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Scrutinizing Homophobia: A Model of Perception of Homosexuals in Russia

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ABSTRACT

We aimed to develop and validate a model of associations of perceived threat of homosexuals with lay beliefs about causes of homosexuality, group entitativity of homosexuals, approval of social action strategies targeting homosexuals, and support for their rights using original Russian-language measures. We tested the model in two samples of social network users ($n = 1,007$) and student respondents ($n = 292$) using structural equation modeling and path analysis. Attribution of homosexuality to social causes was a positive predictor of perceived threat of homosexuals, whereas biological causes showed an inverse effect. Perceived threat predicted approval of discriminatory strategies targeting homosexuals and lack of support for their rights and fully mediated the effects of causal beliefs on these variables. Group entitativity of homosexuals was a positive predictor of perceived threat and a significant moderator of its effects on support for punishment and medical treatment of homosexuals. We discuss the findings with reference to the Russian social context.

KEYWORDS

Homosexuality;
institutionalized
homophobia;
homonegativity; attitudes to
homosexuals; intergroup
threat theory;
support for rights

During the past few decades homosexuals have gained increasing social recognition in many developed countries, where steps toward legalizing same-sex unions and adoption by same-sex couples have been taken. However, there are still many places in the world where the legal status of homosexuals is inferior to that of heterosexual majority. Some countries, such as Russia, exhibit negative trends with respect to the rights of homosexuals, promoting homophobia.

Following Murray, we propose to understand homophobia as a social phenomenon, a “socially produced form of discrimination located within relations of inequality” (Murray, 2009, p. 3), a stigma attached to non-

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heterosexual behavior by a society (Herek, 2004, 2007). At the level of individual mind, homophobia manifests itself in sexual prejudice (attitudes reflecting a negative evaluation of homosexual individuals based on their social group membership) and policy attitudes, such as approval of discriminatory strategies targeting homosexuals and lack of support for their rights (Herek, 2009).

Attitudes to homosexuals have received extensive research attention during the last three decades, mostly in North American and European contexts. A majority of existing measures (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Bouton et al., 1987; Costa et al., 2014; Costa, Bandeira, & Nardi, 2013; Grey, Robinson, Coleman, & Bockting, 2013; Hansen, 1982; Herek, 1988; Hudson & Ricketts, 1980; Kite & Deaux, 1986; Larsen, Reed, & Hoffman, 1980; LeMar & Kite, 1998; Massey, 2009; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Morrison, Parriag, & Morrison, 1999; Raja & Stokes, 1998; Roese, Olson, Borenstein, Martin, & Shores, 1992; Walls, 2008; Worthington, Dillon, & Becker-Schutte, 2005; Wrench, 2005; Wright, Adams, & Bernat, 1999) have focused on the general positive or negative evaluation of homosexuals. However, recent theory and empirical studies tend to take a more differentiated approach, focusing on various aspects of intergroup attitudes. The present study aims to investigate the associations of beliefs about causes of homosexuality, perceived threat of homosexuals, and approval for social action strategies targeting homosexuals in the Russian context.

Social context: Homophobia in modern Russia

The views of homosexuality in Russia have been rather ambivalent during the past centuries. Despite being officially condemned by the church, homosexuality, both male and female, was not considered a serious offense in traditional Russian society. Throughout the 18th century, with the gradual penetration of Western mores, the social norms regarding homosexuality became progressively less lenient, and male homosexuality was finally criminalized by an 1835 law (Healey, 2001; Kon, 2003). However, this law was rarely enforced, and homosexual preferences of some upper-class individuals remained a common theme of 19th-century gossip (Healey, 2001).

The 1917 revolution brought a new level of sexual freedom. In the early Soviet Union, homosexuality (both male and female) was viewed as a pathological but untreatable medical condition requiring no specific action. However, in the early 1930s, with the establishment of totalitarian regime and its prescriptive heterosexual norm, homosexuality was framed as an essentially social phenomenon (“mental infection”) resulting from corrupting influence of counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie and Western anti-Communist (fascist) regimes (Healey, 2001; Kon, 2003). A criminal punishment for male homosexuality was reintroduced in 1934 and was actively enforced until its

abolition in 1993. As a result of this criminalization and of the growth of the gulag system, the late Soviet perceptions of homosexuality presented a very negative picture, mainly informed by prison culture, where homosexuality (particularly male) was typically practiced as a means of establishing power relations and dehumanizing the victim (Healey, 2001; Kon, 2003). Thus Stalinist repression of homosexuality has stigmatized and marginalized homosexuals to an unprecedented extent.

No specific legislation regarding gays and lesbians existed in Russia between 1993 and 2012. Despite repeated urges from the UN and international human rights organizations, Russia has been refusing to develop antidiscrimination legislation (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Although homosexuals were not considered criminals, they remained an “invisible” minority (Baer, 2009), whose queer identity was confined to the private sphere. Based on the dominant idea that sexual identity is a private matter, Russian homosexuals were denied public visibility, but they did not strive to gain it (Kondakov, 2014; Soboleva & Bakhmetjev, 2015; Stella, 2007), which was noted as a surprising fact by Western activists (Amico, 2014; Essig, 2014).

However, the situation evolved in line with the saying “If you do not do politics, politics will do you.” On June 11, 2013, the State Duma passed the so-called homosexual propaganda law (Amico, 2014), which effectively prevents any public messages about homosexuality, unless the latter is presented in a negative light. A year later, another law forbade international adoption of Russian children by unmarried nationals of any country where same-sex unions are legal (Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 2014). Because of increasing harassment and pressure from state authorities, the few Russian LGBT activist organizations, which had been disunited and enjoyed little support from the Russian LGBT community (Lapina, 2013), have switched to “survival mode” (Buyantueva, 2017).

In parallel with increasing institutional homophobia, Russian public opinion was growing less tolerant of homosexuality throughout the 2000s. During the 1990s, the level of homophobia decreased, compared to late Soviet times (Kon, 2010), but this trend toward higher tolerance has reversed in the 2000s. According to public opinion polls conducted by Levada-Center, a Russian nongovernmental research agency (Levada-Centr, 2015; see also Buyantueva, 2017), the approval for discrimination against homosexuals has been steadily growing since 1999, whereas the proportion of respondents with uncertain opinion has decreased, suggesting growing social polarization (see Figure 1). The findings of other surveys (Pew Research Center, 2013; Papiya, 2015), as well as a growing number of homophobic violence cases documented by Human Rights Watch (2014), have confirmed this negative trend.

According to Dmitry Isaev, the struggle with “homosexual propaganda” serves as a way of coping with fear arising from loss of identity: “Homosexuals are posed as a convenient enemy destroying the old

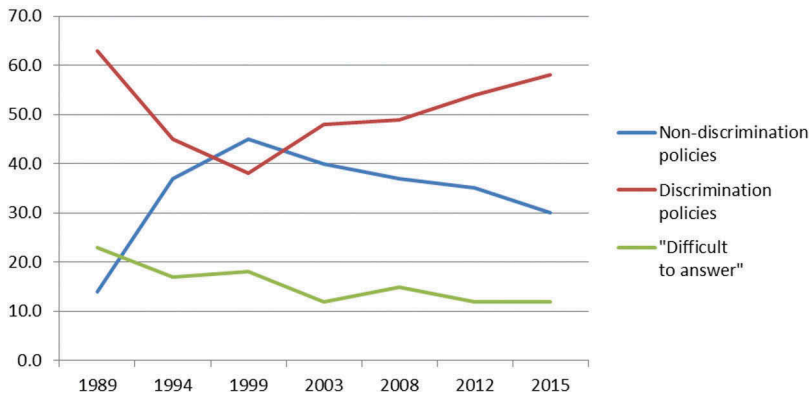


Figure 1. Public opinion trends in approval of social policies targeting homosexuals. Responses to the question “How, in your opinion, should homosexuals be treated?”; the discrimination policy index includes “eliminated” and “isolated from the society” options, the nondiscrimination policy index includes “given help” and “left on their own” options. The vertical axis denotes the percentage of respondents endorsing each group of options. *Source:* Levada-Centr (2015) polls in nationally representative samples.

‘Orthodox’, traditional, ‘truly Russian’ values” (Isaev, 2013, p. 103). Imposition of gender norms and stigmatization of “enemies” may be a strategy used by the political powers as a means of self-assertion (Muravyeva, 2014) or as a way to direct the negative sentiments of Russians away from itself, toward a “convenient” target. The fact that Russia, compared to other European post-Communist countries, is only moderately conservative in terms of public attitudes to homosexuality but has the highest level of institutionalized homophobia (in terms of rights available to homosexuals; see O’Dwyer, 2013) also indicates that Russian homophobia has political, rather than sociocultural, roots.

The survey findings reveal decreasing tolerance to homosexuals in Russia but offer little information about the psychological mechanisms underlying this process. Existing studies carried out in the Russian context were most qualitative, investigating homophobia by analyzing social discourse or through the lens of lived experiences of homosexuals (Amico, 2014; Buyantueva, 2017; Hylton et al., 2017; Kondakov, 2014; Soboleva & Bakhmetjev, 2015; Stella, 2008). We intend to fill this gap by using a quantitative approach to model the associations of different facets of homophobic attitudes (perceived causes of homosexuality, perceived threat of homosexuals, and approval of various social policy measures) in Russian-speaking community samples.

Perceived causes of homosexuality

The lay theories that people refer to when they try to explain the causes of homosexuality have been studied over the past three decades. Some

researchers focused on lay theories of homosexuality referring to biological factors perceived as innate and, therefore, immutable during one's lifetime (such as genetics, prenatal hormones, etc.) versus social factors, such as parenting styles, social norms, and social influence (Frias-Navarro, Monterde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2015; Jayaratne et al., 2006; Smith, Zanotti, Axelton, Saucier, 2011; Tygart, 2000). Other studies focused on the lay theories viewing sexual orientation as a given (i.e., outside one's control) or as a product of choices made by individuals (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2005, 2008; Sakalli, 2002; Wood & Bartkowski, 2004).

The attribution of homosexuality to different types of causes is strongly related to the way homosexuals are perceived. The individuals who attribute homosexuality to social factors or to personal choice tend to hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Hegarty, 2002; Hegarty, Pratto, 2001; Herek, 2009; Herek, Capitanio, 1995; Horvath, Ryan, 2003; Sakalli, 2002; Smith et al., 2011) and show lower support for their rights (Frias-Navarro et al., 2015; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2005, 2008; Jayaratne et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2011; Tygart, 2000; Wood, Bartkowski, 2004), compared to those viewing sexual orientation as a result of biological factors or as a given.

Because these findings are mainly correlational, some authors have argued that the causal links between attributions and attitudes may go in both directions (Hegarty & Golden, 2008). However, unlike attributions pertaining to individual cases, causal beliefs concerning whole social groups exist within social discourse and are transmitted through mass media (e.g., the idea that homosexuality is a "fashion" or a "trend" coming from the West (Baer, 2009) or, more recently, that it is a result of propaganda). Based on this reasoning, we treat perceived causes of homosexuality as predictors of attitudes to homosexuals, rather than vice versa.

Perceived threat of homosexuals

Outgroup threat is defined as a perception by members of an ingroup that an outgroup is in a position to cause them harm (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). Recent studies differentiate two types of outgroup threat: realistic and symbolic. Realistic threat involves a perception that an outgroup poses a threat to the life, health, or material resources of the ingroup members. Symbolic threat involves a perception of an outgroup as a threat to the values and lifestyle shared by the ingroup members (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009).

The antecedents and consequences of perceived outgroup threat are described within the intergroup threat theory (ITT; Stephan et al., 2009). The perception of outgroup threat may be influenced by four types of factors: intergroup relations, cultural dimensions, situational factors, and individual

difference variables. The factors pertinent to intergroup relations include relative power of the groups, relative size of the groups, and history of group conflict. We believe that intergroup relations factors explain the association of causal beliefs about homosexuality with the perceived threat of homosexuals. If sexual orientation is viewed as innate or as a given, this view per se constitutes no reason to expect that the proportion of homosexuals in the society or their power as a group should increase. But if sexual orientation is viewed as a result of social influence (e.g., some kind of “gay propaganda” that can “turn” heterosexuals into homosexuals), then unrestrained social activity of homosexuals may appear as a factor leading to an increase in the number of homosexuals and their relative power in society, which may eventually threaten the status of heterosexual norm and result in a “total control of sexual minority rights over those who endorse traditional views” (Ustinkin, Rudakova, Eminov, 2016, p. 13). Hence, we hypothesized that attribution of homosexuality to social causes would be associated with higher levels of perceived threat of homosexuals, whereas its attribution to biological causes would not show such an association (Hypothesis 1).

Perceived threat posed by an outgroup results in a negative attitude to that group (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006), which is expressed in a range of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions. These reactions include reduced willingness to share territory with outgroup members (Pereira, Vala, & Costa-Lopes, 2010; Semyonov, Raijman, Tov, & Schmidt, 2004), reduced support for assistance programs targeting the outgroup (Durrheim et al., 2011), and increased approval of discrimination of outgroup members in various spheres of life (Falomir-Pichastor, Munoz-Rojas, Invernizzi, & Mugny, 2004; Kauff & Wagner, 2012). Hence, we expected that perceived threat of homosexuals would be a positive predictor of support for discriminatory social action strategies (criminalization or medical treatment of homosexuality) and a negative predictor of approval of protection of homosexuals and support for their rights. We hypothesized that perceived threat of homosexuals would mediate the association of perceived causes of homosexuality with these policy attitudes (Hypothesis 2). However, some studies suggest that group entitativity of homosexuals may also contribute to these associations.

Perceived group entitativity of homosexuals

The notion of group entitativity was introduced by Campbell (1958), who defined it as the degree to which a group forms a coherent whole. Most studies of entitativity treated it as a unidimensional construct. More recently, Lickel et al. (2000; Crump, Hamilton, Sherman, Lickel, & Thakkar, 2010) found two distinct clusters of items describing group characteristics related to entitativity. The first cluster, labeled entitativity, included items reflecting

the perception of target people as a group, the amount of interaction among them, the importance of group to them, the strength of interpersonal bonds between them, and the amount of information shared among them. The second cluster, similarity, consisted of items tapping into shared outcomes, similar roles, status, power, personalities, and abilities of group members.

Earlier research has found that group entitativity influences the processing of information and the resulting impressions concerning ingroups and outgroups (see review in Yzerbyt, Castano, Leyens, & Paladino, 2000); in particular, outgroups perceived as more homogeneous tend to provoke stronger negative attitudes (Er-Rafiy & Brauer, 2013; Vanbeselaere, 1991). Recent findings have confirmed the associations of entitativity beliefs with prejudice toward various stigmatized outgroups (Andreychik, Gill, 2015; Haqanee, Lou, Lalonde, 2014; Hodson, Skorska, 2015). However, some studies suggest that outgroup entitativity contributes to negative reactions to an outgroup only when the latter is initially perceived as threatening. For instance, in an international relations context, entitativity showed a moderating effect on the association of outgroup image to perceived outgroup harmfulness only for groups initially presented as enemies (Castano, Sacchi, & Gries, 2003).

Based on these findings, we hypothesized that perceived entitativity of homosexuals would predict perceived threat of homosexuals and moderate its associations with its behavioral consequences: higher perceived entitativity of homosexuals would be associated with stronger links between perceived threat and discriminatory action strategies targeting homosexuals (Hypothesis 3). To test the model, we have conducted two studies. The first study aimed to test Hypotheses 1 and 2 concerning the associations between perceived causes of homosexuality, perceived threat of homosexuals, action strategies targeting homosexuals, and support for their rights using a large online sample. The second study aimed to replicate these findings in a face-to-face paper-based survey setting and to test the third hypothesis concerning the role of perceived group entitativity of homosexuals in these associations.

Study 1

Method

Participants

The sample included 1,007 Internet users (34.1% males and 65.9% females) aged 18 to 73 ($M = 32.10$, $SD = 9.74$, median = 30). The data were collected using an anonymous Web-based questionnaire in April 2014. Links to the questionnaire were circulated in Russian social networks and on Russian-language Internet forums. All the participants took part in the study on a voluntary basis; informed consent was obtained.

Measures

Participants completed a set of Russian-language scales measuring perceived causes of homosexuality, perceived threat of homosexuals, approval for different action strategies toward homosexuals, and support for homosexuals' rights. The items for each measure were developed by the team of authors based on analysis of themes in the current Russian-language media discourse (a more detailed description of item development and exploratory analyses is provided in another article using the same sample to explore the demographic predictors of perceived threat of homosexuals; Gulevich, Osin, Isaenko, & Brainis, 2016). The structure of each questionnaire was tested using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in Mplus 7.31 with a robust MLM estimator. The complete sets of items for each measure and the parameters of respective measurement models are given in [Appendices A-D](#); the reliability coefficients are presented in [Table 1](#).

Attribution of homosexuality. Seven items reflected beliefs about biological or genetic causes of homosexuality (e.g., "One is born homosexual, rather than becomes one") and its social or environmental causes (e.g., "Homosexuality is a result of the influence of the environment one grows up in"). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). CFA supported the theoretical two-factor model (Figure A1 in [Appendix A](#)).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (Studies 1 and 2).

		Study 1 (N = 1,007)		Study 2 (N = 292)		Study 1 vs. 2, Cohen's d
Scale	N items	α	M (SD)	α	M (SD)	
Perceived causes of homosexuality						
Biological causes	3	.66	3.70 (0.89)	.71	2.92 (0.82)	−0.89***
Social causes	4	.83	1.89 (0.88)	.78	2.38 (0.88)	0.56***
Perceived threat of homosexuals						
Threat to Morality	5	.90	1.91 (1.08)	.87	2.85 (1.10)	0.87***
Threat to Individuals	4	.82	1.60 (0.89)	.83	2.48 (1.04)	0.95***
Threat to Society	4	.87	1.97 (1.14)	.78	3.04 (1.12)	0.94***
Threat to Culture	4	.89	1.82 (1.13)	.82	3.11 (1.11)	1.15***
Action strategies toward homosexuals						
Punishment	4	.91	1.22 (0.64)	.87	1.77 (0.93)	0.77***
Medical treatment	4	.91	1.46 (0.82)	.90	2.37 (1.19)	0.99***
Protection	5	.84	4.11 (0.97)	.78	3.11 (0.93)	−1.04***
Support for homosexuals' rights						
Family	3	.91	3.74 (1.35)	.86	2.56 (1.24)	−0.89***
Social Action	3	.87	3.64 (1.28)	.82	2.40 (1.07)	−1.00***
Publicity	2	.90	4.02 (1.24)	.89	2.71 (1.29)	−1.05***
Communication	3	.89	4.46 (0.93)	.88	3.49 (1.19)	−0.98***
Social Participation	2	.80	4.48 (0.95)	.79	3.34 (1.25)	−1.11***

Note. *** $p < .001$ for two-tailed Student's t test; scale scores are given as item averages.

Perceived threat of homosexuals. The questionnaire included 17 statements (four of these reverse-scored) combined into four subscales: (1) *threat to morality*, with items reflecting an evaluation of homosexuality as immoral, going against human nature (e.g., “Homosexuality is a sexual perversion”), (2) *threat to individuals*, reflecting a view of homosexuality as dangerous to the health and integrity of heterosexuals and children (e.g., “Homosexuals are dangerous, because they spread sexually transmitted diseases”), (3) *threat to society*, reflecting a view of homosexuality as a threat to the institute of family, demographic situation, and the future of society as a whole (e.g., “Spreading of homosexuality leads to extinction of the nation”), and (4) *threat to culture*, reflecting a view of homosexuality as a result of foreign influence undermining traditional Russian culture (e.g., “Homosexuals increase in their number as a result of spreading Western values”). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). A four-factor model fit the data well ($\chi^2(112) = 338.50$, $p < .001$; CFI = .974; RMSEA = .045, 90% CI [.039, .050], SRMR = .024); the addition of a single second-order factor did not significantly affect the fit of the model ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 2.17$, $p = .34$; Figure B1 in Appendix B), suggesting that these four scales may be viewed as constituting a single dimension of perceived threat ($\alpha = .95$).

Approval of social actions regarding homosexuals. The questionnaire included 13 statements grouped into three subscales: (1) *Punishment*, reflecting a view that homosexuals should be isolated from the society or punished like criminals (e.g., “Homosexuality is a crime that must be prosecuted by law”), (2) *Medical treatment*, reflecting a view that homosexuals should be treated medically or helped to overcome their condition (e.g., “Homosexuals need to work with a therapist to change their sexual orientation”), and (3) *Protection*, reflecting a view that homosexuals should be protected from discrimination and aggression (“Police must protect homosexuals from assaults and aggression of those who hate them”). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert scale with answer options ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). CFA supported the 3-factor measurement model (Figure C1 in Appendix C).

Support for homosexuals’ rights. We used 13 statements combined into five groups: (1) *Family* (same-sex marriage, adoption, surrogate parenthood), (2) *Social action* (Pride parades, public actions in support for equal rights), (3) *Publicity* (providing positive information about homosexuality in mass media targeting general audience), (4) *Communication* (existence of specialized clubs, Web sites, and mass media targeting homosexuals), and (5) *Social*

participation (participation in politics, public disclosure of sexual orientation). Participants rated whether, in their opinion, each activity should be forbidden or permitted to homosexuals using a 5-point Likert scale with options ranging from 1 (*should definitely be forbidden*) to 5 (*should definitely be allowed*). The 5-factor measurement model demonstrated acceptable fit ($\chi^2(55) = 311.59$, $p < .001$; CFI = .965; RMSEA = .068, 90% CI [.061, .076], SRMR = .038). A single-factor second-order model with one disturbance covariance did not lead to a worse fit ($\Delta\chi^2(4) = 6.80$, $p = .15$; Figure D1 in [Appendix D](#)), supporting a single index of support for homosexuals' rights.

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics for all scales are given in [Table 1](#). Respondents tended to agree more strongly with the items attributing homosexuality to biological causes, compared to those tapping into social causes. The perceived threat of homosexuality to morality, society, and culture was more pronounced than its threat to individuals. Respondents generally tended to support homosexuals' rights, with family rights and social action rights receiving somewhat lower support, compared to the rights for communication, social participation, and publicity. Finally, respondents tended to agree with the items tapping into the protection strategy, compared to those tapping into the medical treatment and punishment strategies. Overall, this picture indicates a relatively tolerant attitude to homosexuality in the online sample.

Pearson correlations between the variables are presented in [Table 2](#). The correlations between the four facets of perceived threat were quite high ($r > .80$), suggesting a single construct; the associations of these facets of perceived threat with the other variables were also quite similar. The tendency to explain homosexuality by biological causes was associated

Table 2. Pearson correlations between perceived causes of homosexuality, perceived threat of homosexuals, policy attitudes, and group entitativity of homosexuals.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Biological causes		-.48	-.48	-.44	-.46	-.46	-.35	-.44	.46	.46
2. Social causes	-.24		.69	.68	.67	.69	.49	.64	-.55	-.65
3. Threat to Morality	-.40	.52		.82	.85	.83	.66	.80	-.78	-.84
4. Threat to Individuals	-.34	.51	.71		.86	.81	.71	.76	-.74	-.82
5. Threat to Society	-.42	.48	.80	.76		.85	.69	.77	-.76	-.83
6. Threat to Culture	-.39	.55	.76	.69	.78		.62	.72	-.71	-.80
7. Actions: Punishment	-.33	.42	.72	.71	.68	.59		.72	-.64	-.67
8. Actions: Medical Treatment	-.38	.48	.79	.69	.71	.64	.75		-.67	-.74
9. Actions: Protection	.37	-.32	-.68	-.57	-.62	-.57	-.62	-.58		.83
10. Support for rights	.42	-.40	-.76	-.73	-.76	-.69	-.68	-.66	.73	
11. Group entitativity	-.19	.41	.53	.52	.48	.49	.44	.50	-.41	-.47

Note. Correlations for the Study 1 sample ($n = 1,007$) are presented above the diagonal, and correlations for the Study 2 sample ($n = 292$) are presented below the diagonal. All coefficients are significant at $p < .001$. The group entitativity measure was not administered in Study 1.

with lower perceived threat of homosexuals, whereas the tendency to attribute homosexuality to social causes showed an inverse pattern. Perceived threat of homosexuals was positively associated with approval of punishment and medical treatment of homosexuals and negatively associated with approval of protection of homosexuals and support for their rights.

In order to test the substantive hypotheses 1 and 2, we performed structural equation modeling in Mplus 7.31 using robust Satorra-Bentler chi-square (MLM estimator). The model included seven latent variables: biological and social causes of homosexuality, perceived threat of homosexuals, three types of action strategies regarding homosexuals (punishment, treatment, and protection), and support for homosexuals' rights. To simplify the model and to avoid convergence problems typically associated with second-order structures, we used subscale scores as indicators of perceived threat and of support for homosexuals' rights.

We followed the conventional two-stage approach to model testing (Byrne, 2012), starting with a measurement model, where all the factors were freely correlated, and proceeding to the structural model, where perceived causes of homosexuality were entered as predictors of perceived threat, which, in turn, predicted the policy attitude outcomes. To evaluate the fit of the models, we relied on Hu and Bentler's (1999) criteria of acceptable model fit (CFI close to .95 or greater, RMSEA close to .06 or below, SRMR close to .08 or below). Because the chi-square test is known to be overly sensitive in large samples (Brown, 2015), we used the difference in practical fit indices to compare nested models.

The measurement model for 29 variables grouped into seven latent factors fit the data quite well ($\chi^2(353) = 1034.85$, $p < .001$, CFI = .958, RMSEA = .045, 90% CI [.042, .048], SRMR = .041, BIC = 68200.44). The structural model also showed a good fit to the data ($\chi^2(361) = 1074.66$, $p < .001$, CFI = .956, RMSEA = .045, 90% CI [.042, .048], SRMR = .043, BIC = 68197.99). Although the scaled chi-square test of the difference in the fit of measurement model and structural model was significant ($\Delta\chi^2(8) = 42.13$, $p < .001$), the difference in practical fit indices was very minor ($\Delta\text{CFI} = .002$, $\Delta\text{RMSEA} < .001$), suggesting that the model with a full mediation is acceptable. The values of the BIC index, which takes into account model parsimony (Brown, 2015), also indicated that the structural model was preferable. The standardized second-order parameters of the structural model are presented on Figure 2.

Overall, these findings are in line with the proposed theoretical model. In line with the first hypothesis, the attribution of homosexuality to social causes predicts increased perceived threat of homosexuals, whereas its attribution to biological causes shows a weak inverse effect. In line with the second hypothesis, perceived threat of homosexuals fully mediates the effect of perceived causes on policy attitudes, suggesting that individuals who

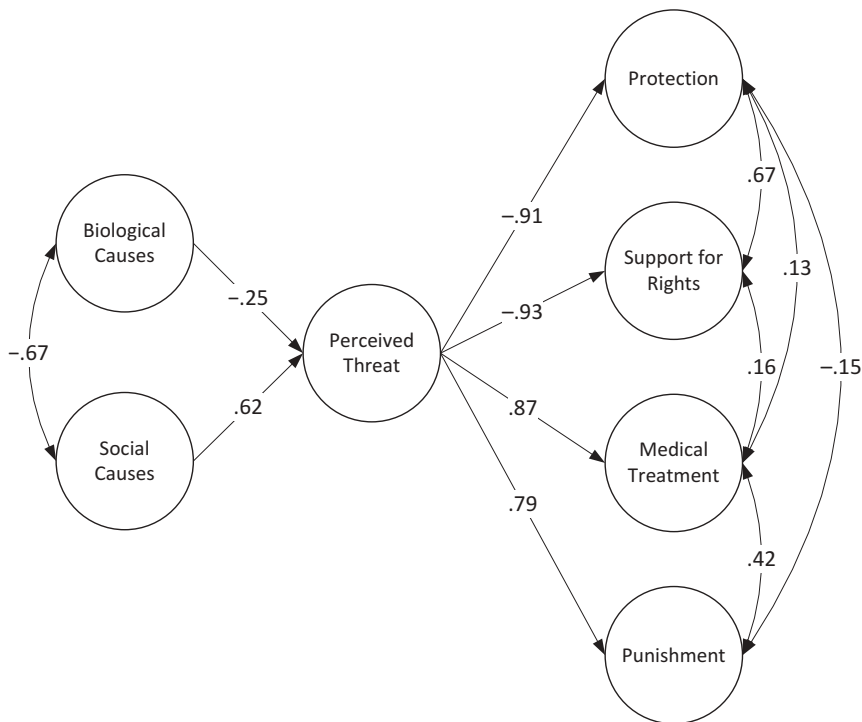


Figure 2. Parameters of the structural model, Study 1. Fully standardized model, all the parameters shown are significant at $p < .05$.

believe in the social roots of homosexuality tend to approve of discrimination against homosexuals only when they see homosexuals as threatening.

However, the participants of Study 1 have demonstrated an overall picture of a rather positive attitude toward homosexuals, somewhat in contrast to the findings of face-to-face surveys using nationally representative samples. Study 2 aimed to replicate these findings in a face-to-face survey setting and to test the group entitativity hypothesis.

Study 2

Method

Participants

The sample included 292 students (37.7% males, 62.3% females) aged 18 to 38 ($M = 21.7$, $SD = 4.46$, median = 20) of various disciplines from a university based in Moscow. The students completed the anonymous paper-and-pencil questionnaire in the Russian language during their introductory psychology course. The participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained.

Measures

Participants filled out the same set of instruments as in Study 1, as well as a measure of perceived group entitativity of homosexuals. The measurement models for all scales are presented in [Appendices A–D](#); the reliability coefficients are given in [Table 1](#).

Group entitativity of homosexuals. We developed a Russian-language instrument based on the two-dimensional model of group entitativity (Crump, Hamilton, Sherman, Lickel, & Thakkar, 2010; Lickel et al., 2000). The item set included 12 items rated on a 5-point scale (e.g., “All homosexuals pursue common goals”). Following the procedure used by Lickel and colleagues, we performed an exploratory factor analysis (Mplus 7.31, MLR estimator with Geomin rotation) and found two groups of items, reflecting similarity (items 1, 2, 3, and 5; $\alpha = .85$) and organization (items 4 and 6–12; $\alpha = .80$) of homosexuals, as well as a strong common factor. We compared the fit of one-factor, two-factor, and bifactor CFA models and chose the bifactor model (Figure E1 in [Appendix E](#)), supporting a single dimension of group entitativity ($\alpha = .87$).

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics for the Study 2 scales are given in [Table 1](#). The views regarding homosexuals were much more negative, compared to those observed in the Study 1 sample (Cohen’s d in the .56 to 1.15 range); the levels of perceived threat, as well as approval of punishment and medical treatment strategies, were higher, whereas approval of protection strategy and support for homosexuals’ rights was lower. Compared to Study 1, the Study 2 respondents were less likely to share the biological causes view and more likely to believe in the social roots of homosexuality.

The correlations between the study variables are given in [Table 2](#). The pattern of significant associations replicated the Study 1 findings. Again, the two groups of perceived causes of homosexuality showed inverse profiles of associations with the other variables. The facets of perceived threat were strongly correlated and associated with approval of actions against homosexuals and lack of support for their rights. The two components of entitativity of homosexuals showed moderate positive associations with the perceived threat of homosexuals and predictable associations with the other variables.

To test the theoretical model in this new sample, we tested the same two models as in Study 1. The fit of the measurement model was acceptable ($\chi^2(352) = 614.67$, $p < .001$, CFI = .946, RMSEA = .052, 90% CI [.046, .059], SRMR = .059, BIC = 22851.39). The fit of the structural model, where the effects of perceived causes of homosexuality on policy attitudes were fully

mediated by perceived threat, was nearly as good ($\chi^2(360) = 633.62, p < .001$, CFI = .944, RMSEA = .053, 90% CI [.046, .060], SRMR = .060, BIC = 22829.41). The chi-square test of the difference between these models was only marginally significant ($\Delta\chi^2(8) = 18.59, p = .02$), the differences in practical fit indices were quite small ($\Delta\text{CFI} = .002, \Delta\text{RMSEA} = .001$), and the BIC favored the more parsimonious structural model, providing support for full mediation, in line with Hypothesis 2. The standardized second-order parameters of the structural model are shown on Figure 3. The parameter estimates were consistent with the Study 1 findings, showing a stronger positive effect of social causes and a weaker negative effect of biological causes on perceived threat (Hypothesis 1).

Next, we explored the contribution of group entitativity as a potential moderator of the effects of perceived threat on approval for social action strategies. Because models with latent factor interactions are difficult to estimate, we used path analysis with moderation in Mplus 7.31 (MLM estimator). The predictors were centered prior to calculation of the interaction terms.

We started with a model where group entitativity predicted perceived threat and moderated its effects on the two discriminatory action strategies (criminal punishment and medical treatment). The direct effects of group

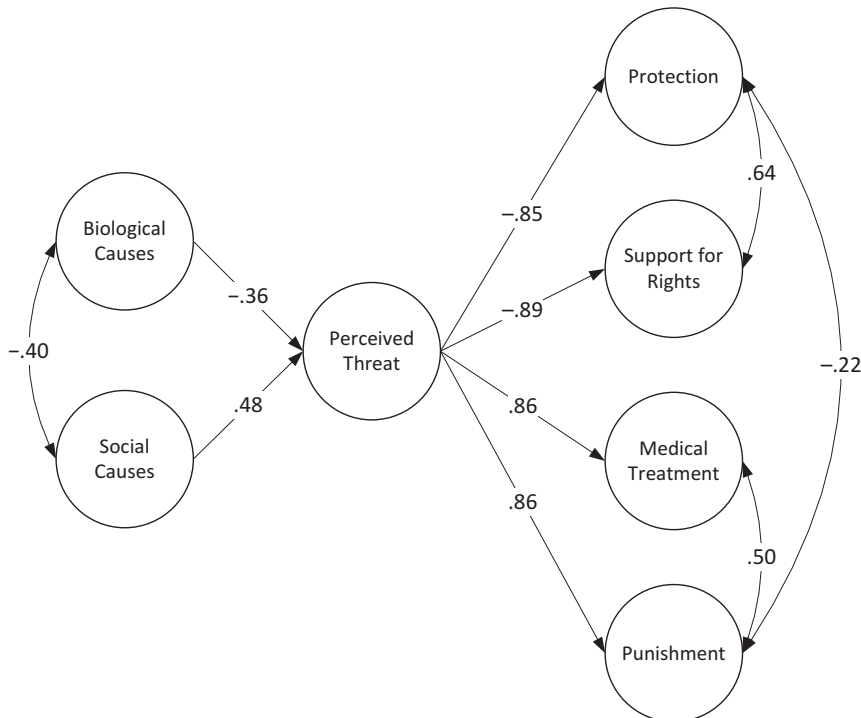


Figure 3. Parameters of the structural model, Study 2. Fully standardized model, all the parameters shown are significant at $p < .05$.

entitativity on action strategies and support for rights were not significant, and we removed these paths from the model. The final model showed a good fit to the data with a nonsignificant value of the chi-square statistic. The parameters are presented in Figure 4.

Group entitativity showed a moderate positive association with the tendency to attribute homosexuality to social causes and a weak negative association with the biological causes index. Entitativity was a significant positive predictor of perceived threat and a significant moderator of its effects on the punishment and medical treatment strategies. All the indirect effects of biological causes, social causes, and group entitativity on the four dependent variables were significant ($p < .001$) and moderate (the absolute values of the β coefficients were in the .20 to .30 range). In line with our expectations, group entitativity showed no significant moderation of the effects of perceived threat on the two positive strategies (protection and support for rights). When we performed the analysis with similarity and organization components of group entitativity taken separately, the findings were substantially the same. There were only minor differences in the absolute values of regression coefficients of perceived threat on entitativity ($\beta = .37$ for similarity and .30 for organization) and in the sizes of the effects of interaction terms on punishment and treatment strategies (.21 and .12, respectively, for similarity; .19 and .09, respectively, for organization).

The results of the moderation analysis indicate that when homosexuals are perceived as threatening, holding an image of that group as homogeneous and organized is associated with a stronger preference for criminal punishment and medical treatment of homosexuals. Overall, the findings of Study 2 replicate and extend those of Study 1, providing support for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3.

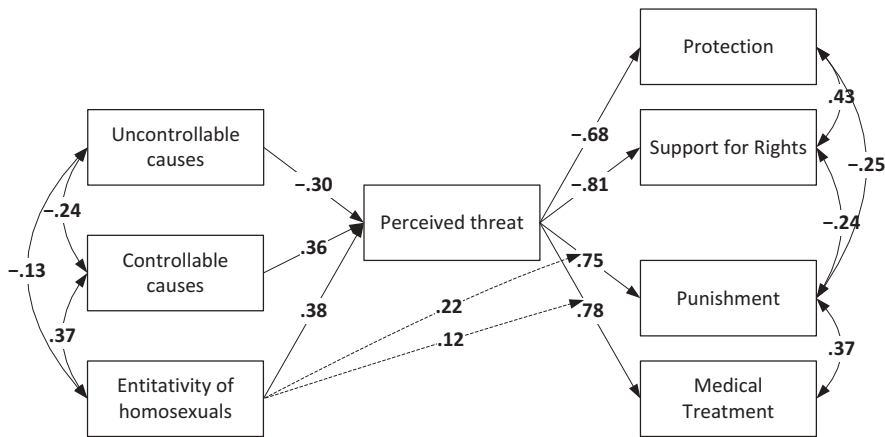


Figure 4. Group entitativity as a moderator of the effects of perceived threat.
Note. $\chi^2(18) = 23.50$, $p = .17$, CFI = .996, RMSEA = .033, 90% CI [.000, .066], SRMR = .031. Standardized model, all the parameters shown are significant at $p < .05$.

General discussion

The findings of both studies support the theoretical model of associations between perceived causes of homosexuality, perceived threat of homosexuals, and policy attitudes targeting homosexuals. Three aspects make this approach novel. First, instead of a general focus on attitudes to homosexuals, we relied on intergroup threat theory and tested a structural model differentiating the possible attitudinal antecedents and consequences of perceived threat of homosexuals. Second, we showed that perceived entitativity of homosexuals is associated with increased perceived threat of homosexuals and stronger effects of this threat on approval of discriminatory social policies. Third, we used samples from the general population, which received little attention in previous homosexual prejudice studies carried out in Russia.

We focused on four distinct aspects of perceived threat, which emerged as strongly correlated. In terms of the ITT classification, *Threat to individuals* (views of homosexuals as endangering the health or sexual integrity of heterosexuals) and *Threat to society* (views of homosexuals as unsettling the demographic situation and the family institution in the country) are realistic threats, whereas *Threat to morality* (views of homosexuality as threatening the universal moral norms) and *Threat to culture* (views of homosexuality as an “alien,” Western fashion threatening the integrity of the Russian culture) are symbolic threats. Strong associations between these beliefs suggest that their evaluative aspect is more important than their specific content: for those Russians who see homosexuals painted in black, all of these reasons work equally well to justify their view, whereas those who are tolerant tend to reject all these beliefs equally.

The view of homosexuality as a result of foreign influence can be found in many countries, especially non-Western ones (Baer, 2009), and it is strongly pronounced in contemporary Russian discourse. Today, intolerance toward homosexuals has become a part of collective Russian identity and a symbolic boundary separating Russia with its traditional moral norms from “corrupt Gayrope” (Baer, 2009; Ryabova & Ryabov, 2013). This idea is supported by our recent findings showing that national identity is a strong positive predictor of perceived threat of homosexuals in Russian students (Gulevich, Osin, Kucherova, Zdilar, in preparation).

The results contribute to intergroup threat theory by providing new knowledge about the predictors of perceived threat. We found that respondents who tend to explain homosexuality by social causes are more likely to see homosexuals as a danger. A simplistic view of homosexuality as a consequence of an environmental influence (rather than a complex, genetically based disposition) implies that homosexuality might be “contagious,” entailing the perspective of homosexuals as a social group growing in size and in

influence. The other psychological pathways linking the attribution of homosexuality to social causes with the perceived threat of homosexuals may include value violations (Reyna, Wetherell, Yantis, & Brandt, 2014), fear of “turning” homosexual (i.e., becoming a member of that stigmatized group), fear of losing one’s identity as the society shifts toward more fluid gender roles, and so on. In contrast, we found that respondents viewing homosexuality as an innate biologically based disposition tend to see homosexuals as less threatening. Additional research is needed to find out whether this link is causal or whether it is explained by the fact that respondents sharing the biological cause view are less prejudiced because they are better informed about homosexuality (Bartoş, Berger, Hegarty, 2014).

The findings also shed new light on the associations of intergroup threat with its antecedents and consequences described within ITT. In line with existing findings for racial and ethnic outgroups, we found predictable positive associations of perceived threat with discriminatory strategies and negative associations with supportive strategies. However, those past studies did not address such unacceptably radical discriminatory measures as punishment and isolation or medical interventions intended to “change” outgroup members. The strong associations of perceived threat with other variables indicate that various views reflecting tolerance or intolerance toward homosexuals are strongly interconnected and that Russian society is currently highly polarized. Perceived threat of homosexuals plays a central role within this system of homophobic attitudes: Russians who believe in social roots of homosexuality (and reject the scientifically based biological view) support discrimination against homosexuals if and only if they see homosexuals as a threat.

Finally, we explored the contribution of group entitativity to the effects of perceived threat. Within the ITT context, perceived outgroup entitativity appears as a factor of intergroup relations contributing to perceived threat: outgroups with higher homogeneity and stronger bonds between their members are likely to be perceived as more active and, therefore, more threatening. In our data, group entitativity was a significant independent predictor of perceived threat, controlling for perceived causes of homosexuality. We also found that the effects of perceived threat on approval for discriminatory strategies were moderated by group entitativity, but no similar effects were observed for the two positive strategies (protection and support for rights). Thus when homosexuals are viewed as a homogeneous and organized group, they are perceived as more threatening, and this threat is more readily translated into approval for social measures intended to punish and isolate homosexuals or to “cure” them.

The associations of group entitativity with attribution of homosexuality to social influence and with perceived threat of homosexuals suggest that beliefs in the possibility of “gay propaganda” and in the existence of an “aggressive

homosexual lobby” conspiring to uproot the traditional heterosexual norm tend to come together in the minds of Russian people. These constructions typically come in one package in the homophobic discourse of Russian politicians and mass media. Future research could investigate the role of witch-hunting media campaigns in the adoption (or critical rejection) of homophobic beliefs by individual Russians in order to design and test educational interventions that could reverse the effects of hate discourse in the media.

Institutional measures appear as another mechanism that promotes prejudice: during the 2 years that have passed since the adoption of the notorious law, the number of Russians who consider almost any information about homosexuality to be propaganda has increased (Pipiya, 2015). According to our model, legitimization of the imaginary “gay propaganda” notion reinforces the belief in the social roots of homosexuality, which entails a stronger sense of danger posed by homosexuals and more support for discriminatory measures, such as those that form the state policy. This results, ultimately, in a stronger support for the government, which seemingly protects the people and the country from “harmful” influence. Thus we see the present research as a small step toward understanding the psychological mechanisms that link social policies with individual attitudes, forming the vicious circle of homophobia. And we believe that it is at the psychological level that new opportunities to break it can be discovered.

The present research has several limitations. First, nonprobability sampling resulted in both samples of Russian respondents demonstrating, on average, more positive views of homosexuality, compared to the high levels characteristic of the general population, according to public opinion polls: the level of homophobia was low in the online sample used in Study 1 and average in the student sample used in Study 2. The strong differences in the mean scores between the two studies can be explained by the demographic composition of the samples and by the research setting. We believe that the student sample is likely to be more representative of the general population, because the online sampling procedure may have involved a stronger self-selection effect (with “gay-friendly” respondents being more likely to participate); also, Russian Internet users are known to hold more liberal views compared to the rest of the population (Chugunov, 2006). Younger respondents, residents of large cities, and individuals with higher education typically show lower levels of homophobia, compared to the Russian population as a whole (Pipiya, 2015), which explains why the mean levels of homophobic attitudes observed in Study 2 were not as high as those seen in nationally representative samples. Nevertheless, we found that the pattern of associations has replicated well across our two samples, despite the differences in the mean scores.

On the other hand, it is not completely clear how trustworthy are the high levels of homophobia found in public opinion polls. Online research involves

a higher degree of perceived anonymity, which makes it easier to express unpopular views (Booth-Kewley, Larsen, & Miyoshi, 2007; Wright, 2005), whereas face-to-face interviews and telephone surveys may have produced an exaggerated picture of homophobia, because they lack perceived anonymity and encourage responding in line with the perceived social consensus. In order to find out how homophobic or how tolerant Russian people really are, future studies need to combine probability sampling with data collection methods robust to socially desirable responding.

Another set of limitations pertains to the measures used. Because our questionnaires were based on the current discourse, the list of fears associated with homosexuals may not be exhaustive, and the list of social strategies appears to be quite polarized (reflecting either discrimination or protection, but not absence of both). The content of the questionnaire and its non-stigmatizing language may have contributed to sample bias. Although only one quarter of the items reflected neutral or positive attitudes toward homosexuals, some online respondents perceived the questionnaire as “pro-homosexually biased,” whereas others expressed worry that the large proportion of items reflecting negative views could contribute to spreading the stigma, as past public opinion polls with their predominant focus on discrimination may have done. In settings where opinions are strongly polarized, maintaining balance and non-interference in social research becomes a serious challenge.

Finally, our study did not differentiate between the perception of gays and lesbians. Existing data show that lesbians provoke more positive attitudes than do gays (Smith, Axelton, Saucier, 2009), but people react more negatively to homosexuals of the same sex as theirs, that is, males are more prejudiced toward gays than toward lesbians and females vice versa (Herek, Gonzales-Rivera, 2006). It is possible that perceived threat of gays and perceived threat of lesbians may differ in their structure and patterns of associations with other variables.

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Appendix A: Perceived Causes of Homosexuality Questionnaire

Item formulations:

- (1) Sexual orientation can be repressed, but cannot be changed.
- (2) Homosexuality is caused by biological factors (genetic, hormonal, etc.).
- (3) One is born homosexual, rather than becomes one.
- (4) Whether a person becomes homosexual, depends on their parents.
- (5) One becomes homosexual because he/she was molested or raped at young age.
- (6) Homosexuality is a result of improper upbringing or bad relationship between parents.
- (7) Homosexuality is a result of the influence of the environment one grows up in.

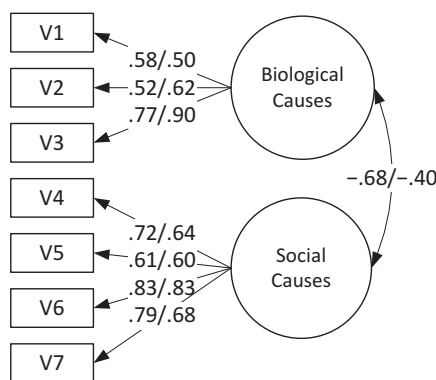


Figure A1. Measurement models for the Causes of Homosexuality Questionnaire. Standardized parameters for Study 1 ($n = 1,007$) and Study 2 ($n = 292$) samples are shown. Fit indices for Study 1: $\chi^2(13) = 70.85$, $p < .001$, CFI = .969, RMSEA = .066, 90% CI [.052, .082], SRMR = .033; Study 2: $\chi^2(13) = 27.56$, $p = .010$, CFI = .971, RMSEA = .061, 90% CI [.029, .093], SRMR = .046.

Appendix B: Perceived Threat of Homosexuals Questionnaire

Item formulations:

- (1) Homosexuals are a threat to the traditional family.
- (2) Homosexuality is a way of life that must be condemned.
- (3) Homosexuals increase in their number as a result of spreading Western values.
- (4) Homosexuals are particularly dangerous, because they spread sexually transmitted diseases.
- (5) Homosexuality is an expression of laxity.
- (6) Existence of homosexuals does not cause any harm to people with traditional sexual orientation.
- (7) Homosexuality is a natural form of human sexuality.
- (8) Spreading of homosexuality leads to extinction of the nation.
- (9) Existence of homosexuals harms the ethical climate in the society as a whole.
- (10) Homosexuality is a normal variant of sexual orientation.
- (11) Homosexuality is a sexual perversion.
- (12) Homosexuals pose a threat to children, because they can molest them.
- (13) Increasing numbers of homosexuals indicates a decay of social mores.
- (14) Homosexuals do not threaten the society in any way.
- (15) The danger of homosexuals is that they can convert people with traditional sexual orientation to homosexuals.
- (16) Homosexuality is a completely alien phenomenon to Russian culture.
- (17) Homosexuality is a fashion spread by mass media.

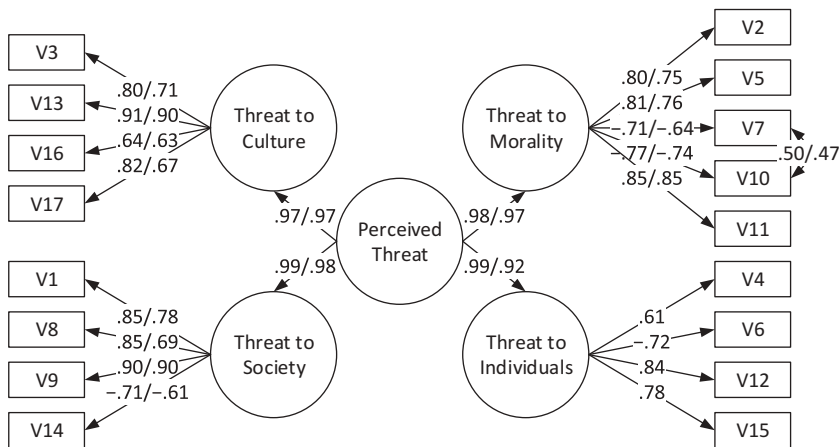


Figure B1. Measurement models for the Perceived Threat of Homosexuals Questionnaire. Standardized parameters for Study 1 ($n = 1,007$) and Study 2 ($n = 292$) samples are shown. Fit indices for Study 1: $\chi^2(114) = 339.28$, $p < .001$, CFI = .974, RMSEA = .044, 90% CI [.039, .050], SRMR = .024; Study 2: $\chi^2(115) = 235.80$, $p < .001$, CFI = .954, RMSEA = .061, 90% CI [.050, .072], SRMR = .040. Second-order factor loadings of Threat to Morality and Threat to Culture were constrained to equality in order to obtain convergence in the Study 2 sample.

Appendix C: Actions Toward Homosexuals Questionnaire

Item formulations:

- (1) Hatred toward homosexuals is a sign of poor moral climate in the society.
- (2) Homosexuals must be cured.
- (3) Homosexuals have no place in our society.
- (4) A homosexual should do anything to overcome the attraction to members of his/her own sex.
- (5) Homosexuals need to work with a therapist to change their sexual orientation.
- (6) A punishment for homosexuality needs to be introduced in the criminal code.
- (7) Homosexuality is a crime that must be prosecuted by law.
- (8) Fighting homosexuality in a society does not lead to any good outcomes.
- (9) Homosexuals need legal protection from oppression and discrimination.
- (10) Homosexuals must be isolated from the society.
- (11) Police must protect homosexuals from assaults and aggression of those who hate them.
- (12) Homosexuals need help to become “normal.”
- (13) Life will be better when the society offers equal rights to homosexuals and heterosexuals.

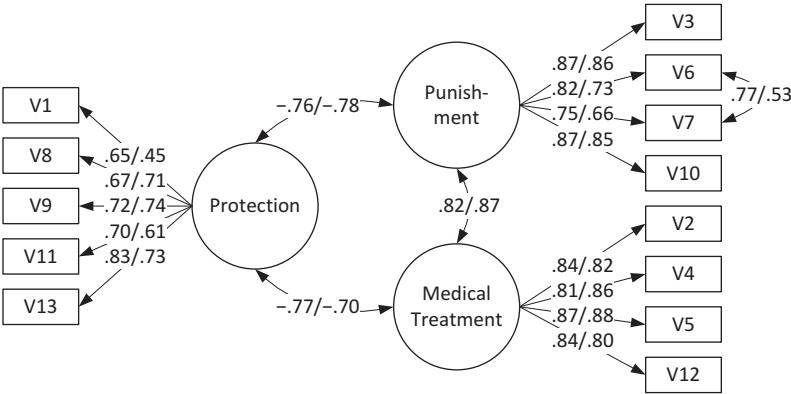


Figure C1. Measurement models for the Actions Toward Homosexuals Questionnaire. Standardized parameters for Study 1 ($n = 1,007$) and Study 2 ($n = 292$) samples are shown; fit indices for Study 1: $\chi^2(61) = 106.02$, $p < .001$, CFI = .990, RMSEA = .027, 90% CI [.018, .036], SRMR = .024; Study 2: $\chi^2(61) = 138.43$, $p < .001$, CFI = .959, RMSEA = .066, 90% CI [.052, .081], SRMR = .044.

Appendix D: Support for Homosexuals’ Rights Questionnaire

Instruction: Different people hold different attitudes regarding homosexuals’ rights. Please rate your own attitude to each of the social phenomena in the listed. Do you think this should be...

1	2	3	4	5
Definitely forbidden	Probably forbidden	Not sure	Probably allowed	Definitely allowed

- (1) Same-sex marriage.
- (2) Adoption by same-sex couples.
- (3) Public actions in support of equal rights for homosexuals and heterosexuals.
- (4) Books and films showing homosexuals in a positive way.
- (5) Positive information about homosexuality in newspapers and TV shows.
- (6) Gay pride parades.
- (7) Recruitment of surrogate mothers (fathers) by homosexuals for childbirth.
- (8) Places like gay bars or cafés where homosexuals could meet each other.
- (9) Web sites for dating and communication among homosexuals.
- (10) Appearance in public with symbols or in clothing emphasizing one's homosexual orientation.
- (11) Participation of homosexuals in politics or state government.
- (12) Celebrities revealing their own sexual orientation in the media.
- (13) Publishing of special journals and newspapers for homosexuals.

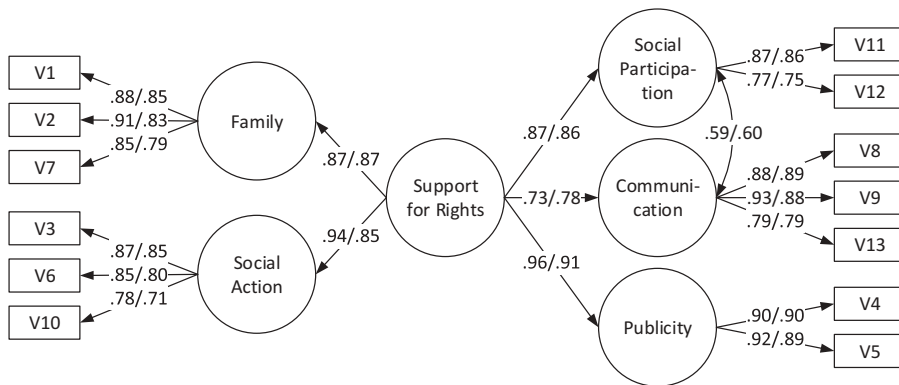


Figure D1. Measurement models for the Actions toward Homosexuals Questionnaire. Standardized parameters for Study 1 ($n = 1,007$) and Study 2 ($n = 292$) samples are shown; fit indices for Study 1: $\chi^2(59) = 317.36$, $p < .001$, CFI = .964, RMSEA = .066, 90% CI [.059, .073], SRMR = .040; Study 2: $\chi^2(59) = 153.01$, $p < .001$, CFI = .961, RMSEA = .074, 90% CI [.060, .088], SRMR = .048.

Appendix E: Group Entitativity of Homosexuals Questionnaire

Item formulations:

- (1) All homosexuals resemble each other in appearance.
- (2) All homosexuals have similar personality characteristics.
- (3) All homosexuals behave in a similar way.
- (4) All homosexuals share common values.
- (5) All homosexuals strongly differ from people with traditional sexual orientation.
- (6) All homosexuals communicate a lot with each other.
- (7) All homosexuals have many friends among themselves.
- (8) All homosexuals follow their specific rules and social norms.
- (9) All homosexuals pursue common goals.

- (10) All homosexuals have leaders that organize their actions.
- (11) All homosexuals share a common destiny.
- (12) All homosexuals strive to achieve the same result.

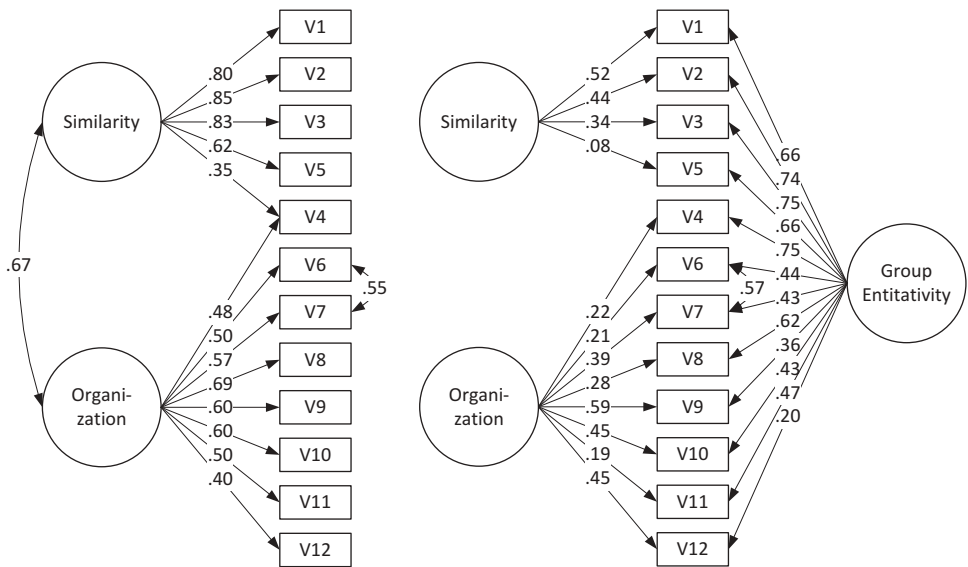


Figure E1. Measurement models for the entitativity measure (Study 2, $N = 292$). Standardized parameters are shown; fit indices for the two-factor model: $\chi^2(51) = 99.21$, $p < .001$, CFI = .961, RMSEA = .056, 90% CI [.040, .073], SRMR = .051; fit indices for the bifactor model: $\chi^2(41) = 55.10$, $p = .070$, CFI = .989, RMSEA = .034, 90% CI [.000, .055], SRMR = .028.