

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITY IN ROMANIA, IN
THE PRESS DEDICATED TO WOMEN. CASE STUDY: *ELLE*
MAGAZINE**

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Abstract: *The present article aims to study a magazine dedicated to women in terms of covering topics related to the construction of gender identity in Romania. More precisely, the research aims to observe how such a publication can contribute to (re)defining the image of the representatives of the LGBTQ community in Romania, thus becoming an agent of social change in a patriarchal, traditionalist and still deeply conservative society. The analyzed journalistic texts were published in 2018, and the period chosen for the research is not accidental. In 2018 in Romania was organized what in the collective mind remained as the referendum for defining the family in the Constitution, with the aim to ban the right to marry a person of the same sex; the attempt was invalidated by the citizens with the right to vote.*

Keywords: *gender, gender identity, sexual minorities, homosexuality, women's magazines, 2018 referendum, civil partnership*

The present study aims to observe how the press dedicated to women contributes to the construction of gender identity in Romania. Specifically, in this study – which is an exploratory one – we will identify those journalistic texts that deal with the subject of gender identity in terms of gender diversity and the rights and freedoms of the LGBTQ community.

For the case study, we chose *Elle* magazine, a women's magazine and a progressive publication, which defines itself as "the best-selling fashion magazine in the world", as it is mentioned on its cover, since its publication in Romania in 1999. However, the parent publication appeared in France 75 years ago, and today it is one of the largest magazines in the world dedicated to women, with dozens of international editions.

The period chosen for the analysis of articles on gender identity is 2018, a research period that coincides with the period of the referendum for defining the family. In this study, from a methodological point of view, a content analysis will be performed on journalistic texts that during the mentioned period had gender identity as their central subject.

Context

In order to justify the choice of the aforementioned period for the analysis of journalistic texts published in *Elle* magazine, a contextualization is necessary. This can be beneficial to understand the historical, social, and cultural framework in which discussions on gender identity take place in Romania. In 2018, an informal alliance, without legal personality, called the Coalition for the Family (CpF) initiated an approach that had as final objective the prohibition, of same-sex marriages in the Constitution, although the Romanian Civil Code prohibits such marriages anyway. The CpF's approach materialized in a referendum organized on October 6 and 7, 2018, a referendum which, had it been validated, would have led to the amendment of Article 48 of the Romanian Constitution. Article 48, paragraph 1 of the Constitution provides that: "The family shall be based on freely consented marriage between spouses, on their equality and on the right and duty of parents to ensure the upbringing, education and training of children."¹. Given the low turnout, the referendum was not validated and, therefore, the Constitution was not amended to redefine the family as consisting exclusively of a man and a woman.²

In the discussion on the historical, political and socio-cultural context in which gender identity is discussed in Romania it is important to mention the fact that the country is a former communist state still anchored in patriarchal mental reflexes. Romanian society is, even now, a traditionalist and conservative one. Starting from the results of the Gender Barometer 2000³, Vladimir Pasti stated: "Recent analyzes show that contemporary Romanian society, in the absence of progressive models, tends to focus, in building relations between men and women, both in the family and in public life., on a patriarchal model of traditional-archaic origin" (Pasti 2003, 84).

A form of patriarchy was perpetuated, according to Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu, including the poor representation of women in the public sphere, more precisely, in political positions: "The figures are staggering: immediately after the fall of communism (1990), women elected to official positions represented 3.7% of the Parliament, reaching a peak of 11% in 2008, before falling to a maximum of 6.5% of the total number of parliamentarians in the next legislature (2012-2016)" (Bucur, Miroiu 2019, 303).

¹ Constitution of Romania, <http://cdep.ro/pls/dic/site2015.page?id=339&idl=1>, accessed 20 June 2021

² "Referendumul a eșuat. Rezultatele oficiale finale: peste 91 la sută din voturi sunt DA [The referendum failed. Final official results: over 91 per cent of votes are YES]", Digi24, 08.10.2018, <https://www.digi24.ro/referendum-familie-2018/referendum-schimbare-constitutie-redefinire-casatorie-familie-1008821>, accessed 29 June 2021

³ *The Gender Barometer 2000* was conducted by the Foundation for an Open Society and was the first such approach in Romania, which followed the attitudes of citizens in relation to gender equality.

Almost two decades later, Laura Grünberg coordinated the latest Gender Barometer: Romania 2018⁴, an approach which outlined a series of conclusions, among which: “We have benchmarks to justify the statement that Romania is also facing a wave of resistance towards gender equality practices. Even if the referendum⁵ for the traditional family failed, this initiative brought to light the strong reactions to the gender ideology, which, as the supporters of the referendum stated, will make Romania's children transgender” (Grünberg 2019, 13).

The authors of the study further state: “Even if at the level of academic feminism 'Gender Studies' are well represented and integrated in the segment of social sciences and humanities, albeit there is a good normative framework on gender equality and in the field of domestic violence - have made important progress, even if there are institutions specially created to deal with gender issues (such as ANES, CNCND, NGOs, Commissions for Equal Opportunities in the Chamber of Deputies, etc.), the progress in Romania in the field of gender equality is more modest than in many other countries in the European Union” (Grünberg 2019, 13).

In the introduction to the study Gender Barometer: Romania 2018 signed by Laura Grünberg, the author states that Romania has been the subject of several comparative studies on gender equality, and here she offers as an example the study Backlash in Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Rights, 2018. The researcher points out that, in a comparative context, the situation of Romania regarding gender equality has undergone some formal improvements, and here Grünberg recalls the legislative framework (more precisely Law no. 202/2002 on equal opportunities and treatment between women and men and legislation on violence against women), however, there are a number of negative aspects:

⁴ *Gender Barometer: Romania 2018* is a publication made within the project “EGAL - Civic Dialogue and Advocacy for Public Policies Sensitive to Gender Equality”, by the Center for Curricular Development and Gender Studies: FILIA and the Center for Training and Support for a Equitable Society, in collaboration with IMAS Marketing and Surveys.

⁵ The referendum to amend the Constitution - in the sense of defining the family as consisting exclusively of a man and a woman - took place on October 6 and 7, 2018, but failed, because the validation threshold was not reached. The initiators of the referendum proposed amending Article 48 para. (1) of the Romanian Constitution as follows: "The family is based on the freely consented marriage between a man and a woman, on their equality and the right and duty of parents to ensure the upbringing, education and training of children" (“Referendum pentru redefinirea familiei în Constituție - 20,41 % prezență la vot la închiderea urnelor. Referendumul nu este valid [Referendum for redefining the family in the Constitution - 20.41% turnout at the polls. The referendum is not valid]”, News.ro, 7.10.2018, <https://www.news.ro/politic-intern/referendum-pentru-redefinirea-familiei-in-constitutie-20-41-prezenta-la-vot-la-inchiderea-urnelor-referendumul-nu-este-valid-1924400007002018100718563924> , accessed 19 May 2020).

In terms of exploring backlash initiatives, the report mentions, *inter alia*: anti-feminist public controversies and discourses the referendum on the traditional family in 2018; (...) The lack of a policy of integrating gender issues into the educational curriculum; lack of sex education and reproductive health education in schools; the lack of involvement of important actors in the process of implementing the Istanbul Convention, although Romania is a signatory state; attempts to restrict the right to abortion (2012), to ban education on reproductive rights in schools, in the context in which Romania is a champion of the birth rate among adolescents. (Grünberg 2019, 13)

To these negative aspects are added, according to the researcher:

the economic crisis of 2008, which profoundly negatively affected the standard of living of women; the existence of special groups of women (such as Roma women) who are subject to multiple discrimination, in the context in which Romania has legislation on equal opportunities between women and men and provisions related to multiple discrimination (for which, however, there is no monitoring methodology!). (Grünberg 2019, 13)

Thus, Grünberg draws attention to the fact that, despite some indisputable achievements, Romania "is part of the regional and global context unfavorable to consistent and assumed investment in the field of equal opportunities in general and gender equality in particular" (Grünberg 2019, 13).

Even in the recent past, in the communist period, we cannot talk about a real empowerment of women, but only about a supposed emancipation. In the chapter "False treatise on feminism in communism", the historian Cosmin Popa remarks:

Although a genuine candidate for the role of institution meant to survive the dictatorship, the economic and political emancipation of women in socialist Romania was unfortunately a failed project. The conduct of all actions under the auspices of Elena Ceausescu, even if some of them met objective needs and standards of minimal modernity, left an undeserved mark on her public perception. The inability to question specifically female goals, the satisfaction of which required genuine political will and material resources, which the regime did not want to allocate, and the mechanical application to the female part of society of Ceausescu's primitive grids – in clear contempt for any feminine specificity – made the policy of emancipation only lead to the

consolidation of two ‘gender versions’ of a single regime: Ceausescuism. (Popa 2021, 88)

From the point of view of the political system it should be mentioned that Romania is a democratic state, but without a tradition of democracy, its institutions still functioning slowly and seeming forever blocked during the transition period of the '90s, on the way from communism to capitalism, from censorship to complete freedom. Maria Bucur and Mihaela Miroiu define democracy, in the work *The Birth of Democratic Citizenship. Women and Power in Modern Romania*, as a

political regime in which all members of the community have the same rights and responsibilities in relation with the decision-making political system, enjoy the same legal protection against discrimination and manage to maintain this equality through active involvement in society. (Bucur, Miroiu 2019: 16)

Democracy in Romania is far from consolidated and perhaps that is why the representatives of sexual minorities are still victims of discrimination, are sometimes marginalized and often exposed to prejudices deeply rooted in the collective mind. Let us remember that Romania decriminalized homosexuality only 20 years ago. This refers to Article 200 of the Criminal Code, an article introduced by the communist regime in 1968 and repealed only on June 21, 2001. According to the ACCEPT Association, a non-governmental organization founded in 1996 whose actions and projects focus on respecting human rights,

Under Article 200, the Security, the Militia, and later the Police, the courts, the prosecutor's office and the prisons subjected gay men and lesbian women to arrests, investigations, blackmail, torture and imprisonment. Although the other member states of the European Union decriminalized same-sex relations much earlier, from the end of the 18th century until the 1990s, the Romanian authorities postponed the decision until the beginning of the 21st century, which was necessary in order to meet the conditions for pre-accession to the European Union.⁶

⁶ “20 de ani de la dezincriminarea homosexualității în România [20 years since the decriminalization of homosexuality in Romania]”, [acceptromania.ro](https://www.acceptromania.ro/blog/2021/06/21/20-de-ani-de-la-dezincriminarea-homosexualitatii-in-romania/), 21.06.2021, accessed 10 October 2021.

The ACCEPT Association carried out a national and international campaign for the abrogation of Article 200 of the Criminal Code of Romania, a campaign which had as final result, on January 30, 2002, the conclusion of the legislative process for the abrogation of this article. The association is one of the most vocal and active NGOs in human rights issues in Romania. Their efforts have also been recognized internationally, so that in May 1999 the ACCEPT Association was awarded the EGALITÉ (Equality for Gays and Lesbians in the European Institutions) Prize at the European Commission in Brussels for its efforts with the aim of protecting the rights and freedoms of LGBTQ people in Romania.⁷

No less important, in the same year, the ACCEPT Association was nominated for the Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament.⁸ Established in 1998 and awarded annually by the European Parliament, the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought aims to pay tribute to those individuals and organizations that defend fundamental human rights and freedoms. In 2021, the Sakharov Prize went to Alexei Navalny, a Russian opposition politician and anti-corruption activist.⁹

This is, in general, the historical, cultural, and social context of the gender identity discourse in Romania and it is important to consider it in order to attempt to understand how the press contributes, through its own discourse, to the construction of gender identity. We believe that a decontextualization - whether total or partial - would prevent us from reaching a deep understanding of the phenomenon.

We chose, for the case study, a magazine dedicated to women because we believe that, at least theoretically, a publication of this kind hosts, in its pages, journalistic texts that raise a series of issues that focus on women from several angles, without, however, resorting to reductionist, simplistic approaches and uniformizing visions. Regarding magazines dedicated to women, Daniela Rovența-Frumușani claims that they “offer one of the few forms of female solidarity, by promoting a female counterculture. [...] They propose alternatives in fundamental issues such as divorce, menopause, abortion, sexuality, etc. They are and can become an instrument of social change and women's cohesion” (Rovența-Frumușani, 2002: 60-61).

⁷ “Istoricul Accept [History of Accept]”, [acceptromania.ro](https://www.acceptromania.ro/istoric/), n.d., <https://www.acceptromania.ro/istoric/>, accessed 14 October 2021

⁸ “Istoricul Accept [History of Accept]”, [acceptromania.ro](https://www.acceptromania.ro/istoric/), n.d., <https://www.acceptromania.ro/istoric/>, accessed 14 October 2021

⁹ “Premiul Saharov 2021 al Parlamentului European i-a fost acordat lui Alexei Navalnii [The 2021 Sakharov Prize of the European Parliament was awarded to Alexei Navalny]”, [Europarl.europa.eu](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20211014IPR14915/premiul-saharov-2021-al-pe-i-a-fost-acordat-lui-alexei-navalnii), 20.10.2021, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/ro/press-room/20211014IPR14915/premiul-saharov-2021-al-pe-i-a-fost-acordat-lui-alexei-navalnii>, accessed 21 October 2021.

“#Elleokcăsătoriilegay [#Elleokgaymarriage]” - an editorial position pro LGBTQ rights and freedoms

Since its debut on the Romanian media market, in 1999, *Elle* magazine has been a monthly publication. According to the data available on the website of the Romanian Circulation Audit Bureau (BRAT)¹⁰, for the digital edition, elle.ro, the number of online visits varied, in June 2021, from 19,620, on June 27, to 35,269 visits, on June 16. Also, according to BRAT data, the audience profile of *Elle* magazine consisted, between June 1-30, 2021, in 80% female readers and 20% male readers¹¹.

As previously mentioned, in this research, from a methodological point of view, a content analysis will be performed on journalistic texts that, during the mentioned period (2018) had gender identity as a central subject. We identified the following articles published in *Elle* in 2018, in a separate category on the magazine's website, a category entitled “#Elleokcăsătoriilegay”. The title of the column was also a label for all journalistic texts that dealt with the subject of gender identity. The articles published in this category in 2018 were (original titles in Romanian):

- “Scandal at the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. The screening of the film 120 Beats per Minute was interrupted by a religious group” - 5 February 2018
- “120 BPM: why you have to see the film interrupted by conservatives at MȚR [the Museum of the Romanian Peasant]” - 5 February 2018
- “The LGBT community in Romania deserves to be treated with respect!” - 5 February 2018
- “EXCLUSIVE: Robin Campillo, director of 120 BPM: 'We were seen as enemies of society'” - 5 February 2018
- “Marlon Brando and the men he loved” - 8 February 2018
- “120 beats per minute. Let us not be afraid when we look at each other” - 16 February 2018
- “Cluj Pride 2018 reaches its second edition and urges you to participate” - 21 June 2018
- “Equal love in the time of the referendum” - 24 September 2018
- “An immoral, useless, illegitimate referendum” - 27 September 2018
- “What does the referendum to amend the Constitution change” - 28 September 2018
- “Romanian stars boycott the referendum” - 28 September 2018
- “What are our options at the referendum?” - 1 October 2018

¹⁰ “www.elle.ro Circulation profile”, brat.ro, n.d., <https://www.brat.ro/sati/site/elle-ro/profil-audienta/>, accessed 30 June 2021.

¹¹ “www.elle.ro Circulation profile”, brat.ro, n.d., <https://www.brat.ro/sati/site/elle-ro/profil-audienta/>, accessed 1 July 2021.

- “10 reasons why the video *Children of the referendum* is not an exaggeration” - 2 October 2018
- “The referendum to amend the Constitution has been invalidated” - 8 October 2018

To understand what gender theory entails, it is necessary to define the concept of gender. According to John Hartley, gender is:

The cultural differentiation of male from female. Gender is all culture and no nature: the only natural aspect of gender is sexual differentiation – a bio/physiological difference upon which is balanced a rickety but enormously elaborate cultural structure of differences which are used to classify and make meaningful the social relations of the human species. (Hartley 2001, 154-155)

Anthony Giddens also explains, in his seminal work, *Sociology*, the difference between sex and gender:

In general, sociologists use the term sex to refer to the anatomical and physiological differences that define male and female bodies. Gender, by contrast, concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity; it is not necessarily a direct product of an individual's biological sex. (Giddens 2010, 438)

At the same time, Laura Grünberg explains gender identity:

Entailing the sense of self associated with the cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity, gender identity is especially a subjective experience, being the psychological internalization of feminine / masculine features and the result of a complex process of interaction between oneself and others. The existence of transvestites or transgender identities indicates that gender is not only dependent on sex but arises from the construction of gender identities. (Grünberg 2002: 192)

Of the 14 texts selected from the website of *Elle* magazine in the section called #Elleokcăsătoriilegay, four deal with the scandal caused by the interruption of the screening of the film *120 Beats per Minute/120 de Bătăi pe Minut* of director Robin Campillo at the Museum of the Romanian Peasant (MȚR) by a group of Orthodox believers. Of these four texts, one is an interview with director Robin Campillo. The other articles in the section

#Elleokcăsătorilegay refer to the referendum for the so-called traditional family, and one of the texts is framed as a journalistic dossier titled "Equal love in the time of the referendum": the text is extremely dense in terms of information on the life of members of the LGBTQ community in Romania in the year of the referendum. The journalistic dossier also appeared in the print edition of *Elle* magazine in June 2018 in an issue entitled "We need diversity!". The text brings together statements from members of the LGBTQ community and aims to x-ray their lives in several ways. It should be noted that the text provides equal space for each type of gender identity. Thus, a homosexual, an intersex man, i.e. a person "who was born with sexual characteristics that are neither exclusively male nor female" are also interviewed¹², together with a lesbian, a young transsexual, a bisexual man and a woman who identifies as queer. The journalistic dossier raises the issue of coming out, of the marginalization of these gender identities by the Romanian society, of the operations and treatments necessary for transgender people, of the attitude of individuals towards androgynous (intersex) people, of the referendum, and of activism. Through this journalistic text, *Elle* magazine gives some representatives of the LGBTQ community the possibility to express themselves freely, without displaying a superior attitude towards them and without considering them in any way "abnormal". Through this approach, those who feel oppressed by the Romanian society are offered what could be called call a pulpit, a channel of communication as they do not speak only on their own behalf, individually, selfishly, but on behalf of the minority they are part of in the idea that other representatives of sexual minorities can identify with the often-traumatizing experiences of the interviewees.

The journalistic discourse practiced by *Elle* magazine on the subject of sexual minorities demonstrates the progressive character of the publication and its courage in assuming a public position towards the LGBTQ community. Below are some examples that support this hypothesis:

- "For four days, between June 20 and 24, in different locations in the heart of Transylvania, Cluj-Napoca, various extremely cool events will take place, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community and demanding tolerance, acceptance and, last but not least, love". (Excerpt from the text "Cluj Pride 2018 reaches its second edition and urges you to participate" - June 21, 2018)
- "Cluj Pride is a reason to celebrate the entire Cluj community and a step forward towards a civilized Romania, in which the rights of every person are respected, and in which abuses against LGBTQ+ people are no longer tacitly accepted or even with the consent of those who should

¹² "Dragoste egală în vremea referendumului [Equal love in the time of the referendum]", *elle.ro*, 24.09.2021, <https://www.elle.ro/lifestyle/dragoste-egala-vremea-referendumului-621683/>, accessed 25 May 2021

- represent us all”. (Excerpt from the text "Cluj Pride 2018 reaches its second edition and urges you to participate" - June 21, 2018)
- “When we wave the flag, what do we say to each other? Wasn't Romania also under siege? Wasn't she marginalized, on her knees? Does neither Romania, nor the Romanian, nor the Romanian peasant bleed? Didn't it happen to him/her - the Romanian peasant - to be forced to flee, to hide, to lose everything? Has it not happened to us, does it not happen to us - Romanians, Romania - to carry the burdensome flag of the indifference of the authorities, of the revolt against the silence and laziness that kills people every day?” (Excerpt from the text "120 beats per minute. Let us not be afraid when we look at each other" - February 16, 2018)

Publicly embracing such a discourse has effects, echoes in society, because the media gives individuals access not only to a knowledge, but also to a recognition of values and sometimes is an invitation to a resettlement of the values they assume:

Journalistic discourse constructs models of the world that are not based primarily on argumentative logic, but on narrative logic. In special situations, this logic is doubled by a symbolic one - now mythological processes take place that allow society, through journalistic discourse, to ask fundamental questions about the principles and values on which its existence is based and by tinkering with the narratives that set these principles and values in motion, to re-think their values. (Coman, 2003, 126)

What *Elle* magazine proposes with the dossier "Equal love in the time of the referendum" is to bring to readers the stories of representatives of the LGBTQ community in order to provide social actors with an x-ray of the existence of minorities in terms of sexual orientation, stories to give readers the opportunity to access, to enter a world which is talked about a lot, but of which there is little actual knowledge.

We note that, although it is defined as "the best-selling fashion magazine in the world", the publication addresses, through such journalistic texts, topics on the definition of gender identity not only of women but also of men, and, at the same time, on the definition of the identity of individuals in a society which wants women and men to assume the roles traditionally assigned to them. "Stereotypical beliefs tell us not only what women and men are like, but also how they should be. [...] This belief system is transmitted mainly through societal expectations, which also include attitudes towards roles appropriate to each sex, perceptions of those who violate these rules, as well

as self-perception as a person of a certain gender” (Miroiu, 2002, 341). If we refer to the considerations of the authors of the *Lexicon Feminist (Feminist Lexicon)*, the people interviewed by *Elle* in the dossier "Equal love in the time of the referendum" certainly brutally contradict the expectations that Romanian society still has from men and women, as they categorically refuse to assume the roles that the mainstream society / “the normal ones” have assigned to them without knowing them personally, and most likely, without understanding them. Here are some examples:

- “Coming out is something necessary for every individual who undertakes anything. It is a declaration of independence and an authentic step towards a better and quieter life”. Robert Rațiu, homosexual
- “The fact that we are different is what we should cherish in each other, we should celebrate it, instead of judging it. It's wonderful that it's like that.” Emil Rengle, bisexual

As mentioned above, although *Elle* is a magazine in which the emphasis is primarily on the fashion phenomenon, it does not create editorial content exclusively on this topic. Nor does it insist unnecessarily or disproportionately on the area of beauty and the aesthetic. That is why the publication does not impose standards of beauty and does not operate value judgments based on aesthetic criteria. If it had done so, it would have risked its readers becoming tributaries to ideals of beauty that were difficult or even impossible to achieve. "Dominated by the aspiration to identify with the dominant models, bearers of the signs of distinction, women are sure victims of symbolic manipulation through the myth of beauty"¹³. *Elle* does not, therefore, impose dominant models in terms of beauty, fitness, or fashion.

We will explain, below, why the 14 texts published by the magazine *Elle* in the category "#Elleokcăsătoriilegay" in 2018 are proof of an authentic, courageous position on respecting and protecting the rights of the LGBTQ community in Romania. Of the 14 texts, two are opinion texts ("120 BPM: why you have to watch the film interrupted by conservatives at MȚR" and "120 Beats per minute. Let us not be afraid when we look at each other"), the first being signed by Ioana Ulmeanu, editor of *Elle*, the other by blogger Raluca Roșu. The text entitled "EXCLUSIVE: Robin Campillo, director of 120 BPM: 'We were seen as enemies of society'" is an interview with the director of the film "120 Beats per Minute", a film whose screening at the Museum of the Romanian Peasant was interrupted in early 2018 by a religious nationalist group, an event that generated numerous debates both within the LGBTQ

¹³ “Dragoste egală în vremea referendumului [Equal love in the time of the referendum]”, elle.ro, 24.09.2021, <https://www.elle.ro/lifestyle/dragoste-egala-vremea-referendumului-621683/>, accessed 25 May 2021

community and outside of it. The articles "What options do we have in the referendum?" and "What does the referendum to amend the Constitution change" are informative texts that contain video-interviews with Romanita Iordache, vice president of the ACCEPT Association and human rights researcher. All the other materials are informative texts, either news or more extensive materials, well-documented articles, which explain in detail why an approach such as the referendum by which same-sex couples in Romania would have been prevented to marry by Constitution (which, incidentally, is banned by the Criminal Code anyway), is considered illegitimate and immoral not only by members of the LGBTQ community, but also by heterosexual people. Through all 14 texts published in 2018 in the category "#Elleokcăsătoriilegay", the magazine *Elle* makes an explicit call for tolerance and invites its readers to know the lives of LGBTQ people with all the challenges, problems, pains, and frustrations involved. We offer some examples in this respect:

- "Even for Vivian, who is an intersex man, life is not simple. 'It fell on my shoulders to understand how I am as a person, how I am different from others. For a long time people had decided for me and put a lot of labels that I had to carry. I was called trans, gay, lesbian, homosexual, I was told that I changed my sex in the Netherlands, I heard them all'" (excerpt from "Equal love in the time of the referendum" - September 24, 2018)
- "'Instead, I would like doctors for us. And the legal situation sucks, with the identity card and everything, with the name'. Her life is comfortable, compared to those of other people she sees and who struggle to live. It's about friends and work. She thinks it also has to do with elections, after all." (excerpt from "Equal love in the time of the referendum"- September 24, 2018)
- "Racism, homophobia, misogyny - are horrible." (excerpt from "EXCLUSIVE: Robin Campillo, director 120 BPM: 'We were seen as enemies of society'" - February 5, 2018)

It is worth mentioning that the two video-interviews inserted in the texts "What options do we have in the referendum?" and "What does the referendum to amend the Constitution change", representing interviews with Romanita Iordache, vice president of the ACCEPT Association, have the label "#ellenutace". The choice of using this *hashtag* is not accidental at all, because like Romanian society, which is still patriarchal and deeply traditionalist, Romanian publications are reluctant to give representatives of a marginalized minority the opportunity to be heard in accordance with the problems they face.

The conclusion of the informative text "What options do we have in the referendum?" is: "We cannot respond to hatred with hatred. I think that's the

most important message to convey. The basic message is a boycott. The illegitimate cannot be legitimized. A type of approach that is immoral, that is populist, that places Romania on a geostrategic axis where we have nothing to look for, in the traditional family of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Bulgaria – we have nothing to look for there, these are not our values. Therefore, boycott”¹⁴. The boycott of the referendum was, in fact, the assumed position of the women's magazine, an obvious position in all the texts published during the period considered in this study.

The informative text "Romanian stars boycott the referendum" presents the campaign through which the MozaiQ Association brought together several Romanian stars (Tudor Chirilă, Andreea Bălan, Vladimir Drăghia, Alexandra Ungureanu, Maurice Munteanu, an *Elle* editor and others) who chose to boycott the 2018 referendum by posting messages on their own social channels. These public figures spoke out against hatred against sexual minorities, called for respect for people in the LGBTQ community, insisted on the need for love and equality among all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation, and stressed the right of every human being to love freely.

In all the materials published in the column "#Elleokcăsătoriilegay" in 2018, people who are part of the LGBTQ community are presented as individuals with professions, passions, aspirations, traumas, and life stories that are not reduced to sexual orientation. There are people who come out of reductionist labels such as homosexual or gay/lesbian/transgender, bisexual, but who, at the same time, do not deny who they are, who they love, or what sexual preferences they have. For example, the article "Equal Love in the time of the Referendum" brings together not only a homosexual, an intersex man, a lesbian, a young transsexual, a bisexual and a woman who identifies as queer, but also a choreographer, a photographer who is at the same time a writer and a psychoanalyst, a creative leader of a PR agency, a curator and an art historian. They are the same people, but who do not define themselves strictly through the magnifying glass of gender, but also beyond this aspect, which they do not deny, on the contrary, they assume it publicly, with everything that this gesture implies.

Conclusions

A progressive publication such as the Romanian edition of *Elle* magazine can significantly contribute to the construction of gender identity in Romania by generating quality editorial content, through which representatives of the LGBTQ community have the opportunity to escape the status of oppressed and

¹⁴ Ioana Ulmeanu, "Ce opțiuni avem la referendum? [What options do we have in the referendum?]", *elle.ro*, 01.10.2018, <https://www.elle.ro/elleokcasatoriilegay/ce-optiuni-avem-la-referendum-623567>, accessed 20 July 2021

marginalized members of the society and to become authentic voices and representatives of the community they belong to.

The publication pursues a policy committed to the rights of sexual minorities, not having a reductionist vision on gender, on the contrary, insisting on the right of every person to define him/her-self as he/she feels like, without giving way to the pressures of a society which until recently was under communism, a patriarchal and a still very conservative society.

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