and “impure” (Yip, 2005).

Starting from the interpretation and instrumentalization of six specific biblical passages, three from the Old Testament and another three from the New Testament (Genesis 19: 1-28, Leviticus, 18:22, 20:13 - Romans 1: 26,27, I Corinthians, 6: 9, I Timothy 1:10), Christian doctrine has categorized homosexuality as something totally forbidden, “unnatural,” a “perversion,” and an “abomination in the sight of God.” (Scanzoni & Mollenkott, 1978; Keysor, 1979; Boswell, 1980; Clark et al., 1989; Brooke, 1993; Appleby, 1995; Locke, 2005; Rodriguez, 2010; Moon, 2014). Most Christian denominations define homosexuality as immoral, sinful, or less desirable than heterosexuality. Therefore, homosexual and Christian identities are supposed to be incompatible - you cannot be a good Christian and homosexual at the same time (Comstock, 1996; Rodriguez, 2010; Wilcox, 2003).

Although there is no explicit reference to condemnation in the Bible against transgender people, the heteronormative view of Christianity rejects their identity, starting from the interpretation of the exclusive gender binary according to which “God created man and woman” (only). Trans persons do not conform to heteronormative gender expectations. The only accepted gender is the one corresponding to the sex attributed by birth. The subject of trans identity has emerged more recently than that of sexual orientation.

### **3. The Romanian Context**

Romania’s population is eminently religious, as evidenced by most surveys conducted after the 90s. The most recent study of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation (FES, 2018) based on data collected at European and national level, showed that 99.6% of Romanian citizens said they belong to a religion, 95% believe in

God, 89% self -consider religious (89%), 44% say they pray daily, and 33% consider themselves “religious practitioners”. 67% of Romanians agreed with the statement: “Homosexuality must be discouraged by society”. These results, that show that Romania is one of the most religious countries in Europe, are also confirmed by studies at European level (Pew Research Institute, Oct. 2018a). Among other predominantly orthodox European countries, the Romanian Orthodox Church seems to have one of the greatest influences on citizens’ attitudes towards homosexuality, regardless of their degree of religious involvement. (Spina, 2016; Takacs, 2019). The IRES survey on discrimination, made public in early 2019, showed that 74% of Romanians did not trust homosexuals, and 59% would not have accepted a gay person as their relative. (IRES, 2018)

However, the Romanian Orthodox Church, the main church in the country, has a long history of oppressing gay identities and opposing gay rights. After the 1990s started the debates on the abrogation of Article 200, the law which was sending gay people in prison. In this context, the main pressure agent to maintain anti-gay legislation was the Orthodox Church, opposing the elimination of imprisonment for homosexual citizens. The Orthodox Church proved to be the most vocal institution ostracizing homosexuals, vehemently opposing the decriminalization of homosexuality, using both official positions and through subordinate religious organizations, to conduct public protests, to send open letters to political establishment and to have public discourses condemning and portraying gay people as a threat to the public morality (Ciobotaru, 2017). Florin Buhuceanu in *Homoistorii* (2016) considers that the vehement opposition shown by the Romanian Orthodox Church and the deployment of forces around the repeal of Article 200, was “disproportionate to the size and visibility of sexual minorities in Romania”. As Liliana Popescu remarks, for no other subject has the Romanian Orthodox Church ever led a crusade similar to the one against gay people, highlighting the double standard practiced by the church in dealing with heterosexuality and homosexuality among parishioners (Popescu, 2004).

In 2015, The Coalition for the Family, a conglomerate of organizations with a religious ethos, including many organizations that in the 1990s opposed the abolition of Article 200, (ASCOR, ProVita, Christiana), having massive support of the Orthodox Church and other churches, gathered and submitted almost 3 million of signatures in favor of changing the definition of the family in the Romanian Constitution through a national referendum. The restrictive change of the definition of the family as the result of „marriage between a man and a woman”, was meant to exclude gay couples from legal family rights. During the referendum campaign, that lasted over 3 years, the homophobic discourse on the religious field was brought to the national scale in the public space fueling prejudices against LGBT people on various media channels, by launching forceful messages (B1 TV, 14.09.2018). Throughout this period, religious leaders, representatives of various denominations, in the name of religious freedom and “traditional values” competed in statements against LGBT people and constantly launched homophobic and heteronormative messages targeting people belonging to the LGBT community, their families and single parents, trying to convince population that the participation at the referendum is a *test for Christianity*. (Agerpress, 19.09.2018)

The Augustinian Evangelical Church did not support the referendum to

amend the Constitution in October 2018. Bishop Reinhart Guib, vicar bishop Daniel Zikeli and Friedrich Philippi, the curator of the General Church presented a series of arguments against the referendum:

“Marriage is not contested and should not be defended. Not even the referendum will bring any substantial change. (...) We uphold faith in God, freedom and tolerance of minorities. (...) A referendum that is initiated by a dictatorial and destructive power and that violates the most basic democratic values and human dignity cannot be sustained. (...)” (Official site of the Augustinian Evangelical Church, BECAR, 02.10.2018)

Even if the referendum failed, not reaching the required 30% validation threshold, the effects of the 3 years of continuous public campaign with high potential for toxicity on society and individuals are difficult to quantify in the long run. This referendum is a clear example that LGBT persons were subjected to policies meant to restrict rights as a result of the cooperation between religious organizations, churches and political parties. Given this, research on how Romanian LGBT people relate to religion is even more relevant.

#### 4. The purpose of the study, research questions and theoretical perspective

The purpose of this research is to explore the spiritual and/or religious identities that exist within the LGBT community in Romania, starting from the experiences of 14 interviewees with different religious backgrounds belonging to Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, and Seventh Day Adventist churches. The intersectional approach encompassing gender identity/sexual orientation and spiritual-religious beliefs offers a more complex understanding of how LGBT people relate to religion and spirituality.

The main research question the study aims to answer is: *How do LGBT people in Romania relate to religion and/or spirituality in terms of their relationship with the church and their faith in God/divinity?* Tangentially, I also aim to find out how this relationship was influenced by the involvement of the churches in the antigay Referendum to amend the Constitution in October 6-7, 2018?<sup>[1]</sup>

In accomplishing this, I will use the lenses of queer theory (Gamson, 2000; Watson, 2005). Queer theory is commonly used to explore the lives, experiences, and identities of LGBT people, focusing on the relation between issues listed above and the heteronormative forces operating in the field of institutionalized religion.

---

1 To ensure academic integrity, I want to present the intentions I originally had when initiating this research. The choice of the topic was driven by personal concern directly connected to my own identity. Until the age of 24, as a theology student, I lived in a conservative-religious environment that shaped and influenced my perception of myself as a gay person with a Christian identity. However, I believe my personal experience and related theological studies are an asset in addressing the issue at hand. I am fully aware of the possibility that my perspective may be subjective, but I endeavor to approach the issue using an impersonal, sociological lens. I consider the current approach necessary because the diversity in spiritual and religious experiences and identities specific to members of the Romanian LGBT community is most often ignored, a fact that leads to a fractured understanding of the way these individuals relate to religious institutions and to religious belief in general. Therefore, the motivational engine behind this research is the desire to shed light on specific experiences that are not part of mainstream discourse with the purpose of rejecting the perceived opposition between religious/spiritual and LGBT identities.

### *Methodology*

The present research carried out through a qualitative method that allows access to the spiritual and religious experiences of people belonging to the LGBT community. The method consists of conducting in-depth interviews on the topic at hand and analyzing them in order to understand the relationship with the church and the relationship with divinity of the people participating in the study. The in-depth interviews covered several topics: family background, religious and spiritual experiences during primary socialization, the moment of awareness of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, the relationship with the church and the relationship with God and their evolution over time, the impact of the so-called “referendum for the family” on the relationship with the church, the personal vision of church reform.

Some of the interviews took place at the headquarters of the ACCEPT Association (The national LGBTI Rights Organization in Romania). Another part of the interviews was conducted in several places in Bucharest, established by mutual agreement with the interviewees, depending on their availability. Two interviews were offered online. The duration of the interviews varies from a quarter of an hour to two hours, most of them lasting about an hour. I started the interviews in April 2018, and I finished them in March 2019. The information collected was analyzed according to the method of thematic analysis.

### *Participants*

For the selection of participants, I used the snowball method starting from initial recommendations made by the Accept Association, and also by ECPI (Euro-regional Center for Public Initiatives, another local human rights organization). While conducting the interviews I tried to cover several religious affiliations and a diverse spectrum of sexual orientations (gay, lesbian, bisexual) and gender identities (cis women and men, trans women and men, gender fluid people). The age range is between 19 and 78 years. To protect the identity of the persons, I coded their real names, using pseudonyms, according to the data systematized in the following table:

Table 1: List of participants

No	Name	Gender	Sexual orientation	Religious Background	Area	Age
1	Ianis	Cis man	Gay	Seventh Day Adventist	Urban	29
2	Paul	Trans man	Heterosexual	Orthodox	Urban	34
3	Adina	Cis woman	Lesbian	Orthodox	Urban	31
4	Alina	Trans woman	Bisexual	Orthodox	Urban	32
5	Doru	Cis man	Gay	Catholic	Urban	79
6	Y	Gender Fluid	Bisexual	Orthodox	Urban	43

No	Name	Gender	Sexual orientation	Religious Background	Area	Age
7	Felix	Cis man	Gay	Orthodox	Urban	47
8	Gabriel	Cis man	Gay	Orthodox	Urban	34
9	Narcis	Cis man	Bisexual	Baptist	Urban	30
10	X	Cis woman	Lesbian	Orth/Cath/Jewish	Urban	31
11	Sergiu	Trans man	Gay	Pentecostal	Urban	33
12	Cristian	Cis man	Gay	Orthodox	Urban	52
13	Andrei	Cis man	Gay	Catholic	Urban	19
14	Ioana	Cis woman	Lesbian	Orthodox	Urban	45

## 5. Results

### *Religious background, role models and personal interest*

LGBT people interviewed in this research reported that they were born and grown in families whose members had varying degrees of religiosity: from non-practicing believers to fervent practitioners. Most people first came into contact with the church and the idea of God through childhood experiences during primary socialization. Family experiences have contributed to the formation of religious and/or spiritual identity without having a major defining role. Roberts (1989) considered that the image of God, the relationship with the church and spirituality are largely influenced by the primary religious socialization within the family or at church.

*“Yes, I come from a religious family. Mom, Dad, and my brother. Since I was a child, because we were members of the Adventist church, automatically we as children, we were taught as such.” (Ianis)*

*“I grew up in a rather religious family, especially the older generation, my great-grandfather was a priest, he helped build the church in the village I grew up.” (Paul)*

*“I was born into an Orthodox but non-practicing Christian family”. (Narcis)*

*“My family was not religious; we were not preoccupied with going to church. We had no contact with the church.” (Sergiu)*

*“For me, the religious experience began in 1990 - I met a neo-Protestant community in which I felt a warmth of solidarity between members that impressed me. Later, I began to read theology - rather out of curiosity, then it became a cultural and spiritual need.” (Felix)*

Most LGBT people participating in this study identified at least one prominent figure who accompanied and guided their primary religious experiences. Whether



they were born in a religious or a less religious environment, at one point there was a mentor who passed on a set of religious values to them, dealing especially with education in the Christian spirit, instructing them in a series of rituals. These mentors are the actors who have substantially influenced the foundations of their past and / or current spiritual and religious identity. The identified spiritual mentor is most often a family member: mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, uncle. There are also cases in which the mentor was a spiritual leader in the community: the priest or a collective mentor: the community of faith as a whole. The role of the mentor in shaping religious identities, for both LGBT and heterosexual people, has been captured by other researchers and attributed mainly to female family figures: mothers or other female relatives (grandmothers) - (similar results are found in Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000).

In addition to the elements presented above: religious experiences in primary socialization, family education and the role of the mentor in building spiritual and / or religious identity, LGBT interviewees discussed another important aspect: spirituality as an intrinsic part of their personality. The positive response to external religious and spiritual stimuli comes as a result of inner inclination, personal interest in this area of life. Their spiritual and/or religious identity is not only perceived as a socio-cultural construct, a result of experiences and interaction with other people and the religious environment, but is also a fundamental inner characteristic of their personality, which is part of them and cannot be simply ignored or removed.

“It is the result of my mother but also *the faith inside us. We found our way to religious things*”. (Cristian)

“*That’s probably how I was built, that’s how I feel. This spiritual side is very important because I feel that I can develop as a person only by being mentally and emotionally stable. And it matters to me.*” (Andrei)

### *The coming out experience*

Most of the interviewees went through the experience of coming-out at different moments of life, at different social levels: towards themselves (the moment of actual awareness), towards family, friends or the faith community. *Coming-out is the process by which an LGBT person voluntarily assumes their sexual orientation and/ or gender identity towards other people.*

The process of awareness and acceptance of sexual orientation and / or gender identity within the existing religious context differs from individual to individual. The moment they became aware that their sexual orientation is different from the majority, some people automatically ignored, through their own mechanism, those dogmas that condemned them. Another type of reaction encountered is compartmentalization – the strategy of keeping two conflicting identities separate as a way to reduce/avoid identity conflict or using the explanation of Rodriguez & Ouellette (2000): “*keeping their religion out of the homosexual parts of their lives and keeping their homosexuality out of their religious lives.*”

For most people, awareness of sexual orientation that conflicts with the

church's teachings about sexuality has generated bad experiences and feelings of guilt. The conflict felt between the two identities was accentuated because of negative reactions and rejection received from the religious area. But this conflict only affected the institutional relationship with the church and not the relationship with God. On the contrary, the relationship with God became central, being an element that helped them reconcile the two identities. Following this process, the transition is made to a rather spiritual identity, to the detriment of a religious identity.

“When I was 17, I realized that I am a lesbian woman. I fell in love with a woman, for the first time in my life, luckily, I started a relationship with her, a relationship that lasted 5 years and was very, very beautiful. ... So, for me constantly, including today: *faith means love*. (...) *My faith remains unshaken by the fact that I have a different sexual orientation than the one embraced by the Orthodox Church, because I was never interested in what sexual orientation the church embraces, or what it imposes.*” (Adina)

“I’ve always felt that if there’s anyone to do this, it’s people and people’s interpretation of God, not God per se. That kept me a spiritual man and respectful of all religions, that’s why I still believe in a force that is beyond us and in an energy that we can’t fully explain.” (Paul)

“At Taize I saw a monk and I went shyly and said, “I would like to talk to you.” “Say Son.” “Well, look, I like boys.” He said, “Son, this is a blessing. It is the mystery of God. You are blessed. Enjoy this.” (Gabriel)

“I had years of feeling guilty because I knew my sexual orientation was convicted. (...) I continued to go to church until a priest refused to give me absolution (forgiveness for the confessed sins). And I haven’t been since then.” (Doru)

“I knew that the church does not accept it, that God does not accept it... And then I stopped praying, and studying the bible, because somehow it seemed to me that I was a hypocrite. (...) I had to give up something. That’s what I thought at the time.” (Ianis)

### *The relationship with God and the image of God*

The relationship with God is defined by the subjects interviewed in relation to the meaning of life, life balance, the afterlife and ensuring the continuity of existence.

“*Since I am out, I have a better relationship with God and a much more beautiful, untiring spiritual life. It’s not like standing in front of God and sitting with a sentence on your back. There is nothing wrong with me, (...) you can’t wake up the next day and say I’m not in a relationship with God anymore. It’s part of me, it’s not like... for me to give up God tomorrow is like saying tomorrow I’m not gay anymore.*” (Narcis)

“I do not think that the importance of faith in God has changed for me, on the contrary it seems to me that it has become more mature since I rethought the institutional relations with the Church.” (Felix)

The relationship with God is closely related to the image that LGBT people in this study have about God. The way God is seen influences and is strongly connected to the way they relate to Him. One can observe an evolution in time of the image of God, from the image they use to have during childhood to the current image they have, just as one can observe at the same time an evolution of the relationship with the divinity, becoming mature and balanced.

For many of the participants, God is associated with love, an idea found in other studies as well (Gross and Yip, 2010; Wilcox, 2003). God is an energy (common, creative, connecting people), omnipresent. There is no differentiation - God is the same for everyone, a universal God, regardless of people's religious beliefs. God is a guarantee for the afterlife, a source of peace and an element of overcoming stress or an external entity that provides guidance in daily decisions or key moments in life. At the same time, we can speak of God as a moral lens of relationship with the self and those around us. The image of God is closely linked to the same principle of love.

“Until the age of 10, God was for me, like for many other children, I think, *the beneficent old man with a white beard, who comforted me when I was sad or troubled*. Later, during adolescence, I became aware of the meaning and scope of the Christian approach. (...) For me, faith and culture are two facets of the spiritual dimension of a person.” (Ioana)

“*I never saw God anthropomorphically*, I never thought about the old man with the beard.... So, for me, God is the Father and Jesus is the message.” (Gabriel)

Light. I looked at the sun, I closed my eyes, and I imagined God more beautiful than the sun as a deity.” (Narcis)

“I believe that there is *a common energy, a creative energy in all, which we all access and have a part of divinity*.” (X)

“I believe in a God of Balance who is omnipresent. I don't think I can find him anywhere.” (Adina)

“It is the same for everyone, whatever their religion.” (Cristian)

“God is Love.” Andrei

### *The relationship with the church, with rituals and practices*

For most interviewees, the relationship with the church occupies a secondary place, acknowledging that they attend it occasionally, only on certain occasions. For some LGBT people in this study, the relationship with the church is found only in the community dimension, through the social relationships that are maintained with

certain friends, members of the same church. LGBT Christians step on the doorstep of churches for spiritual connection, meditation, prayer, or performing rituals with personal significance and importance, such as lighting a candle. An ecumenical openness can be noticed among all the interviewees, regardless of the religious background. There is no exclusive preference for a certain church to satisfy the need for spiritual reconnection. In their vision, it does not matter which church they enter, because the space has the same purpose.

“I no longer have any relationship with the church, the only relationship is when I still miss this communion that I find in prayer and worship - then I go. But I go very randomly to the Baptist churches in Bucharest.” (Narcis)

“My relationship with the Orthodox Church is under the sign of distance and hostility with which it treats its own LGBTI believers. ... I sometimes participate in various public religious events in *various churches*.” (Felix)

“My relationship with the church is more of a cultural one.” (Alina)

*“I go to church when I’m stressed, here at the church on the corner and I sit and think, I watch. I prefer it to be quiet and to smell of incense... For the sacred space. I think some of the things on the spirituality side are important: once the ritual, then the sacred space, that is, the space emptied of everyday energy. The church does not matter may it be Orthodox, or Catholic, it can also be a mosque.”* (X)

“I go to church weekly or whenever I have the opportunity. I go through all this Christian rite, I worship and pray to God, to the saints. It works for me. It’s where I gather my thoughts.” (Andrei)

*“I have the feeling that I can’t go back to my church, because I don’t meet their ‘standards’.* I tried to associate with other churches, only, I had the feeling that I was betraying mine.” (Y)

“I don’t go to the Orthodox church anymore, but *I go to a religious support group at ACCEPT. I went to the Catholic church and I prayed, I also went to the Protestant church. I admit that I did not pray in the synagogue or in the mosque, but I went inside and I consider it to be the same God.*” (X)

LGBT people who have reconciled sexual orientation and / or gender identity, and religious identity, include in their personal practice a number of rituals. Some of these rituals are reminiscent of childhood. These rituals are practiced daily (prayer, meditation - the retrospective of the day, -I fall asleep thinking of God,) or occasionally (the ritual of sharing food, almsgiving, lighting a candle, not washing clothes on Sundays, fasting, etc.). Personal rituals are important for the manifestation and expression of spirituality.

“*The personal ritual became more important*, however, probably as an effect of the considerable weakening of the institutional one.” (Felix)

“In the morning when I wake up, for example, I go I do my morning prayer, I light a candle, I pray for my family...” (Cristian)

### *Spiritual rather than religious*

Most participants in this study identify themselves as spiritual people rather than as religious people. Even people who maintain a certain institutional connection with the church, through occasional participation in collective rituals, prefer to speak of themselves as spiritual persons. Religious identity has a rather negative connotation.

“*I define myself as a spiritual person.*” (X)

“*I am a spiritual person.*” (Felix)

“*I consider myself a spiritual person.*” (Ioana)

### *How was your relationship with the church affected by the involvement in the antigay referendum?*

The church’s involvement in the referendum to redefine the constitution has had negative effects on its relationship with LGBT people, stirring up wounds and arousing feelings of disappointment and disapproval. In the opinion of most participants in the study, the church should accept all parishioners, respect the principle of separation of powers in the state and focus on its philanthropic and pastoral mission, not get involved in political activities.

“*I was extremely disappointed.* (...) Since then, I’ve gone to church very rarely...” (Narcissus)

“*The church should not get involved.* The church should see that they are God’s messengers. That’s what they should do. To take all people as they are. And those who go. And those who do not go. It must be the same for everyone. *That is what the church should do, not get involved in politics.*” (Cristian)

“*It changed my opinion in a negative way.* I believe that they should love their neighbor, to accept them as they are, not to plot against others. ... *The church should not get involved in such endeavors because the state is a secular one, there is a separation of powers between church and state.*” (Alina)

### *Church reform*

In the view of the interviewees, the reform of the Church should include, in addition to changing the attitude towards LGBT people, through the adoption of inclusive pastoral care, a reform on the status of women.

“*To take care of everyone, to shepherd everyone, not to go and divide.*” (Christian)

“*To accept gay people.*” (Narcissus)

“It seems wrong to me that the priest thinks he is God’s messenger on earth, and this creates an unequal relationship between the priest and the rest of the community. I would like them to stop preaching hatred towards others but to preach love in the sense of acceptance and tolerance, because there are also different people not only as gender, sexual orientation, but also as ethnicity, race. *I know it may be more radical, but I would also like women to be included in more church services, ordinances, maybe even to become priests.*” (X)

“What I feel deeply as *an urgent need is the rethinking of a pastoral relationship between the Church and its LGBTI members*, a near-impossibility at this time given the demonization and transformation into an enemy of those like me.” (Felix)

“I would be very happy if any church would *talk openly about this (homosexuality)*. In relation to the Orthodox Church, which is most present in our space, I think I would become more willing to look at it, listen to it, perceive it as presence if it really took on a philanthropic mission beyond any acceptance of the LGBTIQ community. For me, the institution of the Orthodox Church does not exist as long as it does not assume a *philanthropic mission* first on the list. I think this should be the first mission of any church in this world.” (Adina)

## 6. Conclusions

The present research builds upon the results of many previous studies (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Haldeman, 1996; Davidson, 2000; Wilcox, 2003; Yipp, etc.), showing that spiritual and/or religious identity is perceived to be an important component of the personality of many members of the LGBT community. Despite the dominant religious discourse in Romanian society that excludes the possibility of coexistence of both LGBT and religious-spiritual identities, the LGBT people interviewed managed to individually build their own progressive alternative discourse (adapted to the local conservative context), which allows them to integrate both aspects of their identities. Most people who have become aware of a conflict between religion/spirituality and sexual orientation/gender identity, following a self-reflective process, have passed oppressive biblical passages and incriminating teachings through their own filter, reinterpreting them, to create a reconciling space where all the defining elements of their own identities can coexist. Rodriguez (2010) described the process of moving from the traditional interpretation of verses with homophobic potential, found in many LGBT people as “an extension of Christian principles of love and respect for

all” and challenging the relevance of these passages to today’s society (pp. 14).

Thus, LGBT spiritual and religious people, without having theological studies, can be called creators of queer theology for personal use, producing a reform at the micro level, which has an essential role in helping them integrate their identities. Queer theology, as defined by Lisa Isherwood and Marcela Althaus (2004), is “first-person theology”, an autobiographical form that brings to the fore those experiences that have traditionally been silenced in theology (in this case, experiences of LGBT people). What I have identified as the process of creating queer theology for personal use probably corresponds to Savastano’s (2007) “art of bricolage”, specific to LGBT people found in the “spiritual diaspora”.

The relationship to divinity has at its center a characteristic considered by many LGBT Christians as a fundamental quality of God: equal, unconditional, and non-discriminatory love for all people. The definition of God, common to most visions present in the interviews collected in this research, can be concentrated in three words: *God is love*. The direct personal relationship with the divinity prioritizes and transcends the traditional teachings of the church. LGBT people in this study prefer to define themselves as spiritual rather than religious, religion predominantly having a negative, institutional charge, a perception shaped by negative experiences with members or clergy who rejected them. However, positive experiences were (much less) also reported. The spiritual component is far more powerful, recognized as an integral part of the personality. Spirituality is part of the identity of LGBT people, as is sexual orientation and gender identity. The spirituality of the LGBT people interviewed is not dependent on the relationship with the church and is open to new perspectives.

The relationship between LGBT persons and the church is secondary, limited to a minimal social, cultural and spatial role, without occupying an essential place in the intermediation of the relationship with the divinity and the development of personal spirituality. The space of the church is seen as a territory of disconnection from the profane daily life, being assigned a certain sacredness through the symbolic load it carries. In the view of the participants in the study, the reformation of the church should include, in addition to a change in attitude towards LGBT people - materialized by adopting inclusive pastoral care – a change in the current approach to the status of women in the church.

Despite the fact that LGBT people in Romania often live in environments that force/push them to choose between religious and spiritual identity, this research reveals that they retain their individuality, finding their own specific ways of maintaining spiritual feelings. Each interviewee has their own narrative about the process by which they accepted their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and how they managed to reconcile it with the spiritual-religious beliefs in the specific religious context in which they find themselves. A person can be gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans and can maintain, at the same time, despite the rejection and disappointment often experienced, an open relationship with the church - the institutionalized form of religion - on various channels that have personal symbolic value and a religious charge that offers comfort and spiritual satisfaction. This research confirms that LGBT identities and conventional spirituality can coexist and do coexist in Romania, as they can be found in every culture and every era.

The integration of spiritual-religious and LGBT identities is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, with vital implications for LGBT people participating in this study, requiring further in-depth research. For future studies I consider it necessary to extend the area of approach to other types of spirituality than the Christian one. Also, a comparative study of spiritual and religious identities in the Romanian context, among the heterosexual population and the LGBT community - would show what the differences and similarities are in relation to church and divinity.

In a society like the Romanian one, where homophobia is largely fed on a fundamentalist religious path, the results of this study and other future studies on the intersectionality of the two identities, have the potential to lead to a change of perspective. It could open up an honest, passion-free dialogue between the two camps: the LGBT community and the church. The Church should become aware that through an explicitly hostile attitude toward LGBT members, it contributes to their removal, thus failing in its mission to serve the spiritual needs of all people in accordance with the non-discriminatory principle of Christian love. Also, this study can be used to combat hate speech, used by fundamentalist groups, which antagonistically present LGBT people as threats to Christian values and enemies of the church, fueling homophobic feelings among the population. By initiating debates based on this study, or similar studies, which present the existence of LGBT believers as an integral part of the church, it is possible to generate a change of mentality that leads, in time, to the understanding that the church must be a welcoming environment that addresses the spiritual needs of all members, including LGBT people.

Approaches like this dismantle the monopoly held by the perception that LGBT people are placed outside the religious/spiritual sphere of traditional Christian values by showing that they could be an integral part of it.

## References

Adamczyk, A., Pitt, C. (2009). Shaping Attitudes About Homosexuality: The Role of Religion and Cultural Context in Social science research. 38. 338-51.

Aldwin, C. M., Park, C. L., Jeong, Y.-J., & Nath, R. (2014). Differing pathways between religiousness, spirituality, and health: A self-regulation perspective. in *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 6(1), 9-21.

Allen, T. M., & Lo, C. C. (2010). Religiosity, spirituality, and substance abuse. in *Journal of Drug Issues*, 40(2), 433-459.

Agerpress. (19.09.2018). Îndemn al Mitropolitului Ardealului pentru participarea la referendum, Available online at <https://www.agerpres.ro/culte/2018/09/19/indemn-al-mitropolitului-ardealului-pentru-participare-la-referendum-hristos-a-binecuvantat-nunta-din-cana-galileii--178718>, Accessed at 12.09.2020



Appleby, G. A. (1995). AIDS and homophobia/heterosexism. in *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 2(3/4), 1-23.

Barret, R., Barzan, R. (1996). Spiritual experiences of gay men and lesbians in *Counseling and Values*, 41(1), 4-15.

Bellis, O.A., Hufford, L.T. (2002). *Science, Scripture, and Homosexuality*, Michigan: Pilgrim Press.

Blazer, D. G. (2009). Religion, spirituality, and mental health: What we know and why this is a tough topic to research? in *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(5), 281–282.

Boswell, J. (1980). *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Brooke, S.L. MS (1993): The Morality of Homosexuality, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 25:4, 77-100.

Buchanan, M., Dzelme, K., Harris, D., & Hecker, L. (2001). Challenge of being simultaneously gay or lesbian and spiritual and/or religious: A narrative perspective. in *American Journal of Family Therapy*, 29(5), 435-449.

Buhuceanu, F. (2016). *Homoistorii, Iesirea din invizibilitate*, Bucharest: Maiko.

Buhuceanu, F. (2018). *Fundamentalism, gender si orientare sexuală. O scurtă introducere*, Bucharest: Maiko.

B1 TV, (14.09.2018). Mitropolitul Ardealului, declarație incalificabilă, Available online at <https://www.b1.ro/stiri/eveniment/mitropolitul-ardealului-despre-homosexuali-240375.html>, Accessed at 05.05.2019.

Canda, E. R., Furman, L. D. (1999). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice*. New York: The Free Press.

Chally, P. S., Carlson, J. M. (2004). Spirituality, rehabilitation and aging: A literature review. in *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*, 85(3), 60–65.

Ciobotaru, V. (2017). *Schimbarea atitudinilor sociale cu privire la homosexualitate în România după anii 1990*, Unpublished paper.

Clark, J. M., Brown, J. C., Hochstein, L. M. (1989). Institutional religion and gay/lesbian oppression. in *Marriage & Family Review*, 14(3-4), 265-284.

Comstock, G. D. (1996). *Unrepentant, self-affirming, practicing: Lesbian/gay/bisexual people within organized religion*. New York: Continuum.

Comstock, G.D., Henking, S. E. (1997). *Que(e)ring religion. A critical theology*, New York: Continuum.

Crenshaw, K.() *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989: Iss. 1, Article 8.

Davidson, M. G. (2000). *Religion and spirituality*. in Perez, R. M., DeBord, K. A. Koenig, H. G. (2009). *Research on Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health: A Review*, in *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, Vol 54, No 5.

Doebler, S. (2015). *Relationships between religion and two forms of homonegativity in Europe – A multilevel analysis of effects of believing, belonging and religious practice*. *PLoS ONE* 10(8).

Eliason, M. J., Burke, A., van Olphen, J., & Howell, R. (2011). *Complex interactions of sexual identity, sex/gender, and religious/spiritual identity on substance use among college students*. in *Sexuality Research & Social Policy: A Journal of the NSRC*, 8(2), 117-125.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, *Credinta religioasă în România*, Available online at <https://monitorsocial.ro/indicator/credinta-religioasa-in-romania/>, Accessed at 05.10.2020.

Gamson, J. (2000). *Sexualities, queer theory, and qualitative research*, in Denzin N. K., Lincoln Y. S., (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 347–365). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gellman, M., Hartman, T., (2002). *Religion For Dummies*, Wiley Publishing.

Gross, M., Yip, A.K.T. (2010). *Living spirituality and sexuality: A comparison of lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians in France and Britain*. in *Social Compass*, 57(1), 40–59.

Haldeman, D. C. (1996). *Spirituality and religion in the lives of lesbians and gay men*. in Cabaj R. P., Stein, T. S. (ed.), *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health* (pp. 881-896). Arlington, VA, US: American Psychiatric Association.

Halkitis, P. N., Mattis, J. S., Sahadath, J. K., Massie, D., Ladyzhenskaya, L., Pitrelli, K., Cowie, S. E. (2009). *The meanings and manifestations of religion and spirituality among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adults*. in *Journal of Adult Development*, 16, 250–262.

Hill, P. C., & Pargament, K. I. (2008). *Advances in the conceptualization and measurement of religion and spirituality: Implications for physical and mental health research*. in *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, S(1), 3–17.

Hill, P.C., Pargament, K.I., Wood, R.W., McCullough, M.E., Swyers, J.P., Larson, Zinnbauer, B. (2000). Conceptualizing Religion and Spirituality: Points of Commonality, Points of Departure, in *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 30(1) 51-77.

Hodge, D. R. (2003). The intrinsic spirituality scale: A new six-item instrument for assessing the salience of spirituality as a motivational construct in *Journal of Social Service Research*, 30, 41–61.

Hodge, D.R., McGrew, C. C. (2006). Spirituality, religion, and the interrelationship: A nationally representative study. in *Journal of Social Work Education*, 42(3), 637-654.

IRES, (nov, dec 2018), Sondaj de opinie la nivel national privind nivelul discriminării în România și percepțiile actuale asupra infractiunilor motivate de ură. Available online at [http://www.ires.com.ro/uploads/articole/ires\\_cncd\\_discriminarea-in-romania\\_2018.pdf](http://www.ires.com.ro/uploads/articole/ires_cncd_discriminarea-in-romania_2018.pdf), Accessed at 12.09.2020.

Isherwood L., Althaus R., (2004) Introduction: queering theology, thinking theology and queer theory. in *The sexual Theologian, essays on sex, God and politics*, 2004, New York: T&T Clark International.

Keyser, C.W., (1979). What you should know about homosexuality. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Koenig, H. G. (2004). Religion, spirituality, and medicine: Research findings and implications for clinical practice. in *Southern Medical Journal*, 97, 1194–1200.

Koenig, H. G., King, D. E., & Carson, V. B. (2012). *Handbook of religion and health* (2nd ed.). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.

Levy, D. L. (2009). Gay, lesbian, and queer individuals with a Christian upbringing: Exploring the process of resolving conflict between sexual identity and religious beliefs. in *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 69(08), 282A.

Locke, K.A. (2005). The Bible on Homosexuality, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 48:2, 125-156.

Mărgărit, D. (2020). Democracy and Human Rights. Insurgent conservatism in Romania. Available online at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bukarest/16290-20201021.pdf>, Accessed at 05.09.2020.

Moon, D. (2014). Beyond the Dichotomy: Six Religious Views of Homosexuality, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61:9, 1215-124.

Myers, J. E., Sweeney, T. J., & Witmer, J. M. (2000). The Wheel of Wellness counseling for wellness: A holistic model for treatment planning. in *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78(3), 251-266.

Official site of the Augustinian Evangelical Church, BECAR, (02.10.2018). Cuvântul Prezidiului B.E.C.A.R. la Referendumul din 6-7 octombrie a.c., Available online at <https://www.evangel.ro/ro/noutate/artikel/auf-ein-wort-anstelle-eines-aufrufs>, Accessed at 15.06.2019.

Pargament, K.I. (1999). The psychology of religion and spirituality? Yes and no. in *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 9, 3–16

PEW Research Institute (oct 2018a). How do European countries differ in religious commitment? Available online at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/05/how-do-european-countries-differ-in-religious-commitment/>, Accessed at 7.09.2020.

Popescu, L. (2004). *Politica Sexelor*. Bucharest: Maiko.

Renard, J. (2012). *The Handy Religion Answer Book* (The Handy Answer Book Series), Visible Ink Press.

Robinson, B. A. (1999). Policies of religious groups towards homosexuals and homosexuality. Kingston, Ontario, Canada: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. Retrieved from [www.religioustolerance.org/hom\\_chur2.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_chur2.htm).

Rodriguez, E. M., Ouellette, S. C. (2000a). Gay and lesbian Christians: Homosexual and religious identity integration in the members and participants of a gay-positive church. in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39, 333–347.

Rodriguez, E. M., (2010). At the Intersection of Church and Gay: A Review of the Psychological Research on Gay and Lesbian Christians, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 57:5–38.

Rostosky, S., Danner, F., & Riggle, E. (2008). Religiosity and alcohol use in sexual minority and heterosexual youth and young adults. in *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37(5), 552-563.

Runzo, J. (2001). *Global Philosophy of Religion: A Short Introduction* (Oneworld Short Guides), Oneworld Publications.

Savastano, P. (2007). Gay Men as Virtuosi of the Holy Art of Bricolage and as Tricksters of the Sacred. in *Theology & Sexuality*, 14(1), 9–27.

Scanzoni, L., Mollenkot, V.R. (1978). Is the homosexual my neighbor? Another Christian view. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.

Sherkat, D.E.(2002). Sexuality and religious commitment in the United States: An empirical examination. in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41(2), 313-323.

- Spina, N. (2016). The religious authority of the Orthodox Church and tolerance toward homosexuality. in *Problems of Post-Communism*, 63(1): 37–49.
- Stern, S., Wright, A.J. (2017). Discrete Effects of Religiosity and Spirituality on Gay Identity and Self-Esteem, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65:8, 1071-1092.
- Stern, S., Wright, A.J. (2017). Discrete Effects of Religiosity and Spirituality on Gay Identity and Self-Esteem, in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65:8, 1071-1092.
- Takacs, J., Szalma, I. (2019). Social Attitudes towards Homosexuality in Hungary and Romania: Does the Main Religious Denomination Matter?, In *Intersections. EEJSP* 5(1): 71-99.
- Tan, P.P. (2005). The importance of spirituality among gay and lesbian individuals. in *Journal of Homosexuality*, 49(2), 135–144.
- Voiculescu, L., (14.08.2017). USR a decis: va fi împotriva referendumului inițiat de Coaliția pentru familie, Available online at <https://republica.ro/usr-a-decis-va-fi-impotriva-referendumului-initiat-de-coalitia-pentru-familie-nicusor-dan-ramane-in-afara>, Accessed at 17.08.2020.
- Watson, K. (2005). Queer theory. in *Group Analysis*, 38(1), 67-81.
- Wilcox, M.M. (2003). *Coming out in Christianity: religion, identity, and community*, Indiana University Press.
- Yip, A. K. T. (2003). Sexuality and the Church in *Sexualities* 6(1): 60-4.
- Yip, A. K. T. (2005). Queering Religious Texts: An Exploration of British Non-heterosexual Christians' and Muslims' Strategy of Constructing, in *Sexuality-affirming Hermeneutics. Sociology*, 39(1), 47–65.
- Yip, A. K. T., Browne, K., Sally, R., Burlington, V.T. (2010). *Queer Spiritual Spaces: Sexuality and Sacred Places*. Ashgate.
- Zinnbauer, B. J., Pargament, K. I., Cole, B., Rye, M. S., Butfer, E. M., Belavich, T. G., Kadar, J. L. (1997). Religion and spirituality: Unfuzzifying the fuzzy. in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 549–564.