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Moral disagreements: Unearthing pathways to constructive and destructive behavioral responses

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Abstract

Issues like transgender rights often provoke strong emotional reactions, leading to polarized conflicts. Moral psychology suggests that emotions like anger and disgust drive destructive behaviors, such as avoiding or insulting the opponent. However, we argue that constructive behaviors, such as listening to the opponent, are also possible. We propose that appraisals related to engaging and coping with moral disagreements also play critical roles in predicting different behaviors. In an online study with 902 participants from the UK, US, India, and Serbia, we explored these dynamics using a message exchange paradigm. Participants received a message, purportedly from another participant ("messenger"), that contradicted their attitudes toward transgender rights. They then provided emotional reactions, wrote a response, and indicated their willingness to engage in constructive or destructive behaviors with the messenger. Constructive behavioral intentions were predicted by greater empathy, lower disgust and anger toward the messenger, and a higher perceived ability to cope with responding. In contrast, destructive intentions were predicted by lower empathy, greater disgust, lower coping abilities, and higher perceived difficulty in responding. These findings enhance our understanding of behavioral responses to moral disagreements on contentious issues like transgender rights and suggest ways to promote constructive dialogue.

KEYWORDS

appraisals, behavioral responses, emotions, moral disagreements, transgender rights

INTRODUCTION

Social issues such as transgender rights are highly divisive. While some variability in opinion is common and even desirable, polarization—widening of the gap between the opposing camps—threatens societal cohesion (Kleiner, 2018; Overgaard et al., 2021). Often, people on at least one side of the argument perceive their stance as morally correct, and any deviance from it as morally incorrect (Skitka, 2010; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017), leading to emotionally explosive, and difficult-to-resolve conflicts (Coleman, 2011; Kriesberg, 1993). Although instances of violence and intolerance (i.e., destructive behaviors) are more likely responses, concessions, and compromises (i.e., constructive behaviors) also occur (Halperin & Gross, 2011). The study aims to understand how individuals navigate moral disagreements by specifically focusing on the role of emotions and individuals' appraisals of the situation and their coping abilities.

While previous research has examined the relationship between emotions in conflict resolution (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2005), it has largely overlooked the role of situational and ability-related appraisals in moral contexts (Helion & Pizarro, 2015; Pizarro et al., 2003). According to appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991; Moors & Scherer, 2013), behavior is influenced by how individuals evaluate (i.e., appraise) a situation and their capacity to handle it. We propose that while moral values and emotions shape moral disagreement responses to some extent, appraisals of the situation, and their perceived capability to cope also determine constructive or destructive behavioral responses. This study will investigate these dynamics in the context of transgender rights—an increasingly polarized issue (Castle, 2019; Montiel-McCann, 2022; Sharf, 2024)—among participants from the UK, USA, India, and Serbia.

Moral convictions and disagreements

Previous work on conflict resolution finds that disagreements involving ideological differences are challenging to resolve (Illes et al., 2014; Kouzakova et al., 2012) due to individuals' reluctance to compromise on their core moral convictions (Aramovich et al., 2012; Illes et al., 2014). Moral convictions are defined as strong and absolute beliefs that are based on perceptions of rightness and wrongness, that is, morality and immorality (Skitka, 2002). While individuals moralize different topics, they tend to perceive their moral convictions as universally true and fundamentally correct (Skitka, 2010; Skitka et al., 2005). Therefore, moral disagreements often result in increased intolerance expressed through avoidance and aggression toward morally opposed others (Leidner & Castano, 2012; Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008). Avoidant behaviors, such as maintaining greater distance and reduced cooperation, are common in cases of moral conflicts (Skitka et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2008). Additionally, a lack of shared moral conviction is often used as a justification for the dehumanization of the "other" and for the pursuit of aggression (e.g., torture; Haslam, 2006; Leidner & Castano, 2012).

Role of emotions

Previous literature argues that such behavioral responses to moral disagreements are often motivated by the intense emotional experiences that arise when one's morals are challenged (Helion & Pizarro, 2015; Skitka, 2010). We examine three key conflict-relevant emotions such as anger (Skitka et al., 2006; Tam et al., 2007), disgust (Haidt, 2001; Vanaman & Chapman, 2020), and empathy (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Klimecki, 2019).

Disgust as an emotion motivates distancing from its source (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2018; Rozin, 1999) and is linked to more severe moral judgments across different contexts (Schnall

et al., 2008). Disgust also predicts negative attitudes toward LGBTQIA+ people. For example, disgust-driven purity moral concerns predicted support for bathroom restriction for transgender people in the U.S., even when controlling for political orientation (Inbar et al., 2009; Ray & Parkhill, 2021; Vanaman & Chapman, 2020). Like disgust, anger is associated with destructive behaviors. While disgust prompts avoidance, anger drives aggression, often deterring peacebuilding attempts in favor of violence (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Paolini et al., 2021). To illustrate, anger has been shown to reduce support for peace-making efforts in the Northern Ireland conflict (Tam et al., 2007) and to increase support for adversarial policies in the U.S. shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Skitka et al., 2006). Despite anger's destructive potential, research suggests it can also lead to constructive behaviors (De Vos et al., 2013; Halperin & Gross, 2011; Van Kleef & Côté, 2007). For instance, when there is a perceived potential for political negotiations, anger toward outgroup members is linked to greater support for nonviolent policies (Reifen Tagar et al., 2011). Additionally, communicating anger, without contempt can elicit positive responses from outgroups (De Vos et al., 2013).

Moreover, people can even experience empathy toward others with whom they disagree (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; De Vos et al., 2013; Klimecki, 2019). Empathy, comprising of affective and cognitive features, is experienced in response to understanding another's state (Eisenberg et al., 1991). Research on moral convictions and intergroup conflicts shows a positive association between empathy and support for constructive outcomes and humanitarian policies (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Klimecki, 2019). For example, in the context of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, empathy predicted Bosnian Serbs' positive attitudes and approaches toward Bosnian Muslims (Brown & Cehajic, 2008).

Hence, we expect anger, disgust, and empathy to arise in moral disagreements and predict distinct behavioral responses. However, while previous research often focused on a single emotion leading to either destructive or constructive outcomes, we take an integrative approach and propose that people can experience emotions, such as anger, disgust, and empathy simultaneously in response to moral disagreements (Hypothesis (H)1a–c). These emotions in turn drive destructive and constructive behaviors. Specifically, we expect anger to predict both constructive (De Vos et al., 2013; Halperin & Gross, 2011; Van Kleef & Côté, 2007) and destructive behaviors, especially aggressive ones (H2a; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Tam et al., 2007). We expect disgust to predict destructive behaviors, especially avoidant ones (H2b; Inbar et al., 2009; Vanaman & Chapman, 2020) and empathy to predict constructive behaviors (H2c; Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Klimecki, 2019).

The role of appraisals

Emotions are not the sole predictors of behavioral outcomes. In the context of moral disagreement, individuals may also appraise their own ability to effectively communicate and influence the other person's views. Therefore, to holistically understand the behavioral responses to moral disagreements, we must go beyond emotions and examine the role of situational and ability-related appraisals, which are critical but largely overlooked factors (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Helion & Pizarro, 2015; Pizarro et al., 2003).

According to the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), when confronted with a stressful situation (e.g., having to interact with a morally opposed other), individuals appraise both the demands of the situation and their resources to meet them. If the individual appraises that their resources meet or exceed the demands, they are more likely to experience a challenge state, but if resources seem to fall short of demands, they are more likely to experience a threat state (Feinberg & Aiello, 2010; Seery et al., 2010). Typically challenge (vs. threat) state is associated with desirable (vs. undesirable) outcomes such as better (vs. worse) exam performance (Seery et al., 2010).

For example, Gausel et al. (2016) find that experiences of shame and rejection in response to moral failure predicted restitution intentions, but only when the failure was appraised as self-defect, not when it was experienced as a threat to social image. Similarly, Eckerle et al. (2023) find that viewing privilege confrontation as a threat to group image hindered privilege acceptance, while experiencing the confrontation as a moral challenge motivated more acceptance. Applying these insights to moral disagreements, we propose that depending on how stressful the situation of disagreement is appraised (as a challenge or as a threat; Seery, 2013), different behavioral responses will ensue. Individuals who feel capable and perceive the situation as easy or manageable (i.e., their resources meet the demands), will likely engage in constructive behaviors (H3a). Those who perceive themselves as incapable (or less capable) and appraise the task as difficult (i.e., their resources fall short of the demands) will instead be more likely to engage in destructive behaviors (H3b).

Predictors of appraisals

Another goal of this paper is to identify the factors influencing demand and resource appraisals. In stressful situations, factors, such as perceived knowledge, skills, mindsets, and dispositional traits, are important (Kilby et al., 2018). We will focus on the role of interindividual differences, such as open-mindedness, self-efficacy beliefs, and lay theories about personality because they are crucial in conflict situations.

Open-minded cognitive style involves considering competing viewpoints impartially, whereas close-minded cognition biases information processing to confirm prior beliefs (Nickerson, 1998; Price et al., 2015). Open-minded cognition is typically linked to desirable outcomes. For example, highlighting in-group open-mindedness among Democrats and Republicans, improved outgroup attitudes and reduced polarization (Wojcieszak et al., 2020). Similarly, perceived self-efficacy, or belief in one's abilities to mobilize personal resources and meet situational demands (Wood & Bandura, 1989), can also influence responses in stressful conflict situations. For instance, a study investigating outgroup contact found that higher self-efficacy beliefs about successful encounters with outgroup members led to more positive outgroup attitudes and greater contact willingness (Mazziotta et al., 2011). Thus, we expect that more open-minded and self-efficacious individuals will have confidence in their abilities to cope well (H4a) and find the task of defending their moral position less difficult (H4b).

Lastly, their beliefs about others' capacity for change may influence how people engage in moral disagreements. According to implicit theories of personality (Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck et al., 1995), some view personality as fixed and unchangeable (i.e., they endorse an entity theory), whereas others view it as flexible and malleable (i.e., they endorse incremental theory). Rattan and Dweck (2010) found that participants who endorsed incremental theory reported higher motivation to confront people who express prejudicial views, and importantly, a lesser likelihood of withdrawing from future interactions compared to those who endorse entity theory. We expect that in moral disagreement situations, if the individual does not believe the other person can change their view, they may feel that they are incapable of responding well (H4a) and may find the task difficult (H4b).

Overview

In summary, our hypotheses articulate the complex relationships between moral convictions, emotions, and behavioral outcomes in the context of engaging with morally opposed individuals (Figure 1). We anticipate that stronger moral convictions will predict more disgust, more anger, and less empathy toward the morally opposed other (Haslam, 2006; Skitka, 2010;

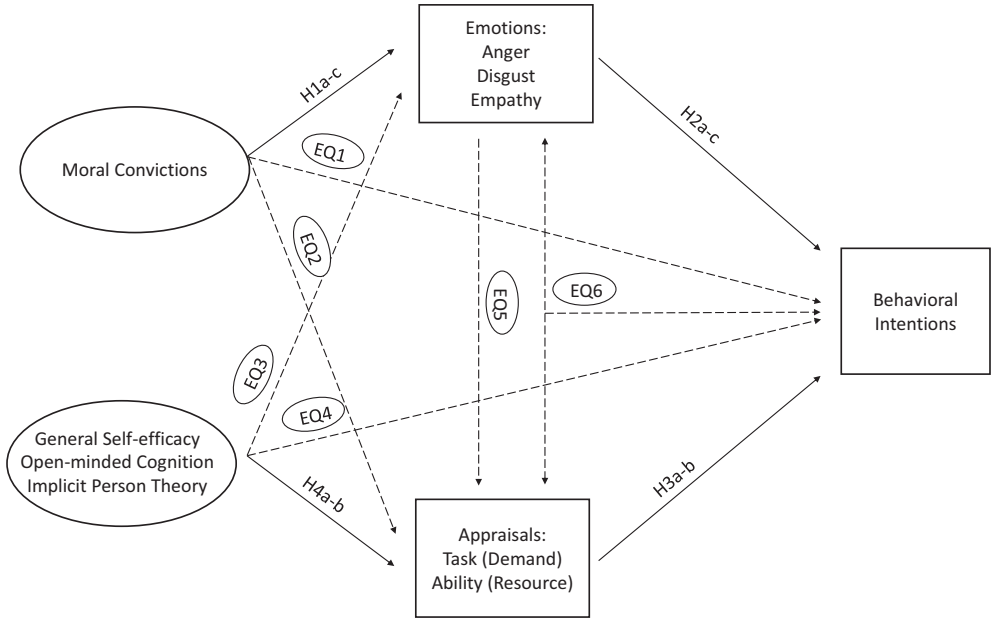

FIGURE 1 Figure summarizing proposed hypotheses and exploratory questions. *Note*: Solid lines represent hypothesized paths, and dashed lines represent exploratory questions.

H1a–c). We hypothesize that anger will predict destructive and constructive behaviors (H2a; De Vos et al., 2013; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015), whereas we expect disgust to hinder constructive behaviors and promote destructive ones (H2b; Inbar et al., 2009; Vanaman & Chapman, 2020). For destructive behaviors, we specifically hypothesize that anger will be a stronger predictor of aggressive behaviors, whereas disgust will more strongly predict avoidant or passive behaviors (H2a, b; Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). We expect empathy to promote constructive and deter destructive behaviors (H2c). For appraisals, we expect that viewing oneself as more (vs. less) capable of engaging with the morally opposed and finding this task less (vs. more) difficult, will increase the likelihood of engaging in constructive (vs. destructive) behaviors (H3a, b; Kilby et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2012). Finally, we expect that more open-minded individuals, those with higher self-efficacy beliefs, and those endorsing incremental (vs. entity) beliefs will perceive the task of engaging with the morally opposed other as easier and their ability to cope greater (H4a, b; Mazziotta et al., 2011; Price et al., 2015; Rattan & Dweck, 2010).

We also explore exploratory questions (dashed lines in Figure 1), without making exact hypotheses due to conflicting or scarce literature. Previous research indicates that moral convictions can lead to both destructive and constructive behaviors (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Skitka, 2010). Therefore, we explore the effects of moral convictions on both behavioral intentions (Exploratory Question (EQ) 1) and appraisals (EQ2). Moreover, open-mindedness, self-efficacy, and implicit theories may shape people's emotional reactions and behavioral intentions directly (EQ3 and EQ4, respectively). Emotional responses could also predict individuals' appraisals (EQ5). With no specific expectations, we also explore whether and how emotions and appraisals interact to influence behaviors (EQ6).

We examine our hypotheses and exploratory questions by investigating moral disagreements on the issue of transgender rights. The scholarship on this topic, while sparse, indicates that public opinions regarding transgender rights are becoming increasingly polarized (Castle, 2019; Montiel-McCann, 2022). The moral psychology literature about transgender issues is also rather small, but recent studies (limited to the US context) indicate that attitudes toward transgender rights are negative, strongly held, and moralized (Skitka et al., 2018;

Vanaman & Chapman, 2020). Transgender individuals already face significant discrimination and violence, and ongoing political debates about their existence and rights further exacerbate their objectification, dehumanization, and marginalization (Montiel-McCann, 2022). Additionally, while it is clear that transgender rights are highly polarized in the US and UK (Sharf, 2024; Variety, 2024), the extent of polarization and moralization in countries like India and Serbia remains unclear due to limited research on the topic and underrepresentation of these countries in psychology (Haeffel & Cobb, 2022; Hässler et al., 2024; Newson et al., 2021). Nonetheless, existing evidence raises concerns about the mental and physical well-being of transgender people in these countries (COWI, 2011; Singh et al., 2022; Slootmaeckers, 2022; Virupaksha et al., 2016). Hence, going beyond the global north, we recruit participants from India and Serbia, in addition to the UK and US, to examine the generalisability of our findings (Haeffel & Cobb, 2022; Hässler et al., 2024; Newson et al., 2021).

Therefore, our work aims to bridge a crucial gap in the literature by contributing to transgender rights scholarship, with the overarching goal of reducing conflicts and polarization toward this group.

METHOD

Participants

Characteristics

A total of 1355 completed responses were collected via Qualtrics from the US, UK, India, and Serbia. Recruitment was done through social media, mailing lists, help of other researchers, and paid platforms like Besample and Prolific (see Appendix S1 for recruitment strategy). Participants were compensated per platform guidelines or entered into a gift voucher prize draw. After removing 453 participants as per our registered exclusion criteria (e.g., held uncertain position on transgender rights or gave low-quality open-ended responses; see Appendix S2 for the full list; stage 1 manuscript is available on OSF) data from 902 participants were analyzed. Data collection occurred from 12 Jan to 18 May 2024, with ongoing quality checks to ensure an adequate sample size after applying the exclusion criteria. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information. Despite our efforts to achieve a balanced sample as preregistered, the participants responding to pro-transgender vs. anti-transgender messages differed on some demographic characteristics, like religiosity and political orientation (see Table 1; comparison test results as pre-registered are included in Appendix S3). As preregistered, we controlled for the relevant differences in the main analyses: nationality, political orientation, religious importance, gender, and message position.

Procedure

The survey was available in English for British, American, and Indian participants, and in Serbian for Serbian participants (1 Serbian participant took the survey in English). The second author translated the English questionnaire (Appendix S4) into Serbian as they are a native Serbian speaker.

In the recruitment material, the participants were invited to take part in an online study called "Conversations around Sensitive Social Issues" to supposedly explore how people discuss various social topics. They were informed that they would exchange messages with another participant about a randomly chosen issue in this study.

First, the participants rated individual difference (that is appraisal factors) scales and stated their position, attitude importance, and moral convictions on transgender rights (the topic was

TABLE 1 Sociodemographic characteristics of participants by message group.

Variable	Anti-trans message (read by supporters of trans rights; $n = 633$)	Pro-trans message (read by opposers of trans rights; $n = 269$)
Age	18–77 ($M = 36.2$, S.D. = 13.3)	18–80 ($M = 41.3$, S.D. = 15.2)
Nationality		
US	138	98
India	194	39
UK	146	86
Serbia	155	46
Gender		
Men	235	138
Women	379	128
Non-binary/third gender	8	0
Other/not disclosed	11	3
Religion		
Christian	184	157
Hindu	150	20
Atheist & agnostics	221	57
Other/Not disclosed	78	35
Religious importance	$M = 3.33$, S.D. = 2.24	$M = 4.48$, S.D. = 2.44
Political orientation	$M = 3.37$, S.D. = 1.60	$M = 5.02$, S.D. = 1.39

Note: 'Men' category includes 2 transgender men. Due to a small number of non-binary people ($n = 8$; all read 'Anti-Trans Message) in the sample, for the main analyses this category was merged with 'Other'. Both religious importance and political orientation were measured on 1 (Not at all) to 7 (Very) scale. Political orientation score is a composite score of economic, political and general political orientation ratings.

embedded among other social issues). Participants were then told that they would read a message from another participant but were given a prewritten text opposing their stance on transgender rights. Participants reported their emotional reactions, wrote a response, and rated the task's difficulty (demand appraisals), and their coping abilities (resource appraisals). They were then asked to imagine how would they behave in a hypothetical face-to-face discussion with the messenger. Finally, demographic information and feedback were collected. All variables were measured on a 7-point Likert scale. For all variables except attitude constructs, demand characteristics, and demographic, the corresponding items were presented in a random order.

Implicit theories about personalities

Participants rated their agreement with 6 items (Chiu et al., 1997; Levy et al., 1998) such as "Everyone, no matter who they are, can significantly change their basic characteristics." Values above the scale midpoint indicate endorsement of incremental theory, that is, the belief that people can change.

Open-minded cognition and general self-efficacy

Open-minded cognition was measured with 6 items (three reverse-coded; Price et al., 2015) and general self-efficacy with eight items (Chen et al., 2001) on a 7-point bipolar agreement scale. Both measures included self-judgments and were presented together in a randomized order.

Example items include "I am open to considering other viewpoints" (open-minded cognition) and "I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks" (self-efficacy). Higher scores indicate greater open-mindedness and self-efficacy.

Position, attitude, and moral convictions

Participants indicated their stance on four issues, including "legalised gender recognition and rights of transgender people" using a bipolar scale from "strongly oppose" to "strongly support," with "uncertain" as the midpoint. Those with an "uncertain" stance were excluded as per our registered exclusion criteria.

The moral convictions score was measured using three items, such as "To what extent is your attitude a reflection of your core moral beliefs?", rated on a scale ranging from "not at all" to "very much". Following Skitka, 2010 approach, we included attitude importance and extremity as control variables as they argue that moral convictions explain unique variance beyond attitude constructs. Participants rated the importance of the issue to them (attitude importance) from "not at all" to "very." The attitude extremity variable was created to represent the extremity of the participant's position on transgender rights, and therefore the responses "slightly oppose or support" were coded as 1, "moderately," as 2, and "strongly" as 3. Higher values indicate a more extreme attitude.

Message task

The messages for those who supported (vs. opposed) transgender rights were prepared in advance by the researchers to be similar linguistically, in content, and length (Appendix S4). We asked quality check questions later (see below for further details) to ensure that the messages had the intended effect.

Emotions

We measured anger (angry, mad, and furious), disgust (disgusted, queasy, and grossed out), and empathy (empathy, sympathy, and compassion) toward the messenger using three items each (Horberg et al., 2009). The scale ranged from "not at all" to "very much," with higher values indicating greater intensity of the emotion.

Open-ended response

Participants were invited to write a response to the messenger. We checked if the participants engaged with the task and excluded those who did not (see exclusion criteria above).

Appraisals

Demand and resource appraisals were measured with two items each (adapted from Schneider et al., 2012; see Appendix S5 for details), rated from "not at all" to "very much." Example items include "How difficult was it to write a response?" (demand) and "How well do you think you performed?" (resource). Higher scores indicate greater perceived difficulty (demand) and greater perceived ability to cope (resource).

Behavioral intentions

Participants rated on a bipolar scale how likely they were to engage in various behaviors toward the messenger if they met in person. We measured three behavioral intentions—constructive, active destructive, and passive destructive—using three items each (adapted from Cuddy et al., 2007; see Appendix S5 for details). We distinguish between active and passive intentions to capture different destructive expressions of disagreement, such as actively aggressive actions like screaming or avoidant behaviors like walking away (passive destructive). Examples include "Call them names or insult them" (active destructive), "Ignore them" (passive destructive), and "Try to understand their opinion" (constructive). To reduce social desirability bias, the participants were encouraged to respond honestly (Larson, 2019) and provide answers that described them realistically given the context.

Demographics

Participants were asked to report their age, gender identity, ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, religion and importance of religion, political orientation (general, social, and economic political orientation on a 1 = Very liberal (Very left) to 7 = Very conservative (Very right) scale where 4 = Centre (Moderate), Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$) and nationality. The demographic information is provided in Table 1. All the regression models controlled for political orientation, importance of religion, nationality, gender, and message position.

Quality checks

The messages were prepared to be as linguistically and thematically similar as possible and were of the same length (111 words). We ran a pilot study to ensure that the messages were perceived as similar as possible and were understood correctly, for example, whether the messenger supported or opposed trans-rights (see Appendix S6 for results). We repeated the same quality checks in the main study (see Appendix S6). However, to ensure that the effects were not driven by the messages we controlled for the message positionality (pro- or anti-trans message) in our main analysis.

Demand characteristics

At the end of the survey, to assess whether the participants were aware of the research hypotheses, which could impact their responses, we included a four-item Perceived Awareness of the Research Hypothesis (PARH; Rubin et al., 2010) scale (example item "I knew what the researchers were investigating in this research").

A one-sample *t*-test (Rubin, 2016) showed that the mean PARH score ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .59$) did not significantly differ ($t(899) = 2$, $p > .05$) from the neutral midpoint of 4 (neither agree nor disagree). Thus, we assume that participants generally did not believe that they were aware of the research hypotheses.

RESULTS

We carried out all analyses in R studio (v. 4.2.2). The raw data set, along with the analyses codes, is available on OSF.

Preliminary analyses

Testing for response sets

One of the challenges of cross-cultural research is systematic cultural variations in response sets such as certain cultures typically avoiding extreme values on the scale while responding (Gelfand et al., 2004). We calculated a grand mean with all relevant numerical items. A Kruskal–Wallis test indicated a statistically significant difference between response sets of at least two countries (χ^2 ($df = 3$) = 81.3, $p < .001$; see Appendix S7). To address the systematic cultural variations, we computed within-group standardization for each country (see Appendix S7; Fischer, 2004). All analyses reported here were repeated on this standardized response set—overall main and exploratory results remained consistent, except for a few near the significance threshold ($p < .05$) where the significance direction changed. The inconsistent results are reported below. In all analyses on the standardized data set, nationality was not a significant predictor.

Indices

We reverse-coded the required items and conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) for both dependent and independent variables using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Based on the CFA results, we dropped poor-performing items for both the implicit person theory scale and the open-minded cognition scale (three reverse-coded items from each scale were excluded). Additionally, we dropped two poor-performing active destructive intentions items, and the remaining one item was merged with three passive destructive items to create a new composite destructive intentions variable (see Appendix S8 for CFA results). All variables, computed based on CFA results, had higher internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > .7$ and Spearman's $r > .7$; Appendix S9).

Main analyses

Descriptives and correlation analysis

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix for the key variables. We find that anger and disgust are negatively, and empathy is positively correlated with constructive behavior intentions and the pattern is inverse for destructive intentions. Resource appraisals were positively correlated with constructive intentions and negatively with destructive behaviors. Demand appraisals are only positively correlated with destructive behaviors.

Regression analyses

Testing assumptions and outliers

Before running the regression models, we checked if the assumptions were met (Tabachnick et al., 2013). None of our models had issues with multicollinearity but the models did under or overestimate extreme values at both ends of the data. Appendix S10 reports the assumptions checks in further detail.

To detect and handle the outliers, we followed the recommendations of Leys et al. (2019) to ensure robust outlier analysis, this was not preregistered, but it is in line with the best and rigorous practices in the field. Accordingly, we used the Minimum Covariance Determinant method using the Routliers package in R with the breaking point set at .25 (Leys et al., 2018). Seventy-one outliers were identified; however, we did not exclude them from the data. We

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics and correlations for study variables.

Variables	*M* (S.D.)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Implicit Person Theory	4.6 (1.31)	_												
2. Open-minded Cognition	5.73 (.84)	0.306***												
3. General Self Efficacy	5.39 (0.92)	0.194***	0.383***											
4. Moral Convictions	4.69 (1.75)	0.015	0.012	0.017										
5. Attitude Extremity	2.28 (0.79)	0.046	0.029	0.064	0.365***									
6. Attitude Importance	4.21(2.01)	0.104**	0.066*	0.053	0.581***	0.350***								
7. Anger	3.14 (1.83)	0.048	−0.074*	−0.079*	0.233***	0.235***	0.289***							
8. Disgust	3.05 (1.76)	0.059	−0.055	0.008	0.244***	0.264***	0.295***	0.787***						
9. Empathy	2.62 (1.47)	0.207***	0.166***	0.125***	−0.037	−0.155***	0.036	−0.215***	−0.184***					
10. Demand Appraisals	2.91 (1.60)	0.050	0.004	−0.056	0.089**	0.019	0.096**	0.215***	0.184***	0.101**				
11. Resource Appraisals	5.44 (1.22)	0.063	0.162***	0.234***	0.129***	0.105**	0.083*	0.055	0.090**	0.099**	−0.224***			
12. Constructive Intentions	5.53 (1.28)	0.153***	0.404***	0.207***	−0.066*	−0.079*	−0.064	−0.382***	−0.399***	0.310***	−0.049	0.119***		
13. Destructive Intentions	2.37 (1.35)	−0.109***	−0.245***	−0.163***	0.092**	0.150***	0.119***	0.386***	0.434***	−0.227***	0.193***	−0.109**	−0.680***	

Note: S.D.= Standard Deviation, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$ all variables are measured on a 1–7 scale except attitude extremity (1–3).

retained the outliers as there were no clear indications that they were problematic, and to avoid arbitrary removal, we conducted a sensitivity analysis to assess their impact on the results (Leys et al., 2019). In other words, we repeated and compared all analyses on a data set without the outliers—overall the main and exploratory results remained consistent with the results. Only the inconsistent results are reported below.

Power analysis

We preregistered a sample of 920 and collected 902 which is only slightly (<2%) below the target. A sensitivity analysis for the largest regression model (16 predictors, $n = 900$) indicated an effect size of $f^2 = .032$ or higher could be detected with 95% power. The smallest effect size in the analysis was $f^2 = .0526$ (Model testing H4), and therefore, our sample is adequately powered to detect the main results.

Regression models

We ran a total of seven hierarchical regression models using the stats and jtools R packages (Long, 2022; R Core Team, 2022). The hypotheses were tested in the first step, while the variables associated with the exploratory questions were added in the second step of the models. All regression models controlled for nationality, political orientation, religious importance, gender, and message position.

Hypotheses testing. Three regression models with additional control variables of attitude extremity and attitude importance tested the effect of moral convictions on emotions (H1). We expected a positive effect of moral convictions on anger and disgust and a negative effect on empathy.

Moral convictions about transgender people significantly predicted anger ($b = .09$, $p = .04$) and disgust ($b = .08$, $p = .04$), but not empathy ($b = -.03$, $p = .37$; see Table 3). Moral convictions' effect on anger and disgust was small and marginally significant and these effects were not supported in the standardized data set (anger: $b = .08$, $p = .05$; disgust: $b = .08$, $p = .05$), and in the data set without outliers (anger: $b = .03$, $p = .05$; disgust: $b = .03$, $p = .05$). Interestingly, compared to moral convictions, the attitude constructs had a stronger effect on the emotions. Attitude extremity positively predicted anger ($b = .32$, $p < .001$), disgust ($b = .37$, $p < .001$), and negatively predicted empathy ($b = -.33$, $p < .001$). Attitude importance also positively predicted anger ($b = .17$, $p < .001$) and disgust ($b = .16$, $p < .001$) but not empathy ($b = .04$, $p = .16$).

We conducted additional, nonpreregistered analyses to further explore these results. As moral convictions were weak or irrelevant predictors of emotions in models including attitude constructs, we examined whether this was due to transgender rights not being a moralized issue for participants or because moral convictions failed to explain any unique variance beyond the attitude constructs. Both pro-trans and anti-trans message groups included participants with varying degrees of moral convictions (Table 4). We further investigated the relationship between moral convictions and emotions and ran the regression models without the attitude constructs, which indicated a strong effect of moral convictions on anger ($b = .25$, $p < .001$) and disgust ($b = .24$, $p < .001$). A small effect on empathy ($b = -.06$, $p = .03$; results in Appendix S11) was also found but it was not supported in the data set without outliers (empathy $b = -.05$, $p = .07$).

Two regression models tested the effect of emotions and appraisals on constructive and destructive behavioral intentions (H2 and H3; Table 5). For constructive intentions, we expected positive coefficients for anger, empathy, and resource appraisals and expected negative coefficients for disgust and demand appraisals.

Anger ($b = -.11$, $p = .001$) and disgust ($b = -.20$, $p < .001$) negatively, whereas empathy ($b = .13$, $p < .001$) positively predicted constructive intentions. Resource appraisal ($b = .14$, $p < .001$)

TABLE 3 Regression analyses: Moral convictions, attitude constructs (H1) and appraisal factors (EQ3) predicting emotions.

	Anger								Disgust								Empathy							
	Main model				Exploratory model				Main model				Exploratory model				Main model				Exploratory model			
Variable	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***B***	**S.E.**	***t***	***P***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***P***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***
(Intercept)	1.30	0.32	4.04	0.00	2.65	0.56	4.73	0.00	1.13	0.31	3.69	0.00	1.99	0.54	3.72	0.00	2.99	0.25	11.83	0.00	1.19	0.44	2.72	0.01
Moral convictions	0.09	0.04	2.07	0.04	0.08	0.04	2.02	0.04	0.08	0.04	2.05	0.04	0.08	0.04	2.05	0.04	−0.03	0.03	−0.90	0.37	−0.02	0.03	−0.55	0.58
Attitude Extremity	0.32	0.08	3.92	0.00	0.33	0.08	4.14	0.00	0.37	0.08	4.76	0.00	0.37	0.08	4.83	0.00	−0.33	0.06	−5.26	0.00	−0.35	0.06	−5.55	0.00
Attitude Importance	0.17	0.04	4.71	0.00	0.17	0.04	4.66	0.00	0.16	0.04	4.49	0.00	0.16	0.04	4.41	0.00	0.04	0.03	1.42	0.16	0.03	0.03	1.10	0.27
Nationality: British	0.35	0.17	2.09	0.04	0.31	0.17	1.84	0.07	−0.09	0.16	−0.55	0.58	−0.10	0.16	−0.61	0.54	−0.09	0.13	−0.71	0.48	−0.02	0.13	−0.12	0.91
Nationality: Indian	0.43	0.18	2.45	0.01	0.45	0.18	2.56	0.01	0.54	0.17	3.18	0.00	0.57	0.17	3.36	0.00	0.51	0.14	3.69	0.00	0.51	0.14	3.73	0.00
Nationality: Serbian	0.04	0.18	0.25	0.80	0.12	0.18	0.66	0.51	0.18	0.17	1.09	0.28	0.25	0.17	1.44	0.15	−0.53	0.14	−3.79	0.00	−0.50	0.14	−3.59	0.00
Political orientation	−0.05	0.04	−1.08	0.28	−0.04	0.04	−1.03	0.30	0.00	0.04	0.03	0.97	0.00	0.04	−0.06	0.95	0.03	0.03	1.04	0.30	0.04	0.03	1.11	0.27
Religion importance	−0.05	0.03	−1.53	0.13	−0.04	0.03	−1.26	0.21	−0.06	0.03	−1.93	0.05	−0.05	0.03	−1.84	0.07	0.10	0.02	4.07	0.00	0.08	0.02	3.41	0.00
Gender: Woman	0.16	0.13	1.27	0.20	0.15	0.13	1.21	0.23	0.02	0.12	0.14	0.89	0.02	0.12	0.15	0.88	−0.05	0.10	−0.45	0.65	−0.01	0.10	−0.14	0.89
Gender: Other	0.21	0.39	0.54	0.59	0.11	0.38	0.28	0.78	0.36	0.37	0.99	0.32	0.31	0.37	0.83	0.41	−0.34	0.30	−1.11	0.27	−0.28	0.30	−0.94	0.35
Message: Pro-trans	0.06	0.15	0.40	0.69	0.01	0.15	0.07	0.95	0.20	0.14	1.37	0.17	0.16	0.04	4.41	0.00	−0.31	0.12	−2.61	0.01	−0.22	0.12	−1.90	0.06
Open-minded cognition					−0.20	0.08	−2.50	0.01					−0.23	0.08	−3.06	0.00					0.15	0.06	2.46	0.01
General self-efficacy					−0.13	0.07	−1.84	0.07					0.02	0.07	0.28	0.78					0.06	0.05	1.19	0.23
Implicit person theory					0.09	0.05	1.91	0.06					0.08	0.05	1.74	0.08					0.13	0.04	3.50	0.00
Model fit	Adj. $R^2 = .11$, $F(11,888) = 11.18$***				Adj. $R^2 = .12$, $F(14,885) = 9.97$*** $\Delta R^2 = .01$ $F(3,885) = 4.98$**				Adj. $R^2 = .12$, $F(11,888) = 12.56$***				Adj. $R^2 = .13$, $F(14,885) = 10.73$*** $\Delta R^2 = .01$ $F(3,885) = 3.59$**				Adj. $R^2 = .15$, $F(11,888) = 15.60$***				Adj. $R^2 = .18$, $F(14,885) = 14.97$*** $\Delta R^2 = .03$ $F(3,885) = 10.79$***			

Note: **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 4 Levels of moral conviction strength by message group.

Moral convictions strength (rating range)	Anti-trans message $M = 4.77$, S.D. = 1.63 *n* (%)	Pro-trans message $M = 4.50$, S.D. = 2.01 *n* (%)
Strong (greater than 4.5)	369 (58.39%)	145 (54.10%)
Moderate (3.5–4.5)	129 (20.04%)	34 (12.68%)
Low (less than 3.5)	134 (21.20%)	89 (33.21%)
Total	632	268

Note: Comparison of mean moral convictions by message group: $W = 89757$, $p = 0.2$.

positively predicted constructive intentions, and surprisingly demand appraisals ($b = .02$, $p = .50$) did not have a significant effect.

For destructive intentions, we expected significant positive coefficients for anger, disgust, and demand appraisals, and negative coefficients for empathy and resource appraisals. We also expected anger to be the stronger predictor of active destructive behaviors and disgust to be the stronger predictor of passive ones. However, given that we merged active and passive destructive intentions items into one construct: destructive intentions, we cannot test these specific parts of H2a-b.

Unexpectedly, anger ($b = .07$, $p = .06$) did not significantly predict destructive intentions. For the data without outliers, the effect of anger was significant but only marginally ($b = .08$, $p = .03$). On the other hand, as expected, disgust ($b = .25$, $p < .001$) positively and empathy ($b = -.10$, $p < .001$) negatively predicted destructive intentions. Disgust had the strongest effect out of all the emotions. For the data without outliers, the effect of empathy on destructive intentions was not supported ($b = -.04$, $p = .12$). As expected, resource appraisal ($b = -.10$, $p < .001$) negatively predicted destructive intentions, and demand appraisals ($b = .10$, $p < .001$) positively predicted destructive intentions. Additionally, as can be seen in Table 5, for both behavioral intentions, the message group has a significant effect, but given the difference in group sizes, we do not draw any conclusions from this finding.

Two regression models tested the effects of appraisal factors on appraisals (H4; Table 6). We expected open-minded cognition, implicit personality theory and general self-efficacy to positively predict resource appraisals and negatively predict demand appraisals.

General self-efficacy had a positive effect on resource appraisals (i.e., higher ability to cope with the task; $b = .25$, $p < .001$) and had a negative, but only marginally significant, effect on demand appraisals ($b = -.13$, $p = .03$) which was not supported in the data without outliers ($b = -.12$, $p = .09$). Open-minded cognition only significantly predicted resource appraisals ($b = .16$, $p < .001$) and did not have a significant effect on demand appraisals ($b = -.06$, $p < .001$). In the data without outliers, the effect of open-minded cognition on demand appraisals was marginally significant ($b = -.16$, $p = .04$). Implicit person theory did not have a significant effect on resource appraisals ($b = -.03$, $p = .37$) or demand appraisals ($b = .07$, $p = .11$).

Table 7 provides a concise overview of our findings and highlights any deviations from the preregistered predictions.

Exploratory analyses. To investigate the effect of open-minded cognition, implicit personality theory and general self-efficacy on emotions (EQ3; Table 3), the vairables were added to the three regression models testing the effect of moral convictions on emotion (H1). Open-minded cognition negatively predicted anger ($b = -.20$, $p < .05$) and disgust ($b = -.23$, $p < .001$) and positively predicted empathy ($b = .15$, $p < .05$). Implicit person theory only predicted empathy ($b = .13$, $p < .001$), whereas in the data without outliers, it also predicted anger ($b = .11$, $p = .03$)

TABLE 5 Regression analyses: Emotions (H2), appraisals (H3), moral convictions (EQ1) and appraisal factors (EQ4) predicting behavioural intentions.

	Constructive intentions								Destructive intentions							
	Main model				Exploratory model				Main model				Exploratory model			
Variable	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*p*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*P*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*p*	*b*	S.E.	*t*	*p*
(Intercept)	5.29	0.25	20.99	0.00	2.45	0.36	6.87	0.00	2.22	0.27	8.25	0.00	4.07	0.40	10.21	0.00
Anger	−0.11	0.03	−3.27	0.00	−0.10	0.03	−3.06	0.00	0.07	0.04	1.86	0.06	0.05	0.04	1.53	0.13
Disgust	−0.20	0.03	−5.81	0.00	−0.20	0.03	−6.01	0.00	0.25	0.04	6.80	0.00	0.25	0.04	6.78	0.00
Empathy	0.13	0.03	4.76	0.00	0.10	0.03	3.83	0.00	−0.10	0.03	−3.30	0.00	−0.07	0.03	−2.22	0.03
Resource appraisals	0.14	0.03	4.33	0.00	0.07	0.03	2.30	0.02	−0.10	0.03	−2.84	0.00	−0.05	0.03	−1.47	0.14
Demand appraisals	0.02	0.02	0.68	0.50	0.02	0.02	0.66	0.51	0.10	0.03	3.84	0.00	0.10	0.03	3.98	0.00
Nationality: British	0.08	0.11	0.71	0.48	0.16	0.10	1.55	0.12	−0.22	0.11	−1.89	0.06	−0.26	0.11	−2.30	0.02
Nationality: Indian	0.25	0.11	2.19	0.03	0.21	0.11	1.97	0.05	−0.16	0.12	−1.32	0.19	−0.15	0.12	−1.22	0.22
Nationality: Serbian	−0.05	0.11	−0.48	0.63	−0.15	0.11	−1.41	0.16	0.12	0.12	0.99	0.32	0.20	0.12	1.69	0.09
Political orientation	−0.02	0.03	−0.57	0.57	0.00	0.02	−0.07	0.94	−0.01	0.03	−0.45	0.65	−0.02	0.03	−0.55	0.58
Religion importance	0.05	0.02	2.48	0.01	0.03	0.02	1.84	0.07	−0.06	0.02	−2.83	0.00	−0.05	0.02	−2.20	0.03
Gender: Women	−0.02	0.08	−0.30	0.77	0.01	0.08	0.12	0.91	−0.18	0.09	−.201	0.04	−0.21	0.09	−2.42	0.02
Gender: Other	−0.37	0.24	−1.51	0.13	−0.27	0.23	−1.16	0.25	0.53	0.26	2.05	0.04	0.45	0.26	1.78	0.08
Message: Pro−trans	−0.40	0.09	−4.17	0.00	−0.27	0.09	−2.97	0.00	0.26	0.10	2.55	0.01	0.17	0.10	1.71	0.09
Moral convictions					0.01	0.02	0.55	0.58					−0.03	0.03	−1.17	0.24
Attitude extremity					0.03	0.05	0.63	0.53					0.08	0.05	1.42	0.16

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

	Constructive intentions								Destructive intentions							
	Main model				Exploratory model				Main model				Exploratory model			
Variable	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***P***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***
Attitude importance					−0.01	0.02	−0.66	0.51					0.02	0.02	0.94	0.35
Open minded cognition					0.48	0.05	10.18	0.00					−0.26	0.05	−4.98	0.00
General self-efficacy					0.06	0.04	1.35	0.18					−0.10	0.05	−2.03	0.04
Implicit person theory					0.02	0.03	0.56	0.58					−0.05	0.03	−1.71	0.09
Model fit	Adj. $R^2 = .27$, $F(13,886) = 26.31$***				Adj. $R^2 = .37$, $F(19,880) = 28.25$*** $\Delta R^2 = .10$, $F(6880) = 23.68$***				Adj. $R^2 = .26$, $F(13,886) = 25.06$***				Adj. $R^2 = .30$, $F(19,880) = 20.86$*** $\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(6880) = 8.87$***			

Note: **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 6 Regression analyses: Appraisal factor (H4), moral convictions (EQ2) and emotions (EQ5) predicting appraisals.

	Resource appraisals								Demand appraisals							
	Main model				Exploratory model				Main model				Exploratory model			
Variable	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***	***b***	**S.E.**	***t***	***p***
(Intercept)	3.45	0.35	9.89	0.00	2.72	0.38	7.10	0.00	3.39	0.47	7.23	0.00	2.34	0.51	4.60	0.00
Open-minded cognition	0.16	0.05	3.06	0.00	0.17	0.05	3.25	0.00	−0.06	0.07	−0.90	0.37	−0.04	0.07	−0.60	0.55
General self-efficacy	0.25	0.05	5.36	0.00	0.24	0.05	5.22	0.00	−0.13	0.06	−2.12	0.03	−0.12	0.06	−1.97	0.05
Implicit person theory	−0.03	0.03	−0.95	0.34	−0.04	0.03	−1.28	0.20	0.07	0.04	1.61	0.11	0.03	0.04	0.78	0.43
Nationality: British	−0.36	0.11	−3.18	0.00	−0.31	0.11	−2.74	0.01	0.31	0.15	2.04	0.04	0.29	0.15	1.94	0.05
Nationality: Indian	−0.23	0.12	−1.95	0.05	−0.27	0.12	−2.25	0.02	0.74	0.16	4.64	0.00	0.59	0.16	3.70	0.00
Nationality: Serbian	−0.74	0.12	−6.20	0.00	−0.68	0.12	−5.62	0.00	0.47	0.16	2.92	0.00	0.54	0.16	3.40	0.00
Political orientation	0.02	0.03	0.68	0.50	0.03	0.03	1.02	0.31	−0.04	0.04	−1.04	0.30	−0.03	0.04	−0.77	0.44
Religion importance	0.01	0.02	0.48	0.63	0.00	0.02	0.08	0.94	0.05	0.03	1.75	0.08	0.04	0.03	1.38	0.17
Gender: Women	0.08	0.09	0.98	0.33	0.09	0.09	1.06	0.29	−0.08	0.12	−0.72	0.47	−0.11	0.11	−0.92	0.36
Gender: Other	−0.21	0.26	−0.81	0.42	−0.27	0.26	−1.05	0.30	0.30	0.35	0.86	0.39	0.26	0.34	0.75	0.46
Message: Pro−Trans	0.04	0.10	0.42	0.67	0.06	0.10	0.58	0.57	−0.27	0.14	−1.97	0.05	−0.22	0.14	−1.62	0.11
Moral convictions					0.07	0.03	2.59	0.01					0.04	0.04	1.09	0.28
Attitude extremity					0.05	0.06	0.96	0.34					0.00	0.07	−0.07	0.95
Attitude importance					−0.02	0.03	−0.81	0.42					−0.03	0.03	−0.81	0.42
Anger					0.01	0.04	0.30	0.77					0.17	0.05	3.67	0.00
Disgust					0.06	0.04	1.55	0.12					0.03	0.05	0.57	0.57
Empathy					0.06	0.03	1.91	0.06					0.14	0.04	3.55	0.00
Model fit	Adj. $R^2 = .10$, $F(11,888) = 10.21$***				Adj. $R^2 = .12$, $F(17,882) = 8.12$*** $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $F(6882) = 3.91$**				Adj. $R^2 = .05$, $F(11,888) = 5.27$***				Adj. $R^2 = .09$, $F(17,882) = 6.46$*** $\Delta R^2 = .05$, $F(6882) = 8.17$***			

Note: **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 7 Summary of hypotheses: Support status and alternative outcomes.

No.	Proposed hypothesis	Support status	Results when hypothesis not supported
H1a	Stronger moral convictions will positively predict anger	✓ (Marginally significant)	–
H1b	Stronger moral convictions will positively predict disgust	✓ (Marginally significant)	–
H1c	Stronger moral convictions will negatively predict empathy		No significant relationship
H2a	More anger will positively predict constructive behavior		Significant negative relationship
	More anger will positively predict destructive behavior		No significant relationship
	Anger compared to disgust will be stronger predictor of the aggressive/active destructive behaviors	–	Could not test this as active and passive destructive items were merged into one construct[a]
H2b	More disgust will negatively predict constructive behavior	✓	–
	More disgust will positively predict destructive behavior	✓	–
	Disgust compared to anger will be stronger predictor of the avoidant/ passive destructive behaviors	–	Could not test this as active and passive destructive items were merged into one construct[a]
H2c	More empathy will positively predict constructive behavior	✓	–
	More empathy will negatively predict destructive behavior	✓	–
H3a	Higher resource appraisal ratings will positively predict constructive behavior	✓	–
	Higher demand appraisal ratings will negatively predict constructive behavior		No significant relationship
H3b	Higher resource appraisal ratings will negatively predict destructive behavior	✓	–
	Higher demand appraisal ratings will positively predict destructive behavior	✓	–
H4a	Higher open-minded cognition will positively predict higher resource appraisal ratings	✓	–
	Higher general self-efficacy will positively predict higher resource appraisal ratings	✓	–
	Higher implicit person theory (incremental beliefs) will positively predict higher resource appraisal ratings		No significant relationship

TABLE 7 (Continued)

No.	Proposed hypothesis	Support status	Results when hypothesis not supported
H4b	Higher open-minded cognition will negatively predict higher demand appraisal ratings		No significant relationship
	Higher general self-efficacy will negatively predict higher demand appraisal ratings	✓ (Marginally significant)	–
	Higher implicit person theory (entity beliefs) will negatively predict higher demand appraisal ratings		No significant relationship

[a]We could not test whether anger was the stronger predictor of active destructive behavior and disgust a stronger predictor of passive destructive ones (H2a–b) as these two constructs were merged into one construct: destructive behavior intentions.

and disgust ($b = .10$, $p = .04$), though the effects were only marginally significant. General efficacy was not related to emotions.

Moral convictions (EQ1) and open-mindedness, self-efficacy, and implicit theories (EQ4) were added to the regression models testing the effect of emotions and appraisals on behavioral intentions (H2 and H3; Table 5). Moral convictions and implicit person theory did not directly predict behavioral intentions. General self-efficacy only predicted destructive intentions but the results ($b = -.10$, $p = .04$) were close to the significance threshold and this finding did not replicate in the standardized data set ($b = -.06$, $p = .06$) or the data set without outliers ($b = -.10$, $p = .05$). Open-minded cognition positively predicted constructive intentions ($b = .48$, $p < .001$) and negatively predicted destructive intentions ($b = -.26$, $p < .001$). Additionally, adding the exploratory predictors to the analyses led to the resource appraisal not being a significant predictor of destructive intentions ($b = -.05$, $p = .14$), most likely because open-minded cognition was correlated with behaviors and the resources appraisal.

Moral convictions (EQ2), anger, disgust, and empathy (EQ5) were added as predictors of appraisals to the two regression models conducted to test Hypothesis 4 (see Table 6). Only moral convictions positively predicted resource appraisals ($b = .07$, $p < .05$), but this was not supported in the data set without outliers ($b = .04$, $p = .12$). Conversely, only emotions, specifically anger ($b = .17$, $p < .001$) and empathy ($b = .14$, $p < .001$), were important in predicting demand appraisals. Contrary to our main analysis, general self-efficacy did not predict demand appraisals ($b = -.12$, $p = .05$). However, for the standardized data set, the effect of general self-efficacy is marginally significant ($b = -.09$, $p = .03$).

We ran regression models to investigate the interaction effects between various emotions and appraisals in predicting different behavioral intention outcomes (EQ6). All interaction terms were not statistically significant. In our data set without outliers, three interactions: between anger and resource appraisals ($b = .04$, $p = .01$) and disgust and resource appraisals ($b = .05$, $p < .01$) when predicting constructive intentions and disgust and resource appraisals ($b = -.04$, $p = .03$) when predicting destructive intentions were significant. Given that the effects are very small and not supported in other analyses, we refrain from drawing any conclusions. We also checked the interactions between demand and resource appraisals through regression models in predicting behavioral intentions and again, the results were not significant.

Structural equation models (SEM)

We also conducted an SEM analysis and the model fit for a model with hypothesized predictors and control variables was moderate (X^2 (824) = 3210.502, $p < .001$; *CFI* = .849; *TFI* = .827; *RMSEA* [90% CI] = .060 [.058, .062]; *SRMR* = .10). A post hoc power analysis using semPower

(Moshagen & Bader, 2024) indicated that given the sample size and the proposed model, an RMSEA effect of .06 could be detected with 99.99% power at the $p = .05$ significance level. The results are indicated in Figure 2 and Appendix S12 includes the detailed results. Regression results that indicated a weak relationship between moral convictions and disgust and between general self-efficacy and demand appraisals were not significant in the SEM analysis. The rest of the SEM results support our main findings. The SEM model with hypothesized and exploratory paths along with control variables did not converge, likely because the model was too complex, therefore, we do not report estimates for this model. The SEM results for the standardized data set and data set without outliers were largely consistent, but any inconsistency is reported and explained in Appendix S12.

DISCUSSION

Moral disagreements on issues such as transgender rights can be very polarizing and are often deemed too difficult to resolve (Skitka, 2010). Therefore, understanding the predictors of different behavioral responses to these moral disagreements is of both theoretical and practical importance. Our study takes a holistic approach to investigate the relationship between moral convictions, emotions, appraisal, and appraisal factors that influence behavioral responses—ranging from constructive actions like engaging in a polite dialogue to destructive behaviors such as insulting others.

We expected moral convictions to play an important role in predicting how emotional people felt in moral disagreements over transgender rights. However, this effect was weak, as emotional responses were more strongly determined by the importance people gave to their attitudes and the extremeness of their position on the issue. Both emotions and appraisals predicted constructive and destructive behavioral intentions, confirming our expectation of the importance of appraisals alongside emotions in shaping behavior. Indeed, both appraisals of task difficulty (demand appraisal) and one's coping abilities (resource appraisal) shaped behavioral intentions. Surprisingly, anger did not predict destructive intentions and had a negative effect on constructive intentions. We were not able to test whether anger predicted more actively destructive behaviors due to poor-performing items identified in factor analyses. Finally, both general self-efficacy beliefs and open-minded cognition positively influenced participants' perception of their coping abilities. General self-efficacy was a negative predictor of demand appraisals, but the effect was only marginally significant and additional analyses failed to support this finding. Implicit person theory had no effect on either of the appraisals.

Exploratory analyses illuminated a few noteworthy findings as well. Open-minded thinking predicted emotional responses and intentions to engage in constructive and destructive behaviors. Interestingly, the effect of open-minded cognition on behavioral intentions was much larger than the effect of emotions or appraisals. Additionally, perceptions of task difficulty, the least explained construct in our analyses, were influenced by anger and empathy. The implications of our findings are discussed below.

Theoretical and practical implications

Previous research highlights the central role of emotions in conflict and therefore we start with their role in predicting behavioral responses. Our results show that higher empathy and lower disgust lead to more constructive behavior and this aligns with previous work that links disgust to distancing behavior (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2018; Rozin, 1999) and empathy to compassion and perspective-taking behavior (Brown & Cehajic, 2008; Klimecki, 2019). Unexpectedly, anger was negatively linked to constructive behavior and did not predict destructive

behaviors—contradicting existing literature that suggests anger motivates aggression and destructive behavior and, in some instances, constructive behavior (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015; Paolini et al., 2021). The lack of relationship between anger and destructive intentions could be explained by our choice of items that captured distancing, rather than aggressive destructive behaviors. On the other hand, in line with existing literature, disgust was the most important predictor of the distancing behavior capturing destructive intentions (Giner-Sorolla et al., 2018; Rozin, 1999). Our results also indicated that empathy led to less destructive intentions, but not all analyses consistently supported the link between empathy and destructive intentions, so this finding should be interpreted cautiously and checked for replication in future studies before application. In summary, our study suggests that disgust (for both behaviors) and empathy (for at least constructive behavior) may play a more important role in the context of disagreements over transgender rights than anger. Future research should further investigate the role of anger along with other emotions in various moralized contexts.

Our work further contributes to the literature on the ideological predictors of emotional reactions to moral disagreements (Skitka, 2010; Wisneski & Skitka, 2017). We found that though most participants moralized the issue of transgender rights, their emotional reactions to disagreements were primarily influenced by their attitude extremity and importance rather than moral convictions. Specifically, more polarized individuals, that is individuals with more extreme attitude positions, were more likely to feel angry and disgusted and less likely to feel empathy. This may seem surprising since Skitka and colleagues (2010) argue that moral convictions are distinct from attitude contracts in predicting emotions. However, some evidence suggests that moral convictions, attitude extremity, and importance all characterize the same concept, that is, the embeddedness of attitude in an individual's core values and identity (Philipp-Muller et al., 2020). Furthermore, our findings linking various emotions and attitude constructs align with previous research on polarization—more polarized individuals are more likely to feel angry and disgusted and less likely to feel empathy (Simas et al., 2020; van Prooijen et al., 2015). This indicates while empathy can promote constructive and possibly deter destructive behaviors, in practice, it might be very difficult to induce empathy in polarization contexts (Simas et al., 2020) and instead anger and disgust might be the most likely reactions. Therefore, while in response to polarizing disagreements emotional experience facilitatory to conciliatory outcomes are desirable, they may be highly unlikely.

This study addresses important gaps in the literature as it goes beyond emotions and investigates how appraisals influence behavioral responses to moral disagreements. We found that both one's perceived ability to cope (resource appraisals) and perceived task difficulty (demand appraisals) predict destructive behavior, whereas only resource appraisals influence constructive behavior. This aligns with previous work that suggests that destructive outcomes are likely when perceived resources do not meet perceived demands (Domen et al., 2022; Seery et al., 2010). However, it is surprising and unclear why only perceived ability to cope, and not perceived task difficulty influenced constructive behavioral intentions because these behaviors are linked to appraisals of resources meeting demand appraisals (Feinberg & Aiello, 2010; Seery et al., 2010). We also explored whether emotions and appraisals jointly influence behavioral intentions. While the initial analyses found no support, additional analyses without outliers revealed some significant effects, particularly between disgust and resource appraisals, predicting both constructive and destructive intentions. Although this aligns with previous findings on the relationship between emotions and appraisals (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015), it may be premature to draw definitive conclusions without future replications, as these findings are exploratory and were observed only in one supplementary analysis.

Moreover, we found that different factors influence resource and task appraisals. Resource appraisals were driven by more stable individual traits—open-minded cognition and general self-efficacy. This aligns with previous work on stress and coping that identifies stable dispositional characteristics as important factors influencing resource appraisals (Lazarus &

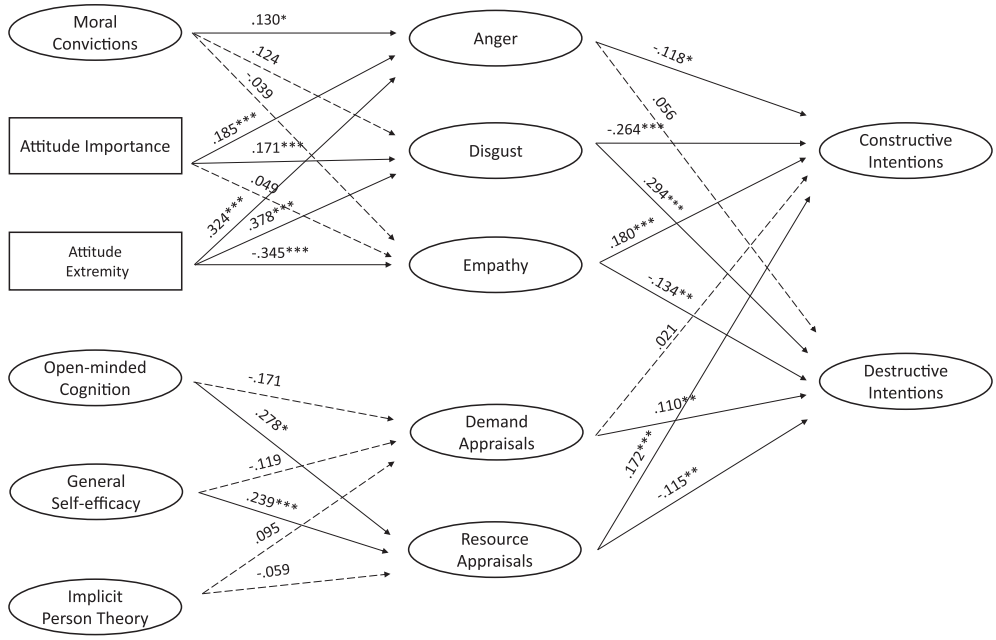

FIGURE 2 Structural equation model results of the hypothesized model. The SEM model included control variables, but they are omitted from the figure for clarity and ease of understanding. *Note*: *$p < .05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$. Solid lines represent significant paths, and dashed lines represent non-significant paths.

Folkman, 1984; Terry, 1991). In contrast, demand appraisals were predicted by situational factors, such as emotions, which had little impact on resource appraisals. Interestingly, our exploratory analyses found that both anger and empathy predicted higher task difficulty appraisals. Anger is often characterized by optimism in the ability to correct wrongdoing (Halperin & Pliskin, 2015), therefore, it may seem surprising that anger here led to pessimistic appraisals about task difficulty. Anger motivates correction of wrongdoing often through aggressive behaviors (Skitka et al., 2006), therefore, it could be that angry individuals prefer an aggressive course over a dialogue with their conflict partner and in turn appraise the latter as difficult. Even more intriguing is the effect of empathy. Given the importance of moral convictions to self, individuals are more likely to be intolerant of morally opposed others, perceiving them as evil (Skitka, 2010). In contrast, empathy involves understanding and compassion for others—even for those with differing views (Eisenberg et al., 1991; Klimecki, 2019). This tension between upholding moral values and empathizing with others may explain why empathy is linked to perceived difficulty in handling disagreements (Klimecki, 2019; Skitka, 2010).

We had also hypothesized that implicit person theory would influence appraisals as we expected that beliefs about people's ability to change might shape an individual's approach to engaging in a dialogue with a morally opposed other (Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck et al., 1995). However, we do not find any support for our hypothesis; perhaps, when evaluating potential confrontation and one's ability to do so, people simply focus on self-related, rather than other-related, factors.

Finally, the most important predictor of behavioral intentions came out of our exploratory analyses. Individuals who engage in open-minded cognition are more likely to display constructive behavior and less likely to engage in destructive behavior. This finding while exploratory aligns with the existing literature that links open-minded cognition to polarization-reducing behaviors like understanding counter position, perspective taking. and being open to listening and learning (Dolbier et al., 2024; Wojcieszak et al., 2020).

Additionally, open-minded cognition predicted less anger and disgust and more empathy. Some work suggests that open-mindedness and empathy conceptually overlap, and an open-minded approach fosters empathy by promoting understanding of others' perspectives (Dolbier et al., 2024). It also seems likely that individuals who are open to conflicting information experience less anger or disgust when challenged (Dolbier et al., 2024; Halperin et al., 2013; Price et al., 2015). However, some work suggests that the relationship between emotions and open-mindedness is bidirectional and that emotions can also influence open-mindedness (Dolbier et al., 2024; Raoul & Huntsinger, 2023). The literature on moral conflicts and conflict resolution would benefit from paying special attention to individual differences in open-mindedness and how those interact with emotions, appraisals, and behavior. Interventions promoting open-mindedness have been successfully applied in various contexts and given its important role here, they could be effective in promoting more constructive outcomes in cases of moral disagreement on transgender rights (Dolbier et al., 2024; Warner & French, 2020).

Limitations

We collected a large sample from four countries for this study; however, the samples were not representative of the general population as we employed convenience sampling due to financial and time constraints. Despite efforts to recruit participants from both sides of the issue, we had a higher proportion of supporters than opponents of transgender rights. Therefore, while we note significant differences between the two groups for some of the outcomes, we caution against drawing conclusions from these findings as the effect might be driven by unequal group sizes. Future research should reflect on how to reach groups that are perhaps not well represented on survey platforms or in university samples. Although we controlled for nationality to identify common predictors of behavioral responses across the four countries, sociopolitical and cultural differences might also influence behavioral responses. Country-specific nuances were foregone for findings that can be generalized to global north and south contexts. However, we encourage future studies to both test the validity of results across more countries and to investigate the role of country-specific contexts in these disagreements.

Given that we collected data from four different countries, our measures had very high internal reliability. However, we had to remove three reverse-coded items each for open-minded cognition and general self-efficacy, to improve reliability. This highlights the need for better cross-culturally validated measures. Additionally, our models did not predict extreme values in our data well, therefore we recommend caution in applying these findings to future theoretical and practical work.

Another limitation is that we used behavioral intentions as a proxy for actual behavior and those were measured in the context of dialogue with the morally opposed other. Future research should investigate the generalisability of the findings to other contexts such as forming friendships with those holding opposing moral views. Similarly, the findings here apply to moral disagreements in the context of transgender rights, but their relevance to other contexts such as immigration or the death penalty remains to be tested.

Finally, our study is conducted in an online context, which may limit the applicability of our findings to face-to-face contexts (Postmes et al., 1998). However, discussions and disagreements over contentious issues do often take place online (e.g., Sharf, 2024; Variety, 2024) with grave consequences for the polarization and well-being of marginalized individuals (Peña-Fernández et al., 2023). Therefore, we believe our online paradigm is ecologically valid and allows us to understand how disagreements over polarized topics unfold. Additionally, the

online message exchange paradigm can be of use for future research, because it provides a versatile framework for exploring a variety of contexts.

CONCLUSION

The issue of transgender rights is often moralized and can be very polarizing. This holds severe negative consequences for individuals who are at the center of such polarizing moral disagreements (Castle, 2019; Montiel-McCann, 2022). Transgender individuals often face verbal and physical abuse, and their basic human rights are violated (Allegretti, 2023; Contreras, 2023; COWI, 2011; Singh et al., 2022). Yet, this is a largely understudied issue in political and moral psychology. Therefore, our findings not only expand our theoretical understanding of moral disagreements, conflicts, and polarization but can potentially inform solutions that promote human rights, dignity, and the overall well-being of the transgender community across various countries.

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