

Romanian Men's Masculinities in Online Personal Advertisements

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Abstract: The present paper analyses Romanian men's masculinities via a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 380 online personal advertisements posted by men. The case of Romania is particularly interesting for understanding gender relations, since the country has recently experienced the impact of (post-)communism, democratization, and resurging traditionalism. Romanian men's advertisements often express traditional gender relations: men-seeking-women are interested in attractive, less educated partners, while men-seeking-men emphasize discretion. Some men resist such patriarchal standards: men-seeking-women who are highly educated prefer educated women, and some men-seeking-men give out recognizable photos of themselves. Limitations and further research directions are discussed.

Keywords: masculinities, personal advertisements, Internet and sexuality, sexual orientation, Romania.



1. Introduction¹

Research on sexualities in Romania is limited (e.g., Bartoș, Phua, & Avery 2009). Existing research generally focuses on sex and gender differences in attitudes toward family life and social issues (e.g., Bădescu et al 2007). In most cases, studies are based on general opinion polls that include questions on these issues. Alternative sexualities in Romania are still a considerably controversial subject (Bădescu et al 2007; Gallup Organization Romania 2000; INSOMAR 2009). Few studies examine the extent to which sexual orientation influences life choices and transitions in Romania (on homosexuality, see e.g., Spineanu-Dobrotă 2005). However, Romania is an interesting country for such inquiry. Its modernity confronted traditional values in the past few decades, when the country joined the European Union (EU) and went through major socio-economic and political changes.

Focusing on the context of mate selection using personal ads, we follow a well-established line of research projects, and contribute to it by studying a relatively under-examined country (see e.g., Groom & Pennebaker 2005; Kaufman & Phua 2003; Lester & Goggin 1999). Researchers who study mate selection using this data source generally focus on the English-speaking countries, studies on Eastern Europe being rather rare (for Romania, see e.g., Rusu & Bencic 2007). In order to understand mate selection through personals in Romania, we focus both on gender relationships and sexuality. Notwithstanding, any study on men would be incomplete unless we provide some information on gender relations and situate men in a broader and changing context (e.g., Hearn 2009).

2. Masculinity revisited

The concept of masculinity has received much scholarly discussion and has been continually contested and refined (e.g., Connell 2000). For example, Connell (1995) criticizes Brannon's (1976) theory of the "male sex role" for creating an abstract, stylized masculinity to which no one can actually adhere and for its insufficient focus on power relations. The concept of masculinity is

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relational, hierarchical, and multidimensional (Connell 2000). Masculinity belongs to a gender continuum and is different from, but not necessarily opposed to, femininity (e.g., Băban 2000a; Smiler 2004). Masculinity also becomes manifest in different forms. While different versions of masculinity exist, these masculinities have “definite [hierarchical] social relations between them” (Connell 2000: 10). At any given time and location, the social organization of that society and one’s social location within that organization influence which form of masculinity is culturally exalted over others (e.g., Phua 2007). Băban (2000a) identifies at least ten different approaches to understanding masculinity. Many of them are applications of broader theories of gender issues, such as psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, social-learning theory, and feminist critique.

Smiler (2004) argues that recent masculinity research departs from previous inquiry in three respects. First, theories of the 1990s and 2000s presuppose an indefinite number of gender identities, as opposed to earlier dichotomies and postulations of a bipolar continuum (male vs. female). Second, researchers have discarded notions of a unique, biologically essential masculinity in favor of historically constructed masculinities. Third, some recent scholars have argued for a more neutral stand on masculinity than their predecessors: hence, there are no “adequate” scores on questionnaires, and no masculinity is fundamentally better than the other. This underscores the idea that masculinity is a complex, relational concept that cannot be easily represented by numerical means.

3. Romanian men’s masculinity in the context of communism and re-traditionalization

“A masculine man in Western societies is portrayed as a traditional bread-winning man, who is White, physically strong, rugged, manly, and displays the quality of heterosexuality” (Phua 2007: 910). While Romania is not necessarily a Western country, the stereotypic image of a Romanian man is surprisingly similar to the Western version. Romanian men are expected to be different from women (e.g., Gallup Organization Romania 2000). This could extend to choice of professions regarded as masculine, and avoidance of feminine or gay-like behavior. Boys are taught not to cry or express emotions, as this would interfere with rationality and productivity (Băban 2000a). More precisely, men ought to express only such emotions as anger and impatience, while love and fear are tabooed (Brannon 1976). Romanian men negotiate their masculinities in

the context of post-communism, re-traditionalization, “ruralization” (Cîrstocea 2003), and the absence of strong feminist movements in Romania as compared to settings such as the U.S. or Western Europe (Miroiu 1998). Roman (2001) reports that the communist discourse on gender equality was highly hypocritical. While socialism may be programmatically degendering (Cîrstocea 2003), Magyari-Vincze (2005: 203) argues that this is a “false gender neutrality”. According to Cîrstocea (2003: 129), the downfall of totalitarianism was itself no more than a “conservative revolution”, reviving rural traditionalism. Gender equality was much discussed in communist countries, but it never went beyond “the flowery thanks spoken on Women’s Day” (Spencer 1996: 269). Analyzing this issue in the case of post-war Romania, Cîrstocea (2003) points out that communist propaganda abounded in references to the “Soviet liberation of women,” contrasted to “capitalistic slavery,” but Romania’s laws and institutions remained virtually unchanged.

For the last 20 years, these laws and institutions have been described in terms of a transition from a national-communist patriarchy (Roman 2001) to a post-socialist patriarchy (Spencer 1996). Values have been re-traditionalized and cities “ruralized” (Băban 2000b). What in Romania is usually called “the Revolution” was, as far as gender is concerned, a “restoration of the ‘natural order of things’” (Magyari-Vincze 2005: 204). Whatever is deemed part of the natural order of things in a patriarchal system typically puts women at a disadvantage. With patriarchy maintained, women are still having a low participation in decision making: for example, there are few women in government (Roman 2001), and most Romanians would not vote for a female president (Gallup Organization Romania 2000).

Romanian women are less likely to work outside the home and are underpaid when they do (INS 2001; Roman 2001; Spencer 1996). In addition, more than half of adults in Romania believe that men cannot take care of young children, and that there should not be any househusbands (Gallup Organization Romania 2000). At the same time, about 66 percent of interviewees agreed that the husband should earn the money (Gallup Organization Romania). Nevertheless, harsh economic conditions have always made the typical family dependent on women’s labor, a fact prompting Miroiu (1998: 256) to call Romanian society “a patriarchy without ‘fathers’”, that is, without “breadwinners.”

An interview study on Romanian men concluded that they construct motherhood as the natural state for a woman (Băban 2000b). Moreover, social constructions of women's bodies tend to ratify naturalistic and medicalized discourses (see Foucault 1990). When the issue of deliberate childlessness came up, an interviewee explicitly stated that "it must be a disease not to want children; so she [childless women] should get help" (2000b). In the context of this sharp dichotomy, feminism is placed in the field of "hysteria"—one man interviewed in the above study (2000b) argued that only "sexual trauma, frustration" of some women could account for such a political movement. It is worth stressing that "naturalization" is the main tool employed in constructing these views (Băban 2000b; Magyari-Vincze 2005).

According to a recent survey on abortion, half of Romanians are in favor, while the other half are against (Bădescu et al 2007). Men view abortion as much as a democratic right as a necessary evil and a crime; roles as husband and father are constructed in terms of financial support; and men pass on their name to their children, a prospect that grants life meaning (Băban 2000b). This may account for the finding that men are slightly more likely to want (more) children in the future (Gallup Organization Romania, 2000).

A real man is expected to have as much sexual experience as possible (Băban 2000b, 2003). Seventy-six percent of Romanian men admit having had sexual experience before marriage, as opposed to 38% of women (Bădescu et al., 2007), suggesting that premarital sexual behavior is more acceptable for men. Men tend to rationalize risk-taking (Shearer et al 2005), adopting a *carpe diem* attitude: "everything is a risk in life," one man says, and this is actually part of enjoying it (Băban 2000b). Modern contraceptive methods are well-known in Romania, and most men spontaneously mention condoms when asked about the subject. Still, traditional methods are generally preferred (Băban 2000b, 2003; Bădescu et al. 2007), by which we mean such techniques as withdrawal (*coitus interruptus*) and the "rhythm method." Nevertheless, 28% of all sexually active people state they have never used contraception, and about 20% claim they have never heard of it (Bădescu et al. 2007). Romania is among the countries where HIV/AIDS mostly affects men (World Health Organization 2003).

While the natural order of things favor men in many aspects, we should keep in mind three issues. First, relationships are dyadic: whatever happens to one partner, the other will be affected as well. We are not suggesting that experience and impact are the same for both partners, or that one is more important than the other. Instead, we are arguing that research needs to look at the dynamics within a union from the perspective of both partners, while acknowledging the potential power differentials within the couple. After all, when women are oppressed by a patriarchal system, the dynamics and interactions of the couple are affected.

Second, men do not uniformly benefit from a patriarchal system, and their experiences vary by other social statuses such as class, race, and sexuality (Connell 1995). Under this system, particular formulations of manhood are being idealized to the point where few men can live up to corresponding expectations. A man is supposed to be successful, to have money, and to be looked up to by his peers (Brannon 1976). But status is achieved by work outside the home. As a consequence, some men have to work to exhaustion and avoid passive leisure (Băban 2000a). Since most men do not have exceptional careers, the family is often the context in which they gain status as the “breadwinner” (e.g., Băban 2000a; Brannon 1976). This pressure puts further strain on the couple, as women lose status not only inside but also outside of the home. We are positing that both sexes suffer when a system promotes gender inequalities, even when oppression is not uniformly experienced by both. In fact, women’s oppression is worsened when their partners also face impossible pressures, making them less able to be supportive of their spouses.

Third, the characteristics of Romanian men’s masculinities we have described may represent only one frame available to Romanian men for understanding and engaging in gender relations, though data indicated that it might be the more prevalent one. Romanian men could be in the process of contesting such a frame or selectively using the frame to their advantage (for similar arguments on Asian Americans, see Phua 2007).

4. Homosexuality in Romania

Consensual same-sex relationships have been illegal under the Romanian Penal Code for half a century (ACCEPT 2002). Before World War II, homosexuality had no legal status in Romania (Spineanu-Dobrotă 2005). From 1938 to 1989, the country was governed by successive

authoritarian regimes that criminalized homosexuality. Anti-gay laws oscillated between weakly enforced bans on open homosexuality and severe punishment for any homosexual act (Spineanu-Dobrotă). During the communist regime (about 1944 to 1989), being gay was often used as an official reason for prosecuting intellectuals unsympathetic with the authorities, according to a journalistic inquiry (Olivotto 2007). It was not until 1996 that the Penal Code was modified. Despite pressure from Western Europe, homo- sexual relationships provoking “public scandal” continued to be criminalized (Spineanu-Dobrotă). Meanwhile, politicians’ attitudes remained ambiguous: some of them were openly homophobic, while the majority expressed indifference (Spineanu-Dobrotă).

Romanian mass media have treated gay issues only superficially throughout the 1990s. Newspapers systematically represented gay people as pedophiles, HIV-infected, mentally ill, and anti-Christian. A recurrent interpretation was that gay rights were forcefully imposed by the EU and represented a blow to Romania’s sovereignty (Crețeanu & Comanb1998; Spineanu-Dobrotă 2005). The language of some major newspapers was remarkably tendentious, often referring to anal sex apparent attempts to mock gay rights (Crețeanu & Coman 1998). The Parliament finally abolished the anti-gay law in 2000, despite public protests (ACCEPT 2002). That same year, the Parliament instated the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD 2007a) defending gay rights, for instance, to donate blood (CNCD 2007b).

As far as we know, there are three organizations dealing with sexual minority is- sues in Romania: ACCEPT, founded in 1996, based in Bucharest, visible through pride parades and legal advocacy (www.accept-romania.ro); Be An Angel, founded in 2002 in Cluj-Napoca, focusing more on publications and social and cultural events (www.beanangel.ro); and PSI Romania, concerned with research and intervention in health and social inequality (www.psi.ro). Recent survey results indicated that more than half of 1,201 participants (56.7%) think that discrimination against LGBT did not decrease after Romania joined the EU (INSOMAR, 2009). Fifty-four percent would not accept LGBT individuals as neighbors, while 54 percent, 70.9 percent and 90.5 percent would not accept them as a colleague, friend, or spouse of kin, respectively (INSOMAR). As expected, attitudes towards homosexuality vary by age, education, and religiosity (Moraru 2010).

Unfortunately, there is no systematic study regarding recent media coverage, and it is difficult to say whether the public image of LGBT people has improved. Despite legal progress, surveys show many Romanians to be blatantly homophobic. A TV channel has been fined for primetime homophobia, remarkably without actual intervention of the CNCD (Bădicioiu 2007). In the post-communist era, both mass-media and politicians have remained ambivalent towards LGBT issues (Spineanu-Dobrotă 2005). Forty percent of respondents in a survey would not like gay people to live in Romania (Gallup Organization Romania 2000), and 52 percent think they should not be accepted as normal people (Bădescu et al 2007). About two-thirds of LGBT Romanians surveyed via a snowball sample reported experiencing discrimination and mistreatment ranging from being avoided and being the subject of jokes and pranks to facing unsolicited attempts to change one's sexual orientation, experiencing physical violence, and false denunciations to the police for child molestation (ACCEPT 2005).

In the present study, we are interested in examining how attitudes on gender relations and homosexuality manifest in mate selection from the perspective of men. Specifically, we examine whether the content of personal ads, in terms of how men present themselves and what they want from potential mates, reflect attitudes highlighted above. Research on personal ads has been well-established (e.g., Jagger 2005; Lester & Goggin 1999; Phua, Hopper & Vazquez 2002; Phua & Kaufman 2003; Rusu & Bencic 2007). Personal ads offer an unobtrusive way of examining dating preferences and minimize socially desirable responses, presenting as they do ways of screening out less desirable mates without in-person confrontation (Phua 2002). However, the bulk of research using personals addresses Western countries.

5. Data and methods

We collected data from a Romanian Internet website in spring 2007. We used only personals posted by men living in Bucharest, Romania's capital. Initially, we examined the distribution across Romanian cities on that website. We decided that the capital yielded enough cases for sampling. We will have more reliable estimates as advertisements from Bucharest represent 45 percent of all cases, while the next city with the largest number of cases made up only seven

percent of all cases. The disparity in size would make it difficult to make any reliable conclusion even if we were to group all other cities together because of regional and rural-urban variations.

We first stratified the sample into men seeking men (MSM) and men seeking women (MSW). Within each group, we systematically sampled every third case until we achieved 200 cases. We deleted cases that were duplicates (e.g., two personals having the same photographs) and those who self-identified as foreigners. The final sample size was 380, with 187 MSM and 193 MSW. Consistent with earlier studies, men seeking men should not be interpreted simply as gay or bisexual, or men seeking women as straight (e.g., Bartoş et al 2009). We remind readers that commonly-used sexual orientation terminologies may vary in meaning depending on cultural context (e.g., McLelland 2000) and that MSM do not necessarily identify as gay (e.g., Phua & Kaufman 1999).

Personals consist of two sections: the first part offers for selection a set of pre-coded answers that has an English version; the second part is written in Romanian by advertisers (here translated by one of the authors). Pre-coding suggests that pertinent variables probably refer to the most common characteristics used in personals. Translation was performed as literally as possible to preserve the “flavor” or tone of the messages. Supplementary explanations were provided for words without English equivalent—typically describing specific Romanian values (e.g., bun-simţ, which could mean good manners, good education, consideration, and so on). However, the amount of freely written text varied from one advertiser to another. Some ad texts were minimal, presenting the following reasons:

You ask too much I will let you describe me. What do you say? (msw#95) I am a cool guy (honestly). I will let you discover the rest! (msw #149)

I'll let you do this ... not that I don't like showing off. (msw#123)

I don't like describing myself; I let others do it.... I think it is more honest that way. (msm#7)

I like participating in a dialogue not having monologue. If you are interested in anything, ask. (msm#8)

About me? I am a nice guy, likeable, a true friend as some say. Discover the treat yourself.... (msm #107)

Providing little information irked some users. In response to what he perceived as lack of information, one advertiser wrote “*If your profile reads ‘I cannot describe myself, I'd be subjective. Describe me yourself.’ Then we have nothing to discuss*” (msw #182).

6. Results

In the following sections, we will report advertisers' characteristics and their preferences in their mate in Romanian men's personals. While we are not explicitly employing role theory as our framework, we used related terms for descriptions. Gender roles denote masculinity or femininity, similar to what Carrigan et al (1985) call gender personalities, while sexual roles refer to preferred sexual activities such as being the active or passive actor in anal or oral sex. We operationalized these two concepts by counting the specific words used, such as manly, masculine and macho for the first, and top, bottom, and versatile for the latter. We look at sexual and gender roles as socially constructed and learned roles (e.g., Carrigan et al 1985). However, data limitations have prevented us to delve deeper into the problem of role strains and "questions of power and material inequality" (*ibidem*: 559).

Characteristics of Romanian MSW Personals

MSW do not report their sexual orientation or sexual roles, or request them from their potential dates. Similarly, none of them specifically excluded dates of any specific sexual orientation. In fact, less than 10 percent specifically reject potential dates based on any characteristics. Less than one percent of MSW mentioned their gender roles; those that do only emphasize their masculinity, like using the word macho (msw#39). These results suggest that heterosexuality appears to be taken for granted, along with all its associated and expected roles.

None of them specifically mentioned body parts. The most explicit reference was to "*Unrest between my legs*" (msw#11). These results are consistent with earlier research that shows that men seeking women are less explicit about sexual characteristics. However, this does not mean that they are necessarily less interested in sex, even though only 2.1 percent specifically mentioned sexual acts. Some examples include:

Virtual sex, live sex, I like stocky women with no inhibitions. I love mature women! Come into my world, let's try something new! (msw#61)

For a relationship with no sentimental implications (msw#20)

Table 1

Content of Men Seeking Women Personals

Variable	Mentioning of respondent's characteristics (%) N = 187	Mentioning preferences in match's characteristics (%) n = 193
Sexual Orientation	0.0	0.0
Gender Roles	0.5	0.0
Sexual Roles	0.0	0.0
Body Parts	0.0	NA
Sexual Acts	2.1	NA
Discretion	1.6	NA
Include Photo	61.7	NA
Exclude particular sexual orientation	0.0	NA
Exclude any characteristics	9.8	NA
Age	99.0	33.7
Height	99.0	27.5
Weight	97.4	24.4
Field of Work	97.9	34.2
Education	100.0	14.5
Income	37.3	2.6
Hobbies	90.7	79.3
Marital Status	86.5	15.5
Mentioned Children	95.3	10.9

About 62 percent of MSW provided at least one photo (usually one of the photos is a clear face shot). Consistent with the high percentage of MSW willing to show their face in their personals, only 1.6 percent requested some form of discretion. In one of these cases, the need for discretion is to conceal a clearly sexual liaison: *“looking for a female partner I think cleanliness and discretion are understood ...”* (msw#59). Almost all MSW mentioned their age, height and weight. Other studies have found physical attractiveness to be an important criterion in mate selection, usually indicated by proxy characteristics mentioned parameters (e.g., Rusu & Bencic 2007). In this sample, about a third or fewer requested specific characteristics from their potential dates (33.7% for age, 27.5% for height, 24.5% for weight). However, it is worth noting that twice as many MSW as MSM requested a specific weight and height.

All MSW mentioned their educational status and 98 percent mentioned their field of work. These percentages are in great contrast with those of people requesting the same information of their potential dates (14.5% and 34.2%, respectively). Similarly, 86.5 percent and 95.3 percent mentioned their marital status and whether they have children but only 15.5 percent and 10.9 percent inquired about these characteristics of their potential dates. While 37.3 percent of MSW mentioned their income, only 2.6 percent specified a preferential income level for prospective dates. These characteristics are consistent with a somewhat traditional idea of a bread-winning husband. Wiederman (1993) has shown that MSW are more likely to offer financial security in exchange for beauty and attractiveness. Conforming to a more traditional role, these MSW seem to be more concerned with their role as man of the house than the extent their potential mates may contribute to the family. Even if not all of them are necessarily affluent, these MSW are willing to show their worth and let their potential partners choose. The following descriptions support this argument:

A young family man who has about everything a man needs to grant a woman a peaceful life who wishes, like me, to have a life together and who still CAN and WILL give what he receives, that is love, affection, tenderness, fidelity, communication and reciprocal trust. (msw#168)

Family man ... feet on the ground! I have no higher education or such fancy stuff. If you want a family, let's try. (msw#122)

Comparing Characteristics of Advertisers and Preferred Matches (MSW)

To evaluate if MSW conform to traditional masculine ideologies in terms of mate compatibility, we examine five characteristics: age, height, weight, income, and educational level. More than 65 percent of MSW did not state any specific preferences in age (63%), height (72%), weight (74%), income (97%), and educational level (85%). Among those who did have a specific age preference, 67 percent prefer the match to be about the same age, 31 percent prefer younger partners, and two percent like older women. Physically, advertisers who stated a specific height or weight generally preferred someone shorter and lighter. Almost all advertisers wanted a match who earns less than they do, albeit the percentage of advertisers voicing a specific preference is low. Regarding education level preferences, the pattern is interesting. Those who completed college would accept someone with less education (69%) but those with a post-university education prefer their match to have the same (75%). A larger percentage of advertisers in these two groups have a specific preference when compared to those with less education.

Characteristics of Romanian MSM Personals

In an early study, Laner and Kamel reported that gay men “make explicit on the outset what one wants, looks like and does (sexually) than do other qualities, since once a sexually compatible partner has been located, personality traits will become evident and recreational or other interests can be negotiated” (1977: 160). Compared to MSW, higher percentages of MSM mentioned their sexual orientation, gender roles, and sexual roles, and requested the same information from their potential partners. However, these percentages are all less than 10 percent and are lower than in studies on American MSM (e.g., Phua 2002). About 22 percent of MSM specifically mentioned sexual acts they like to perform, and about three percent mentioned their body parts. Several points are worth noting. First, those MSM who mentioned their gender roles only emphasized their masculinity. Second, the few MSM who mentioned their sexual orientation or request their partners to be of a specific sexual orientation are more likely to use the designation bisexual. Third, the complex variations that two men could have sex may require those with specific preferences to be verbal about them. Some examples include:

I'm a slave looking for Masters ... gay, bi, hetero, doesn't matter. What matters is their pleasure to humiliate me and mock me. (msm#29)

I'd like to suck and to be loved by a real man.... I'm top for now but want to try bottom. (msm#21)

Table 2

Content of Men Seeking Men Personals

Variable	Mentioning of respondent's characteristics (%) N = 187	Mentioning of preferences in match's characteristics (%) n = 193
Sexual Orientation	4.8	3.7
Gender Roles	2.1	3.2
Sexual Roles	8.6	7.0
Body Parts	2.7	NA
Sexual Acts	21.9	NA
Discretion	15.5	NA
Include Photo	26.2	NA
Exclude particular sexual orientation	2.1	NA
Exclude any characteristics	13.4	NA
Age	100.0	29.4
Height	96.8	13.9
Weight	95.2	12.3
Field of Work	100.0	30.5
Education	100.0	5.3
Income	17.6	1.1
Hobbies	84.0	67.4
Marital Status	78.6	5.9
Mentioned Children	88.8	5.9

Total sex, unknown pleasure. (msm#15)

27-year-old bottom gay, versatile... experienced, clean and very discrete, looking for a mature person for a relation I'm a committed slave looking for a real master, a trampling expert (that is someone who would smash me). (msm#71)

Looking for a relationship based on sex, no implications, preferably with a place, I am versatile.... Open to couples. (msm#177)

Looking for a bottom gay who knows what he wants.... (msm#181)

Only two percent specifically rejected a particular sexual orientation, which in this case is “straight.” About 13 percent rejected partners with specific characteristics. About 16 percent mentioned the need for discretion, which is ten times higher than in the case of MSW. Consistent with this stronger desire for discretion, about 26 percent of MSM included at least one face photograph. Only two MSM who included a photograph did not include a face shot. Displaying one’s face in personals may be a form of “coming out” for individuals who embrace alternative sexualities. Albeit only a quarter of MSM in Romania are willing to be out and proud, the fact that anyone is willing to take the risks in a rather conservative and traditional country where homosexuality is frowned upon, is remarkable (e.g., Bădescu et al 2007; Crețeanu & Coman 1998). Nonetheless, we have no information on the percentage of people in Romania who are out or are comfortable with their alternative sexualities. Many obstacles affecting how people choose to share and express their sexualities exist in Romania (Bartoș et al 2009). In addition, we have to keep in mind that these advertisers live in the capital city.

Similar to MSW, almost all MSM mentioned their age, weight, and height but less than 30 percent requested a specific age and less than 14 percent requested weight or height. This does not necessarily mean that attractiveness is not important for MSM. It may be a strategy to see who is out there and then see whether any of the available men are attractive. In this way, the net may be cast wider. Most MSM mentioned their non-physical characteristics, but they rarely requested such characteristics from their ideal matches. For example, all of them mentioned their field of work and their education, and most of them specified their hobbies (84%), marital status (78.6%), and whether they had children (88.8%). Income was an exception, with only 17.6 percent specifying how much they earn. As for ideal matches, each of these characteristics was requested by less than 10 percent of the MSM, with the exception of field of work (30.5%) and hobbies (67.4%).

The lack of interest in marital status deserves further consideration. On one hand, the issue of marriage may be irrelevant, as same-sex marriage is not currently a legal possibility in Romania. On the other, MSM may be more understanding of the fact that many men who desire another man end up marrying a woman under the past and current gender and sexual systems in Romania (for similar explanations of Japanese gay men, see e.g., McLelland 2000). What is more important than their marital status or sexual orientation for MSM may be whether the other person is willing to engage in sexual activities. Examples include:

I have a steady relationship with a man. I am married to a woman and I have a child with her!... but LOVE CAN SURVIVE ANY PRECONCEPTION! If you want the love of two men to be a happy lifestyle, as I do, do not hesitate to contact me! I'm top only but I have a big heart! Or I am a big heart [soul]! If you're a bottom living in Bucharest just contact me. (msm#62)

Nice young man, no experience with such relationships. Looking for a mature, first of all discrete, person, preferably married, to experiment with new things. (msm#82)

This interpretation is also consistent with the fact that most of them do not specifically self-identify as gay or bisexual in their personals. Here, these MSM may either consider their sexual orientation being obvious and need not be explicitly stated or that they have different interpretations of the meaning and importance of such self-identifications (for similar arguments on Brazil, see Phua 2010). However, this issue warrants exploration in future research.

Comparing Advertisers' and Matches' Characteristics (MSM)

Compared with MSW, more MSM did not state any specific preferences for age (71%), height (84%), weight (84%), income (99%), and educational level (95%). Among those who did state a specific age preference, 65 percent prefer their match to be about the same age, 15 percent prefer younger partners, and 20 percent like older men. In contrast to MSW, closer examination showed that those who prefer their match to be about the same age are on average younger than their match. MSM who stated a specific preferred height or weight generally prefer their match to be about the physically similar to themselves. MSM who specified a preferred income usually failed to give their own income, hence no comparison can be made. Regarding education-level

preferences, the pattern is mixed, and too few MSM stated a specific preference to allow meaningful analysis.

7. Discussion and conclusions: Romanian men's masculinities in mate selection

Romanian men have to navigate a social landscape with conflicting gender and sexual systems. On the one hand, the lingering influences of communism through re-traditionalization and “ruralization” continue to influence Romanian men (e.g., Cîrstocea 2003); on the other, recent socio-economic changes led to an influx of new ideas and values. While the onset of Internet communication is independent of entry into the EU, what can be posted, advertised, and viewed online may be changing and widening. The fact that there is a website that contains ads of MSW alongside those of MSM is a telling sign. For example, in some countries, such as Singapore, conservatism prevents such open display and acceptance of alternative sexualities.

In this paper, we have examined the perspective of Romanian men, more specifically, at the differences between MSW and MSM. Our results show that MSW provided and requested more information not related to sexuality than MSM. For example, a higher percentage of MSW specified and requested income and marital status. However, on characteristics related to sexuality, such as sexual and gender roles, MSM are more verbal than MSW. This may suggest that these two groups emphasized different characteristics. While Phua (2002: 108) argues that “[men seeking] men’s personals are the real analytic lens here because they are the ones faced with the ambiguities that need to be negotiated” in the U.S., our results paint a different picture of being a man in Romania, whether MSW or MSM. MSW’s preferences seem more consistent with the traditional role of a breadwinner. They generally prefer someone who is physically smaller than them (more so than MSM). MSW are also more likely than MSM to seek someone who is less educated and earned less than they do. However, because of data limitations, we cannot confirm whether these preferences are prevalent. While not conclusive, these results suggest that MSM prefer a match who is more similar, whereas MSW are more likely to conform to more traditional mate compatibility. Hearn (2009) suggests that the European Union members would be affected by the EU’s policy and approaches, for instance on human rights (including LGBTQ issues). What

would be interesting is to re-examine these issues at a later date to evaluate how much social progress Romanian men would have made in terms of gender and sexuality equality in mate selection.

What is worth noting is the great number of MSM looking for mates in a relatively traditional society. In addition, 26 percent of the MSM included a photograph with a clear face shot. This phenomenon suggests that some people are resisting and contesting the relatively homophobic culture in Romania by revealing their alternative sexualities. However, these MSM all live in the capital and largest city in Romania. Though the magnitude was more modest, we also observed similar patterns in other cities during the sample stage. We remind the readers that the data did not capture the obstacles that these individuals may continue to face. As expressed by one advertiser, there may be hope for alternative lifestyles in Romania: *“I’m outgoing but shy, tender and affectionate, bottom guy. I’m chasing my ideal gay family in Romania today—rare, but not impossible! Anyone else who would try!?”* (msm#69).

We contribute to the current literature by studying an important but under-examined topic, and by adding to the few studies that examine sexualities in Romania. This paper has been limited to male online activities, and we recommend that future research explore female sexualities in Romania. The present cross-sectional examination of Romanian men’s masculinities could serve as a baseline for future comparisons across time. Another aspect worth exploring is that of racial preference (e.g., Phua & Kaufman 2003). Parameters such as race, ethnicity, and location are conspicuously missing in the personal ads. We wonder whether this is a reflection of the racial tension between Roma and Romanians. A better approach to answer this question may be through surveys or in-depth interviews.

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