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Attitudes Toward and Beliefs about Transgender Youth: A Cross-Cultural Comparison Between the United States and India

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Abstract Using an internet-based survey, we examined attitudes toward transgender youth in the United States and India, two cultures with differences in conceptualizations of gender and treatment of transgender individuals in society, law, and religion. We found generally positive attitudes toward transgender youth in our U.S. ($n = 218$), but moderately negative ones in our Indian ($n = 217$), sample. Consistent with the literature on prejudice against transgender adults in many Western societies, general social conservatism in the form of religious beliefs and political ideology, gender-specific conservatism in the form of gender binary belief, and endorsement of environmental rather than biological causes of transgender identity were the best predictors of U.S. participants' attitudes, although personal contact with gender and sexual minorities also played a role at the bivariate level. These findings suggest that the processes underlying prejudice against transgender youth are similar to those that foster adult-directed transphobia in that cultural context. In contrast, religion-based disapproval and environmental causal attributions were the best predictors of Indian respondents' attitudes, whereas gender binary belief played only a minor role, and political conservatism and personal contact no role at all. Our regression analyses accounted for considerably more of the variability in U.S. than in Indian participants' attitudes, highlighting the need for additional (qualitative) work to identify the factors that promote transprejudice in India. We discuss these findings

in light of cross-cultural differences between the two countries in terms of our predictors and consider implications for efforts to reduce prejudice against transgender youth.

Keywords Transgender · Youth · Attitude · Prejudice · Culture · India · USA

Although there has been movement toward greater equality for gender and sexual minorities in many countries (Human Rights Watch 2016), transgender individuals, or people whose subjective gender identity varies from the sex they were assigned at birth, continue to face social and legal prejudice, discrimination, and physical violence across the globe (Human Rights Watch 2016; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2015). A considerable body of research has examined the factors that promote negative attitudes against transgender adults, as well as uncovered both similarities and differences across cultures (Willoughby et al. 2010; Winter et al. 2008; Worthen et al. 2016). However, despite the fact that gender-nonconforming behavior often begins in childhood or adolescence (Grossman et al. 2006; Menvielle 2009; Rahilly 2014; Winter 2009; Winter and King 2011), research on attitudes toward gender nonconforming youth continues to be rare.

This gap in the research is very unfortunate considering that negative attitudes toward transgender individuals, most commonly referred to as transphobia (Hill and Willoughby 2005) or transprejudice (Winter 2009), are likely one of the factors that fuel discriminatory behavior (Ajzen and Fishbein 2005; Elischberger et al. 2016; Fiske 2000). Gender-variant youth may, in fact, be particularly vulnerable to discrimination due to their diminished autonomy; studies have indeed shown that they are routinely mistreated at home (D'Augelli et al. 2006; Grossman et al. 2005) and at school (D'Augelli et al.

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2002; Grossman et al. 2009; James et al. 2016; Kosciw et al. 2014). One of the primary goals of the current study therefore was to assess attitudes toward gender-nonconforming children and adolescents.

A second major goal of our study was to extend the cross-cultural literature on transgender attitudes by comparing responses from residents of the United States and India. Transprejudice is fairly well researched in the United States (Nagoshi et al. 2008; Tebbe et al. 2014; Worthen et al. 2016), including a recent large-scale probability sample of U.S. residents (Norton and Herek 2013) as well as a study focusing specifically on attitudes toward transgender youth (Elishberger et al. 2016; we would like to point out that the data reported in that study came from a different sample of participants than the U.S. data reported here). The comparison with India was motivated primarily by the fact that Indian culture differs markedly from the United States in terms of fundamental conceptualizations of gender. In contrast to the male/female gender binary model that is common in the United States, Indian culture and law recognize a third gender, which finds its most visible representation in its hijras, a group of male-assigned people who adopt feminine gender expression and live together in communities that are defined by kinship and religious practices (Dutta 2012a; Goel 2016; Nanda 1986).

Research in the United States (Norton and Herek 2013), in the United Kingdom (Tee and Hegarty 2006), and in Australia (Riggs et al. 2012) has shown that the strength of people's belief in a gender binary predicts their attitudes toward transgender individuals. To our knowledge, however, this link has not yet been examined in a culture like India with its long history of challenging that binary. Research has also shown that people's political convictions and religious beliefs correlate with their attitudes toward transgender individuals, although it appears that their examination, too, has so far been restricted almost exclusively to Western samples (Elishberger et al. 2016; Norton and Herek 2013; Tee and Hegarty 2006; Worthen et al. 2016). Particularly India's majority religion, Hinduism, presents an interesting contrast to a majority Christian culture like the United States because of its explicit and positive representations of gender-variant deities and mortals (Hunt 2011).

Gender and Transgender in the West and the East

In the United States and other Western industrialized nations, gender is typically viewed as a strict male/female binary that coincides with a person's (equally binary) biological sex (Schilt and Westbrook 2009). Until the publication of the fifth edition of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 2013, even the American Psychiatric Association viewed any divergence between gender identity

and assigned birth sex as inherently pathological (American Psychiatric Association 2013; see Cohen-Kettenis and Pfäfflin 2010, as well as Newman 2002, for in-depth discussions of the problems with the now outdated diagnosis of gender identity disorder). In contrast, scholars from a variety of disciplines have been challenging the overly simplistic gender and sex (as well as sexual orientation) binaries and the presumed relationships among them (Balzer Carr et al. 2015; Monro 2007). Although transgender identities do not necessarily invalidate the notion of a gender binary, they do call into question related assumptions, namely that gender arises from one's biological sex (as indicated by one's genitalia or chromosomes) and that it is immutable.

The impact of a culture's gender-related belief system begins as soon as a child is born. Parents and others expect babies assigned a male sex to grow into boys/men; babies assigned a female sex, into girls/women. Research has begun to document how parents of gender-nonconforming children negotiate the difficulties that arise from the constraints of the gender binary in the face of their child's gender identity and/or expression (Rahilly 2014). Even the question of sexual orientation, another binary that is part of the sex/gender belief system according to which only sexual attraction between "opposite" sexes or genders is normal (Schilt and Westbrook 2009), becomes relevant well before children reach puberty. Parents, especially fathers of gender-nonconforming sons, worry that childhood nonconformity might predict adult same-sex orientation (Kane 2006). As recently discussed by Worthen (2016), research on attitudes toward adult gender and sexual minorities suggests that anyone violating gender/sex and/or sexual orientation binaries is viewed as not normal and inherently inferior to those who conform, which then provides the justification for prejudice and discrimination against them.

In contrast to the prevalent Western gender binary, South/Southeast Asia is characterized by what Peletz (2006, p. 311) described as "deeply entrenched and broadly institutionalized traditions of pluralism with respect to gender and sexuality." In India, the most widely recognized embodiment of this pluralism is its hijra communities, which can look back on a millennia-long history (Lal 1999). Rather than being *trans*-gender, hijras are often considered to be a *third* gender (Nanda 1986), and a 2014 Supreme Court decision granted legal recognition to this third gender identity. However, the reality of gender variance in India is more complicated than expanding the number of recognized genders from two to three in that different identities are not always clearly defined, some identities are valued above others, and there is considerable intersectionality between gender and class/caste.

It is important to note that the concepts of gender and sex have not been differentiated as clearly in India as in the West (Monro 2007). Many Southeast Asians not only fail to make the Western distinction between biological sex and psychological/social gender, but also frequently define sex/

gender in terms of sexual behavior (Winter and King 2011). India is home to people of many different gender/sexual-variant identities that tend to overlap (such as the hijras and the kothis; kothis are generally understood to be lower-class feminine men who desire sex with men and may or may not identify as transwomen, but are—unlike hijras—not organized in houses or clans; see Dutta 2012a, Dutta and Roy 2014), but consensus on what defines a particular group is often lacking. Some hijras, for instance, do identify as third gender, whereas others identify as female (Das 2015; Semmalar 2014a). The term hijra itself has been used to refer to a variety of different identities, including castrated, gay, or effeminate men and intersex individuals (Kalra 2012; Lal 1999), although most are of male birth sex and subsequently adopt female names, mannerisms, and appearance (in terms of hair, clothing, and potentially also surgical removal of penis and testes). Hijras tend to live among themselves in communal houses and refer to one another in female kinship terms such as sister, mother, and daughter (see Goel 2016, and Nanda 1986, for detailed descriptions of hijra communes). Thus, although the term *transwomen* does not truly capture hijras, it is probably the least problematic that the Western lexicon has to offer (cf. Patel 2010; Winter and King 2011).

In fact, the term *transgender* or variations of it are increasingly used as identity categories in India—at least in English-speaking segments of the population with access to the Internet. This identification is likely due in part to its use by Western non-governmental organizations that work with the country's gender/sexual-variant population (Dutta 2012b; Dutta and Roy 2014). Considering that middle or upper-class Indian transwomen are largely invisible because they have to fear that coming out would lead to loss of family ties as well as economic, social, and political dispossession (as are transmen because they lack social and political organization; Semmalar 2014b), hijras are the face of gender nonconformity in India and thus provide an important cultural context for understanding attitudes toward gender-atypical youth.

India's recognition of a third gender by the legal system does not mean that it is afforded the same social status as its male or even female counterparts. (As noted in the following, India's patriarchy also clearly favors the male over the female gender.) This hierarchy is reflected in the fact that India's increasing post-colonial sexual liberalization and acceptance of gender/sexual variance has largely been restricted to cisgender gay men and lesbian women, although that analysis is complicated by the fact that acceptance also appears to be restricted to upper caste, middle class, English-speaking, metropolitan individuals (Dutta 2008; Semmalar 2014a). With very few exceptions (see Das 2015), hijras fall into none of these categories. Owing to their mythic origins as people who were neither men nor women and who were blessed by the god Rama for their devotion (Lal 1999), hijras have traditionally made a living by bestowing blessings at weddings and

births (Lal 1999; Nanda 1986). British colonial rule, however, greatly exacerbated their social and economic decline (Preston 1987), and increasing modernization has further undermined their traditional/pre-modern roles, forcing many into begging and sex work (Goel 2016; Lal 1999; Patel 2010).

Most hijras today are part of the *dalit* caste (the “untouchables”); they are cut off from mainstream employment, education, and housing (Monro 2007; Semmalar 2014b) and often live in abject poverty (Goel 2016). The considerable prejudice against hijras in modern Indian society thus appears to combine the stigma of being outside the gender binary, which was fueled in part by the Western medical model's view that deviations from the binary constitute a mental disorder (Winter and King 2011), with the stigma of belonging to a low caste/class, as well as the stigma of sex work and other behaviors that may be deemed disreputable, such as “flamboyant displays of gender/sexual difference” (Dutta 2012b, p. 127). As a consequence, hijras are now routinely subject to discrimination, abuse, and violence, even at the hands of the police (People's Union for Civil Liberties – Karnataka 2003).

Attitudes toward Transgender Youth

Only a handful of known studies so far have directly measured attitudes toward transgender youth, and almost all of them were carried out in the United States and Canada. The most recent of these was an online survey of U.S. residents of varied demographic backgrounds (Elischberger et al. 2016). Elischberger et al.'s (2016) findings showed very little disapproval of a hypothetical transgender youth (either 8 or 16 years of age), overall, with an average score of around 3 on a 10-point disapproval scale. Although the sample as a whole leaned towards liberal views on social politics, it is worth noting that even the average score of participants who described themselves as politically conservative remained below the mid-point of the scale. Male-to-female (MtF) transgender youth were judged somewhat less positively than their female-to-male (FtM) counterparts, which might have been due to the fact that participants expressed more concern about the possibility of later same-sex orientation for the MtF youth. In addition to political conservatism, participants were more disapproving if they claimed a religious affiliation, lacked personal contact with gender and sexual minorities, adhered more strongly to traditional gender norms, and viewed transgender identity to be caused by environmental rather than biological factors. This pattern of findings thus mirrored what is generally found in studies on adult-directed transphobia (Nagoshi et al. 2008; Norton and Herek 2013; Worthen et al. 2016). Canadian parents in Hill and Willoughby's study (Hill and Willoughby 2005, Study 2) also did not appear to be particularly negative toward a hypothetical 6-year-old gender-nonconforming child (although the information

reported by the researchers was insufficient to allow for a precise evaluation), but expressed more negativity the higher they scored on adult-directed transphobia, homophobia, and traditional gender attitudes scales.

Considering that attitudes toward gender and sexual minorities in North America have become increasingly more supportive since the 1980s (Andersen and Fetner 2008; Pew Research Center 2013), it is surprising that even studies conducted decades ago showed little evidence of prevalent negativity toward transgender youth, overall. Canadian university students in Martin's (1990) study generally approved of young FtM children, although they did express pronounced disapproval of MtF children, possibly because they viewed the former to be less likely to outgrow their gender nonconformity and more likely to develop a same-sex orientation in adulthood. U.S. college students in Feinman's (1974) research showed essentially neutral attitudes toward 3- to 8-year-old MtF and approval of FtM children, which was attributed to status differences between male and female gender roles in a follow-up study (Feinman 1984).

The only individual difference factor examined in these early studies was participants' gender, and consistent with most of the research on adult-directed transphobia, male participants expressed stronger disapproval of gender nonconforming youth than did women. It is interesting to note that the pattern of gender differences is also in line with the literature on parents of transgender youth in that MtF children generally face more opposition (e.g., gender policing) than FtM and that fathers tend to be less supportive and accepting than mothers are, both in the United States (D'Augelli et al. 2006; Kane 2006) and in Asia (in Thailand: Winter 2006; the Philippines: Winter et al. 2007). This gendered pattern also underscores the dominant position of heterosexual cisgender male individuals in many societies (Worthen 2016). Finally, in what appears to be the only study to date conducted in India that included such information, Mahalingam et al. (2007) found that FtM children were judged moderately positively, whereas cross-gender behavior of MtF children was viewed as very inappropriate, although there were no differences by participants' gender.

The actual experiences of transgender youth in the United States are decidedly more negative than studies on attitudes would lead one to expect. The vast majority of transgender youth report being called names like "sissy" or "tomboy" by their parents and being told to stop acting like one (Grossman et al. 2005). Family rejection and familial violence based on gender and/or sexual identity are, in turn, cited as the primary causes for homelessness among minority youth (Durso and Gates 2012), who are vastly overrepresented in the U.S. homeless youth population (Keuroghlian et al. 2014). A recent large-scale survey of 6th through 12th grade LGBT students from all across the United States (Kosciw et al. 2014) also documented high levels of harassment of transgender students

in schools, ranging from name-calling to physical assault as well as discriminatory school policies and practices. Victims of such maltreatment suffer in terms of academics and self-esteem, and they show elevated rates of depression (Kosciw et al. 2014), homelessness, and suicide attempts (James et al. 2016).

The discrepancy between the alarming statistics on victimization of transgender youth, on the one hand, and the absence of overly negative attitudes expressed in most studies, on the other, might in part be due to greater victimization of MtF than of FtM youth. Unfortunately, most reports of youth victimization do not differentiate by gender, but research does suggest that one way in which cisgender, heterosexual male adolescents assert their dominance is through harassing other male adolescents who deviate from the masculine and heterosexual norm (Swearer et al. 2008; Tharinger 2008). Additionally, the risk of becoming a victim of violence is markedly greater for MtF than FtM adults (Stotzer 2009). A direct correspondence between attitudes and behavior can also not be expected because discriminatory behavior depends in part on context factors (Ajzen and Fishbein 2005; Fiske 2000), attitudinal research is subject to social desirability and other biases that likely play a negligible role in studies on victimization, and studies on attitudes have involved adults reporting on hypothetical transgender youths. (Studies examining the attitudes of adults as well as peers toward actual transgender youths are lacking.)

Despite India's gender pluralism, the country's gender-nonconforming youth are targets of various forms of maltreatment that mirror those suffered by their U.S. counterparts. Likely fueled in part by the hypermasculine brand of masculinity that is prevalent in India (Mahalingam and Balan 2008), which reacts forcefully against stereotypically feminine traits in men (Verma et al. 2006), gender-nonconforming male-assigned youth are shunned by their own families (especially by male relatives), experience familial physical violence (Semmlar 2014b), and get expelled from their homes (Winter and King 2011). Many of them also drop out of school early because they are ostracized (cf. Goel 2016; Winter and King 2011). Very little appears to be known about India's gender-nonconforming girls/female adolescents, which may be a reflection of the low status of their birth sex (see Semmlar 2014b); Indian culture strongly privileges men over women (United Nations Development Programme 2015) and values sons more than daughters (cf. Jha et al. 2006).

The Impact of Culture and Individual Difference Factors

The impact of culture and individual difference factors has thus far been examined exclusively for adult-directed transprejudice. In the only known study to directly compare

attitudes toward transgender individuals between the United States and Asia, Winter et al. (2008) found that U.S. participants were not very accepting of transwomen. In fact, U.S. participants had the lowest acceptance scores among those from seven countries, followed closely by Malaysia. Participants in Singapore, China, Thailand, and the Philippines all scored around the mid-point of the scale, and participants in the United Kingdom were quite accepting. Other studies conducted in Asia (none of which have included India) have yielded similar neutral-to-positive attitudes (in Hong Kong: King et al. 2009; Winter et al. 2008; Thailand: Ngamake et al. 2013; Winter 2006; the Philippines: Willoughby et al. 2010, Study 3).

In contrast to Winter et al.'s (2008) findings, a majority of studies conducted in the United States has also documented mostly neutral (Worthen 2016; Worthen et al. 2016) or even somewhat positive attitudes (Carroll et al. 2012; Tebbe et al. 2014, Study 2; Walch et al. 2012a; Walch et al. 2012b; Willoughby et al. 2010, Studies 1 & 2). Studies conducted in other Western countries, such as Canada (Hill and Willoughby 2005, Studies 1 & 3), the United Kingdom (Tee and Hegarty 2006), Australia (Riggs et al. 2012), Italy and Spain (Worthen et al. 2016), and Sweden (Landén and Innala 2000) have reflected even more acceptance and support. There are, however, two additional important exceptions to the majority of neutral-to-positive findings in the United States: male participants in Nagoshi et al.'s (2008) study expressed fairly negative attitudes (5.05 on a 7-point transphobia scale) and both male and female participants from a large nationally representative sample in Norton and Herek's (2013) recent study were *extremely* negative toward transgender persons (averaging only 27.63 points from men and 36.22 points from women on a scale from 0 to 100, where higher scores indicated more positive feelings). Taken together, it does appear that prevailing attitudes in the United States are more negative than those in most Asian (and, for that matter, European) countries, but there is no consistent difference between world regions characterized by gender pluralism versus gender binary.

Stronger endorsement of a gender binary as an individual difference variable, however, has been linked to greater transphobia in U.S. participants (Norton and Herek 2013). Similarly, equating sex with gender and viewing them as binary and immutable were associated with opposition to trans persons' rights in the United Kingdom (Tee and Hegarty 2006) and transphobia in Australia (Riggs et al. 2012). People's views on gender have also been shown to play a role in the form of their beliefs about the causes of transgender identity. Elischberger et al. (2016) found that both stronger endorsement of biological causes and weaker endorsement of environmental ones were associated with less prejudice in the United States. Similarly, both Landén and Innala (2000) in Sweden and Antoszewski et al. (2007) in Poland found

stronger support for "transsexual" rights in participants who favored biological explanations. Thai transwomen who believed in a biological origin of their own gender identity tended to also view it as inevitable in the sense that it could not be changed and should therefore be accepted (Winter 2006). Finally, Norton and Herek's (2013) finding that men were more transphobic than women reflects a general trend, both in Western (in the U.S.: Nagoshi et al. 2008; Walch et al. 2012a; Worthen 2016; Worthen et al. 2016; Canada: Hill and Willoughby 2005, Study 1; Willoughby et al. 2010, Study 4; Australia: Riggs et al. 2012; the U.K.: Tee and Hegarty 2006; Italy: Worthen et al. 2016; Sweden: Landén and Innala 2000) and Asian cultures (in Hong Kong: Winter et al. 2008; Thailand: Ngamake et al. 2013; the Philippines: Willoughby et al. 2010, Study 3; gender differences also emerged in Winter et al.'s 2009, Malaysian, Filipino, Singapore, Thai, U.S. and U.K. samples, but were not tested for significance).

Worthen (2016) has argued that heterosexual cisgender men tend to be more transphobic than women are because transgender individuals threaten their dominant position in society (MtF people by casting doubt on the actual value of maleness by relinquishing their male gender and FtM by aspiring to a position of privilege that is not rightfully theirs). The fact that people with sexist views, which cast women in subordinate roles relative to men, also tend to be more transphobic (in the U.S.: Nagoshi et al. 2008; Tebbe et al. 2014, Study 2; Worthen 2016; Worthen et al. 2016; Italy: Worthen et al. 2016) further underscores this argument in that sexism and transphobia are both forms of gender-based prejudice.

Political ideologies and religious beliefs play important roles in shaping culture, but they also serve as individual difference factors in that people vary in the extent to which they adopt them. At the level of culture, religion plays a larger role in public life and in politics in the United States than in other industrialized nations (e.g., Western Europe; Berger et al. 2008). The majority of the U.S. population, namely 71%, belongs to various Christian denominations, 23% are unaffiliated, and only 6% are of non-Christian faiths (Pew Research Center 2016). Attitudes toward sexual, and presumably gender, minorities vary among the many different Christian denominations: Evangelical Protestants feel less positively toward them and oppose equal rights for them more strongly than do mainline Protestants and Catholics; some, like the Southern Baptist Convention, have supported explicit anti-gay legislation (Shames et al. 2011). At the level of individual differences, biblical literalism (Worthen et al. 2016), as well as religious fundamentalism (Nagoshi et al. 2008), has been associated with increased transphobia in the United States, although even more basic measures, such as how much daily guidance one receives from religion (Norton and Herek 2013) or even just whether or not one claims any religious affiliation at all (Elischberger et al. 2016), have shown similar effects. In

the only known study to date to examine the role of religious beliefs in Asia, Willoughby et al. (2010, Study 3) found that higher self-reported religiosity and worship frequency were correlated with stronger transphobia in their majority Roman Catholic sample.

The current legal wrangling over transgender rights in the United States provides important insights into the country's political landscape. In early 2016, the majority conservative (Republican) state legislature in North Carolina passed House Bill 2 (General Assembly of North Carolina 2016), which required transgender people, including students in public schools, to use restrooms aligned with the sex listed on their birth certificate. Although that original bill was ultimately repealed (on March 30, 2017), human rights activists have pointed out that the compromise bill that replaced it continues to allow for discrimination by preventing the state's municipalities from passing their own anti-discrimination ordinances until the year 2020 (Hanna et al. 2017). In contrast, the federal government under the leadership of President Obama (a Democrat) declared that schools "must allow transgender students access to [restrooms and locker rooms] consistent with their gender identity" (U.S. Department of Education/U.S. Department of Justice 2016, p. 3; it should be noted that the Republican Trump administration has since revoked the federal guidelines that guaranteed transgender students access to gender-consistent facilities; Trott 2017). Providing a telling example of the intersection of conservative religious and political ideologies in the United States, James Dobson, a vocal Evangelical public figure, condemned the Obama administration's support of transgender students ("Have we gone absolutely mad?" Dobson 2016, para. 3) and cited Tony Perkins of the conservative Family Research Council as stating, "It's all part of a radical movement trying to destroy the fact that God created man and woman—and that somehow people can choose what gender they want to be" (para. 9).

Against this backdrop it is not surprising that studies in the United States have linked negative attitudes toward transgender people with general political conservatism (Elischberger et al. 2016; Worthen et al. 2016) and with more specific conservative ideologies, such as right-wing authoritarianism (Nagoshi et al. 2008; Norton and Herek 2013) and anti-egalitarian attitudes (Norton and Herek 2013). Conservatism has also been linked with less supportive transgender attitudes in Italy and Spain (Worthen et al. 2016), and, conversely, Landén and Innala (2000) speculated that the positive views of their Swedish participants were influenced by the rights that the Swedish legislation has extended to transgender people. We are not aware of any studies outside a Western cultural context to examine the role of political views for transgender attitudes.

Finally, there is abundant evidence that personal contact with outgroup members, such as transgender people, can reduce prejudice (see Pettigrew and Tropp 2006, for a review). In what

appears to be the only experimental study to address this question, Walch et al. (2012b) found that attending a speaker panel with transgender individuals who discussed their personal developmental histories and the emotional impact of their experiences reduced transphobia in U.S. college students enrolled in a course on human sexuality. Several other studies have documented more positive attitudes in those who knew a gender or sexual minority individual compared to those who did not, both in Western countries (in the U.S.: Elischberger et al. 2016; Norton and Herek 2013; Willoughby et al. 2010, Study 2; Australia: Riggs et al. 2012; Canada: Hill and Willoughby 2005, Study 3; U.K.: Tee and Hegarty 2006) and in Asia (in Hong Kong: King et al. 2009; Thailand: Ngamake et al. 2013).

In summary, the literature on adult-directed transphobia suggests that attitudes toward transgender people in the United States may be less supportive than in other Western and Asian countries. In part this may reflect a combination of traditional views of gender and a strong conservative religious element that also holds sway in the political sphere (see also Worthen et al. 2016). Research on individual differences has also highlighted the importance of people's beliefs about the causes of transgender identity and personal contact with gender or sexual minorities, but the vast majority of this work has been carried out in Western cultures.

The Present Study

The two main goals of the current study were to examine attitudes toward transgender youth and to compare responses from participants in the United States and India. Participants in both locations completed the study online by first reading a brief vignette describing either an 8- or 16-year-old MtF or FtM transgender youth and answering questions about their attitudes toward that child or adolescent. The manipulation of age was based on the assumption that the question of sexual orientation may be less salient in 8-year-old children, who have not yet reached sexual maturity, relative to 16-year-old adolescents who have (although, as we discussed, concerns about sexual orientation have been expressed even with respect to very young gender nonconforming children, especially those assigned male sex at birth; Kane 2006; Martin 1990; Rahilly 2014). Based on Elischberger et al.'s (2016) recent study on transgender youth and the many studies on adult-directed transphobia carried out in the United States, we expected to find neutral-to-positive attitudes in our U.S. sample, especially for FtM youth. In addition, we predicted that individual differences in attitudes could largely be accounted for by differences in general conservatism in the form of religious beliefs, political ideology, and lack of personal contact with gender and sexual minorities; gender-specific conservatism in the form of gender binary belief; and assumptions about the causes of transgender identity.

Given the almost complete absence of studies on transgender attitudes in India, our cross-cultural analyses were largely exploratory in nature. The facts that gender pluralism is part of the fabric of Indian culture and that attitudes toward transgender adults have mostly been found to be accepting in other gender-pluralistic Asian countries might be counteracted by India's increasing modernization/Westernization, which has contributed to the pathologizing of transgender people (Winter and King 2011) even as it has helped to advance the rights (Dewan 2015; Hunt 2011) and acceptance of other gender/sexual minority individuals, particularly of upper caste, middle class, metropolitan, cisgender lesbian women and gay men (Dutta 2008; Semmalar 2014b). Taken together with the reports of the maltreatment of feminine male youth and the low social status of hijras, acceptance of transgender youth in India might, in fact, be low.

The question of what role religion might play for transgender attitudes in India is also complex. Around 79% of the Indian population identify as Hindu, 14% as Muslim, and about 2% as Christian (Census India 2011). Both opponents and supporters of non-heterosexuality, which is viewed as part of the third gender, have used different interpretations of the many holy Hindu texts to support their cause (Hunt 2011, 2012). The former, for instance, point to the importance of producing offspring in the Hindu life cycle, whereas the latter can point to India's rich Hindu mythology, which, among others, features the god Shiva who breaks off his phallus and thus loses the power to procreate (even though the falling pieces of his phallus extended fertility all over the earth). Indeed, one of the most popular representations of Shiva is as Ardhanarisvara, the "Lord who is half woman," whose right half represents male Shiva and whose left is his female consort Parvati, depicted with a breast and long hair (Lal 1999). According to Hunt (2011, p. 322): "Hindu historical attitudes...provide rich resources for contemporary support for non-heterosexuality possibly more so than any other major religious faith." It has been argued that the sexually repressive elements that certainly do exist in India stem from its British colonial past rather than from its own religious teachings and cultural traditions (Dewan 2015); the introduction of Section 377 into the Indian Penal Code by the British, which makes non-heterosexual intercourse a criminal offense, is a prime example.

Although Hindu leaders are generally seen as apolitical, some have publicly taken positions on LGBT rights (see Hunt 2011, 2012); there are also several Hindu organizations that lobby either for non-heterosexual rights (e.g., GALVA-108 2017) or against them—reflecting the fact that religion and politics have generally become increasingly intertwined in India (Hasan 2009). In fact, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is currently India's most influential party. In 2013, its then president Rajnath Singh said in an interview: "we support Section 377 because we believe that

homosexuality is an unnatural act and cannot be supported" (Ramaseshan 2013, para. 2). Despite the 2014 ruling that affords them legal third gender status, Section 377 has ramifications for transgender individuals when they engage in sexual activity (Narain 2009; Patel 2010; Ratnam 2016). (The law is still being litigated in India's Supreme Court.) The apparent contradiction between the largely liberal religious Hindu doctrine and the right-wing nationalist Hindu political ideology has been interpreted as the BJP's use of religion to attract Indian voters from a wide spectrum of castes, communities, and sects by uniting them against an "other," namely Muslims (cf. Hasan 2009), rather than reflecting particular religious teachings in its core principles. Taken together, then, both religion and politics can provide platforms on which Indian respondents might base their attitudes toward transgender youth, and we expected that more conservative ideology would predict more negativity (much like in the U.S.).

Method

Participants

Participants in both countries were recruited using Amazon MTurk and paid 1 USD, around 63 Indian Rupees, for their participation; data were collected through SurveyMonkey in early 2015. The final sample included 218 U.S. residents (110 women, 100 men, 8 unspecified) from 37 different states (of 50) and 217 residents of India (82 women, 129 men, 6 unspecified, 0 hijras) from 18 different states and union territories (of 36); 109 (51%) Indian participants reporting were residents of Tamil Nadu, and 39 (18%) of Kerala; in contrast, the highest concentration of respondents in any one U.S. state was 16% (34 Californians). U.S. residents ranged from 18 to 67 years of age ($M = 34.04$, $SD = 10.11$), and participants in India from 21 to 67 ($M = 32.63$, $SD = 9.79$), $t(422) = 1.47$, $p = .14$.

As a group, participants in the United States were less well-educated than those in India: 2 (.9%) of U.S. participants had not completed high school or secondary education, 108 (50.7%) held a high school degree, 77 (36.2%) a Bachelor's, 24 (11.3%) a Master's, and 2 (.9%) a doctoral or professional degree. By comparison, 3 (1.4%) participants in India had not completed secondary education, only 6 (2.8%) held a high school degree, 138 (65.4%) a Bachelor's, 62 (29.4%) a Master's, and 2 (.9%) a doctoral or professional degree, $\chi^2(4) = 125.55$, $p < .001$.

Annual income was measured on an 11-point scale, which proceeded in 15 k USD increments for U.S. participants; 28 (13.1%) participants scored at the lowest two levels (\$29.9 k or less); 101 (47.4%) scored between 3 and 5 (\$30 k–74.9 k), and 84 (39.4%) scored 6 or above (\$75 k or more). Due to a clerical error, the 615 k Indian Rupee increments for

respondents in India were grossly inflated relative to the average yearly income, which was estimated to be below 89 k Rupees during 2014/2015 (approximately 1424 USD; The Economic Times/Times of India 2015). The vast majority of respondents in India who provided information about income, namely 145 (68.4%), therefore scored at the lowest two levels of the scale (1229.9 k Rupees or less); only 34 (16%) scored between 3 and 5 (1230 k–3074.9 k Rupees), and the remaining 33 (15.6%) 6 or above (3075 k Rupees or more).

Finally, the U.S. sample included 168 (77.4%) non-Hispanic White, 21 (9.7%) Asian/Asian American, 14 (6.5%) Hispanic/Latinx, 11 (5.1%) African American, 2 (.9%) American Indian/Alaskan native, and 1 (.5%) Pacific Islander participants. The Indian sample included 68 (31.3%) Asian/South Asian, 46 (21.2%) Caucasoid, 37 (17.1%) Indian, 25 (11.5%) Australoid, and 21 (9.7%) Mongoloid participants; the remaining 20 (9.2%) indicated various ethnic groups (or combinations), such as Hindu, Dravidian, Negrito, and Brahmin.

Materials

Vignettes

Participants were presented with one of four short paragraphs that described an 8-year-old child or 16-year-old adolescent who had either been assigned male or female sex at birth, but whose preferences in first name, appearance, toys and games, friends, and mannerisms were stereotypically characteristic of the other gender. This example is framed for an 8-year-old girl [with minor adjustments for a 16-year-old male adolescent]:

Emma [Ethan] is an eight year-old girl [sixteen year-old boy] in 2nd [10th] grade. She was BORN A MALE called Ethan, but feels that she is a girl and prefers to be called Emma. When Emma goes to school, she often likes to wear skirts and dresses in colors like pink and purple [t-shirts and cargo pants in colors like blue and green]. She has long hair that goes past her shoulders and has her nails painted a new color every week [when he is outside he gets dirt on himself and on his clothes frequently]. Most of Emma's friends at school are girls. Her favorite games to play with her friends at school are jump rope and hopscotch [skateboard and go hunting]. When she plays with her toys at home [spends time at home], her favorite things to do are to play mom with her baby dolls and to cook in her play kitchen [playing video games and listening to music]. In short, Emma is a stereotypical girl in every way EXCEPT FOR HER BODY. (Capitalization in the original.)

In consultation with a bilingual citizen of India residing in the United States, we replaced “hopscotch” with “play on

swings” and “go hunting” with “watched soccer” in the Indian versions.

Attitudes

Following presentation of the vignette, we asked participants to use a Likert-type scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 9 (*completely agree*) to indicate their level of disapproval with the child's gender atypicality for each of six specific reasons. One example is: “Personally, I view this gender atypical behavior as a problem because it is against my morals”; the other five reasons given were religious beliefs, negative impact on child's peer relationships, bad influence on other children, effect on youth's own sexual orientation, and “unnaturalness” of gender atypicality. One additional statement allowed participants to express disapproval without endorsing any particular reason (“It is not a problem for one specific reason; it is just inappropriate”), and one reverse-scored item described gender atypicality as unproblematic (“I do not find this behavior to be a problem”). We also included an open-ended prompt for participants to nominate a reason for disapproval other than the ones we provided; only 10 U.S. and 7 Indian respondents provided a novel reason for personal disapproval, such as the youth being too young to “decide” which gender they are, which was not sufficient for formal analysis.

For U.S. participants, responses across these eight items were strongly correlated ($r_s = .51-.86$; all $p_s < .001$). The one exception to this pattern for Indian respondents was the reverse-scored item, which correlated weakly or not at all with three of the remaining seven; correlations among those seven items were significant ($r_s = .29-.70$; all $p_s < .001$). We thus combined responses into one attitude scale by averaging across those seven items, and did so for participants in both countries to maintain consistency ($\alpha = .95$ in the U.S., $\alpha = .88$ in India). Higher average scores indicated greater disapproval of gender atypicality.

Predictors

In order to assess religious beliefs, rather than making assumptions about participants' interpretations of particular religious texts based on denomination, we first asked them to indicate how religious they were on a scale from 0 (*not religious at all*) to 4 (*extremely religious*), and next, whether their religion disapproves of those who do not conform to traditional gender roles (coded 1 = *yes*; 0 = *no* or *don't know*). We multiplied responses on those two items with each other to create one variable that expresses religiously motivated disapproval of gender nonconformity on a scale from 0 to 4 with higher scores indicating greater disapproval. We asked participants to indicate their political views on social issues as 1 (*liberal or left*), 2 (*moderate or middle*), or 3 (*conservative or right*).

Because gender and sexual minority individuals are likely to hold more favorable attitudes toward a transgender child or adolescent than cisgender and heterosexual people (see Worthen 2016), we also asked participants to indicate whether they themselves or a close friend or relative was transgender, and whether they themselves or a close friend or relative was gay, lesbian, or bisexual (each coded 1 = *yes*; 0 = *no*). Our decision to include close friends and relatives in these questions was based on the rationale that having a gender or sexual minority close friend or family member would likely meet the optimal conditions under which personal contact generally reduces prejudice (e.g., equal status, common goals; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006) and thus have a similar effect on attitudes. In addition, including both the participant and their family/friends in the same item avoided forcing respondents to “out” themselves, which some might be reluctant to do even in an anonymous online survey.

We included the 32-item Genderism and Transphobia Scale (GTS; Hill and Willoughby 2005), an established measure of adult-directed transphobia, to establish the validity of our attitude measure, averaging across items so that higher scores indicate stronger endorsement of transphobia ($\alpha = .97$ in the U.S.; $\alpha = .91$ in India). Furthermore, we assessed participants' gender binary beliefs by averaging their scores on two GTS items: “God made two sexes and two sexes only” (item 4) and “People are either men or women” (item 27). Responses on these two items correlated strongly for participants in the United States ($r = .69$, $p < .001$) and India ($r = .45$, $p < .001$), and average scores could range between 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating stronger endorsement of a gender binary system.

In order to assess participants' beliefs about the causes of gender-atypical behavior, we asked them to rate how much they believed each of seven factors are involved in causing gender nonconformity: genetics, hormones, brain development, parenting of the mother, parenting of the father, media (such as TV, magazines, and news), and “other environmental factors (such as pollution and genetically modified food).” Each item was rated on a scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 9 (*completely agree*). For U.S. participants, correlations among the three items that emphasized a biological cause (genetics, hormones, and brain development) ranged from $r_s = .52$ – $.57$ ($ps < .001$), and correlations among the remaining four items that emphasized an environmental cause ranged from $r_s = .36$ – $.95$ ($ps < .001$). This pattern was similar for Indian respondents, with correlations among the three biological items ranging from $r = .17$ ($p = .02$) to $.43$ ($p < .001$) and among the four environmental items from $r_s = .45$ – $.83$ (all $ps < .001$). However, the distinction between biology and environment was not as clear in the Indian sample because endorsement of brain development correlated strongly with all four environmental factors with r_s ranging from $.29$ to $.46$ (all $ps < .001$). Nevertheless, averaging the first three items into a

factor assessing biological causes and the remaining four into an environmental causes subscale yielded more satisfactory reliability coefficients than omitting the brain development item from the biological causes scale ($\alpha = .86$ versus $.78$, respectively, for U.S. participants; $\alpha = .85$ versus $.55$ for Indian participants), so we defined the scales along those lines for participants in both samples; higher average scores indicated greater endorsement of each respective type of cause. The correlation between the biological and environmental factors was small and negative in the U.S. sample ($r = -.16$, $p = .021$), but positive and larger in the Indian sample ($r = .27$, $p < .001$).

Procedure

Respondents were first presented with an informed consent form. Because all of the surveys were presented in English, participants in India were then asked to rate their mastery of the English language on a scale from 1 (*no understanding*) to 9 (*fluent*). The vast majority indicated a proficiency level of 9 ($n = 109$, 50.2%) or 8 ($n = 65$, 30%), with the remaining respondents indicating a level of 7 ($n = 35$, 16.1%) or 6 ($n = 8$, 3.7%). Next, participants were asked to carefully read the vignette describing a gender-atypical child or adolescent; this was followed by the attitude questions, the questions about the presumed causes of transgender identity, the GTS, and a set of demographic questions. (Several short questions concerning participants' views on gender-related issues in society were also included but are not the focus of the current study and are therefore not discussed in detail.) Before proceeding to the debriefing form, participants had an opportunity to let us know if anything about the surveys had been unclear to them, but none of the participants reported any such problems.

Results

Extent of Transprejudice

Descriptive statistics for attitudes broken down by subgroups and predictors are provided in Table 1. Because attitude scores were positively skewed for U.S. participants, we conducted all analyses involving the attitudes measure twice, once with the original scores and once with their $\log(10)$ -transformed counterpart; only the results of the former are reported when the results patterns were consistent for the two measures. The average attitude score of U.S. participants was significantly lower and thus more positive than the neutral point of the scale (a score of 5), $t(217) = 14.86$, $p < .001$, whereas that of Indian participants was significantly higher and thus more negative than the mid-point, $t(215) = 5.88$, $p < .001$. There was a strong positive correlation between participants' attitudes toward

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for attitudes and predictor variables by country

	Possible range	United States			India		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>
Disapproving attitudes	1–9	2.82	2.17	218	5.70	1.75	216
By target youth's gender							
Male-to-female		3.10	2.23	93	5.81	1.60	116
Female-to-male		2.61	2.10	125	5.57	1.90	100
By target youth's age							
8-year-old		2.87	2.19	99	5.68	1.64	107
16-year-old		2.78	2.16	119	5.72	1.85	109
Participants' gender							
Male		2.94	2.11	100	5.62	1.77	128
Female		2.67	2.15	110	5.84	1.77	82
Transgender contact							
Yes		2.00	1.47	37	5.77	1.42	35
No		2.98	2.23	176	5.70	1.82	175
LGB contact							
Yes		2.35	1.82	122	5.71	1.44	45
No		3.43	2.42	90	5.71	1.81	165
Predictors							
Religious disapproval	0–4	.51	1.08	186	1.52	1.51	147
Political conservatism	1–3	1.66	.77	207	2.08	.61	210
Gender binary belief	1–7	3.23	2.00	212	4.71	1.50	211
Biological causes	1–9	6.08	1.79	211	6.57	1.41	213
Environmental causes	1–9	3.17	2.07	215	5.23	2.06	211

All means were significantly different across the two samples ($ps < .01$). Variations in sample size are due to missing data

transgender youth and their GTS score—U.S.: $r(212) = .72$, $p < .001$; India: $r(208) = .28$, $p < .001$ —and this link was stronger for U.S. than for Indian respondents (Fisher's $z = 6.36$, $p < .001$). Consistent with their considerably more negative attitudes, participants in India also had significantly higher GTS scores ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 0.83$) than those in the U.S. ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.20$), $t(378.4) = 16.00$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.55$. These patterns held regardless of whether GTS raw or log(10)-transformed scores were used to correct for the positive skew in the U.S. sample.

Correlates of Attitudes

Bivariate correlations between all study variables are presented in Table 2. Initial analyses controlling for differences in English language proficiency within the Indian sample were virtually identical to those omitting that variable (the only substantial difference was that the correlation between age and income dropped below significance level when controlling for language proficiency), so only the latter are reported. Against expectations, attitudes in both the U.S. and Indian samples were independent of participants' gender as well as the gender and age of the transgender youth. Apart from these

exceptions, the attitudes of U.S. participants correlated as expected with all of the predictor variables. Specifically, participants expressed more personal disapproval if they reported more pronounced religious disapproval, increased political conservatism, lack of personal contact with gender and sexual minorities, stronger endorsement of gender binary belief, as well as decreased endorsement of biological but increased endorsement of environmental causes of transgender identity. Indian participants, too, expressed more personal disapproval if they reported more pronounced religious disapproval, stronger endorsement of gender binary belief, and increased endorsement of environmental causes of transgender identity, although these linkages were significantly weaker than their U.S. counterparts. The attitudes of Indian respondents did, however, not correlate with political conservatism or personal contact with gender and sexual minorities, and stronger (rather than weaker) endorsement of biological causes predicted more disapproval.

Although there were no effects of target youth's age on attitudes, it was possible that the youth's age might moderate the relationships between attitudes and predictors; we therefore ran all correlations separately for the 8- and 16-year-old conditions. Among U.S. participants, none of the relationships

Table 2 Bivariate correlations between study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Disapproving attitudes	--	.11	-.02	.01	.06	-.15*	-.06	.61**	.61**	-.17*	-.25**	.77**	-.21**	.62**
2. Target youth's gender ^a	.07	--	-.03	.08	.06	.00	.03	.13	.14*	-.05	.03	.09	.00	-.01
3. Target youth's age ^b	.01	.10	--	.02	-.02	-.08	-.11	.00	-.03	.09	.04	-.01	.00	-.01
4. Participants' age	.06	.03	-.03	--	-.13	.10	.07	.11	.00	-.12	.06	.12	.09	-.13
5. Participants' gender ^c	-.06	.01	.08	-.01	---	.10	.02	-.12	.16*	-.16*	-.14*	.08	-.17*	.17*
6. Education	.00	.11	.03	-.04	-.07	--	.36**	-.15*	-.14*	.04	.07	-.18*	.04	-.02
7. Income	-.09	.06	.05	-.14*	.12	.17*	--	-.06	-.01	.04	.05	-.05	-.03	-.11
8. Religious disapproval	.37**	.10	-.11	.02	-.01	.15	.10	--	.44**	-.09	-.13	.46**	-.17*	.32**
9. Political conservatism	.10	.07	.01	-.09	.04	.08	.13	.22**	--	-.14*	-.20**	.59**	-.31**	.37**
10. Transgender contact ^d	.02	-.06	.05	-.20**	-.08	.00	.27**	.10	.03	--	.37**	-.20**	.03	-.09
11. LGB contact ^e	.00	.03	.04	-.27**	.02	.01	.33**	.03	.09	.59**	--	-.22**	.17*	-.10
12. Gender binary belief	.20**	-.06	.03	.06	-.05	-.05	-.02	.25**	-.01	-.02	-.04	--	-.24**	.51**
13. Biological causes	.26**	.04	.00	.12	-.10	.08	-.19**	.22**	-.05	-.10	-.13	.22**	--	-.16*
14. Environmental causes	.37**	-.09	-.06	-.14*	-.09	.02	.08	.25**	.13	.20**	.21**	.10	.27**	---

Ns range from 142 to 218. Correlations for India are reported below the diagonal; for the United States, above. Italicized values indicate a significant difference in size between the two samples ($p < .05$, Fisher's z). ^a Male-to-female = 1, female-to-male = 0. ^b 16-year-old = 1, 8-year-old = 0. ^c Male = 1, female = 0. ^d Personal contact with transgender community = 1, No contact = 0. ^e Personal contact with lesbian/gay/bisexual community = 1, No contact = 0

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

with attitudes depended on the age of the youth. Among Indian participants, youth age moderated two specific relationships. First, male participants in the 8-year-old condition ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.58$) had less-negative attitudes than did women ($M = 6.09$, $SD = 1.69$), $t(103) = 2.26$, $p = .03$, Cohen's $d = .44$, but there were no gender differences between male ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 1.91$) and female ($M = 5.53$, $SD = 1.84$) participants in the 16-year-old condition, $t(103) = -.83$, $p = .41$. Second, for participants in the 16-year-old condition, stronger gender binary belief was related to more negative attitudes, $r(104) = .37$, $p < .001$, but there was no such link in the 8-year-old condition ($p = .73$). Finally, for U.S. participants the correlation between education and log(10)-transformed attitudes was not significant, whereas it was significant with the non-transformed scores (see Table 2), and the correlation between attitudes and personal contact with transgender individuals was significantly different between the U.S. and India (Fisher's $z = -2.12$, $p = .03$) when the log(10)- rather than the non-transformed attitude variable was used.

Predicting Attitudes

In a final set of analyses, we conducted hierarchical multiple linear regression analyses to test the theoretical model that attitudes toward transgender youth are based on general social conservatism, conservative views specifically of gender, and assumptions about the causes of transgender identity. This type of analysis also takes into account the fact that the predictors of participants' attitudes were often associated with one another. This was particularly evident in the U.S. sample

for whom religious beliefs, political conservatism, gender binary belief, and assumptions about the causes of transgender identity were all significantly correlated with one another, as well as linked (at least in part) with personal contact with gender and sexual minorities; in fact, 16 of the 21 possible correlations among these predictors were significant for the U.S. sample, compared to only nine for the Indian sample.

Because the pattern of predictors of attitudes varied by country, we conducted the regression analyses separately for U.S. and Indian participants, even though the basic procedure of building the statistical models was the same. The first step included basic demographic (e.g., participants' gender) and experimental factors (i.e., gender and age of the transgender youth); education was included only for U.S. participants because of its significant correlation with attitudes in that sample. The second step included religious disapproval and political conservatism as measures of general social conservatism; we also included personal contact with gender and sexual minorities in this step because conservative individuals may have less desire and/or opportunity to establish such relationships. Religious disapproval was the only one of these predictors that correlated with attitudes in the Indian sample and therefore the only one included in the model. In the third step we entered conservative views specifically of gender in the form of gender binary belief, and in the fourth and final step we included participants' assumptions about the causes of transgender identity. The logic of this model and its theoretical grounding in the work of Nagoshi et al. (2008) are described in greater detail in Elishchberger et al. (2016, p. 205).

Table 3 Hierarchical multiple regressions predicting disapproving attitudes

Predictors	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4		
	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	β	<i>t</i>
(a) United States												
Target youth's gender ^a	.69	.16	2.14*	.14	.03	.59	.01	.00	.05	.13	.03	.73
Target youth's age ^b	-.05	-.01	-.16	-.12	-.03	-.52	-.18	-.04	-.99	-.20	-.05	-1.15
Participants' gender ^c	.10	.02	.30	.10	.02	.43	-.00	-.00	-.02	-.09	-.02	-.47
Education	-.46	-.15	-2.06*	-.05	-.02	-.28	.08	.03	.60	.04	.02	.35
Religious disapproval				.94	.44	7.27***	.69	.33	6.33***	.63	.30	6.07***
Political conservatism				1.06	.38	6.12***	.40	.14	2.48*	.37	.14	2.47*
Transgender contact ^d				-.06	-.01	-.19	.13	.02	.48	.05	.01	.19
LGB contact ^e				-.32	-.08	-1.28	-.23	-.05	-1.13	-.27	-.06	-1.37
Gender binary belief							.57	.52	9.04***	.45	.41	7.08***
Biological causes										.04	.03	.76
Environmental causes										.26	.24	4.89***
Model statistics	$R^2 = .05$ $F(4, 169) = 2.30$			$R^2 = .55$ $F(8, 165) = 24.98***$			$R^2 = .70$ $F(9, 164) = 42.14***$			$R^2 = .74$ $F(11, 162) = 41.39***$		
Change statistics				$\Delta R^2 = .50$ $\Delta F(4, 165) = 45.26***$			$\Delta R^2 = .15$ $\Delta F(1, 164) = 81.67***$			$\Delta R^2 = .04$ $\Delta F(2, 162) = 12.17***$		
(b) India												
Target youth's gender ^a	.44	.12	1.36	.29	.08	.96	.35	.09	1.13	.37	.10	1.24
Target youth's age ^b	.26	.07	.78	.44	.12	1.43	.40	.11	1.30	.37	.10	1.22
Participants' gender ^c	-.13	-.03	-.37	-.18	-.05	-.57	-.19	-.05	-.61	-.09	-.02	-.28
Religious disapproval				.45	.36	4.44***	.41	.33	3.93***	.32	.26	3.05**
Gender binary belief							.13	.11	1.33	.10	.08	1.01
Biological causes										.10	.08	.91
Environmental causes										.20	.23	2.77**
Model statistics	$R^2 = .02$ $F(3, 132) = .91$			$R^2 = .15$ $F(4, 131) = 5.70***$			$R^2 = .16$ $F(5, 130) = 4.94***$			$R^2 = .22$ $F(7, 128) = 5.17***$		
Change statistics				$\Delta R^2 = .13$ $\Delta F(1, 131) = 19.67***$			$\Delta R^2 = .01$ $\Delta F(1, 130) = 1.76$			$\Delta R^2 = .06$ $\Delta F(2, 128) = 5.01**$		

^a Male-to-female = 1, female-to-male = 0. ^b 16-year-old = 1, 8-year-old = 0. ^c Male = 1, female = 0. ^d Personal contact with transgender community = 1, No contact = 0. ^e Personal contact with lesbian/gay/bisexual community = 1, No contact = 0

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

As can be seen in Table 3, the initial model was not significant in either sample. Despite a lack of overall significance, target youth's gender was a significant predictor of attitudes in the initial U.S. model such that U.S. participants had more negative attitudes toward a MtF than a FtM youth after controlling for the youth's age and participants' gender and education (see Table 3a). General social conservatism in the form of religious beliefs and political views, but not personal contact with gender or sexual minorities, were highly predictive of disapproving attitudes for U.S. participants, even after accounting for all other factors. (Political conservatism was only marginally predictive of log(10)-transformed attitudes [$p = .07$] in the final model.) Among Indian participants, religious conservatism predicted more negative attitudes (see Table 3b). Gender binary belief predicted more negative attitudes among U.S., but not among Indian, participants. In both

samples, endorsement of environmental, but not biological, causes of transgender identity predicted more disapproval. The final models accounted for 74% of the variability in attitudes among U.S. participants and 22% of the variability in attitudes among Indian participants.

Discussion

The current study addresses two important gaps in the literature on transprejudice by examining attitudes toward transgender youth rather than adults and by comparing both the extent of youth-directed transprejudice and its correlates in the United States and India—two cultures that differ markedly with regard to fundamental conceptualizations of gender and

with regard to how society, law, and religion treat transgender individuals. We found generally positive attitudes toward transgender youth in our U.S., but moderately negative ones in our Indian sample; attitudes did not vary with the gender or age of the transgender youth. General social conservatism in the form of religious beliefs and political ideology, gender-specific conservatism in the form of gender binary belief, and endorsement of environmental causes of transgender identity were the best predictors of U.S. participants' attitudes. For Indian respondents, the best predictors were religion-based disapproval and environmental causal attributions whereas gender binary belief played only a minor role once other factors were considered, and political conservatism played no role at all.

The largely positive attitudes toward transgender youth in the United States are in line with similar studies (Elishberger et al. 2016; Hill and Willoughby 2005, Study 2; also Feinman 1974, and Martin 1990, but only with respect to FtM youth), but contrast markedly with recent findings of pronounced transphobia directed against adults (Norton and Herek 2013). One obvious potential explanation for this difference is that children and adolescents might be judged less harshly than adults are, although it is important to note that gender-nonconforming youth frequently become targets of maltreatment at the hands of adults, including their own parents (D'Augelli et al. 2006; Grossman et al. 2006) as well as teachers and other school staff (Kosciw et al. 2014). This suggests either that negative attitudes exist in segments of the U.S. population that were underrepresented in our sample or that self-reported attitude data are masking the true extent of transprejudice due to social desirability influences.

The research literature offers no benchmark against which to directly evaluate the data from our Indian sample. Our findings contrast with several studies conducted in other Asian cultures, which have largely found neutral or positive attitudes even toward transgender adults, regardless of whether these cultures were, similar to India, characterized by gender pluralism, such as Thailand (Ngamake et al. 2013; Winter 2006), or conservatism, such as Hong Kong (Winter et al. 2008). Our findings are, however, consistent with the extremely marginalized social status of India's hijras and the familial maltreatment of male-assigned gender-nonconforming youth in India (Semmalar 2014b; Winter and King 2011). It is possible that the negative attitudes expressed by our Indian participants reflect the increasing modernization or Westernization that has been noted by others who have examined transprejudice in the region (e.g., Winter and King 2011), which can lead to the rejection of pluralistic traditions with respect to gender and sexuality as "un-Asian" (Peletz 2006, p. 324). It appears, however, that not all forms of pluralism are rejected in equal measure: the Indian English-language press, which predominantly addresses the country's well-educated Internet users

like the ones represented in our sample, often portrays gender/sexual variance in positive terms (either as a sign of modernization or harkening back to a more sexually liberal pre-colonial India) as long as the focus is on cisgender, upper caste, middle class, metropolitan gay men and lesbian women. In contrast, gender-variant people like the hijras (and kothis) are discussed as a sign of stagnant provincialism, and rather than focusing on the human rights violations against them, there is a tendency to chastise them for their uncouth behavior (Dutta 2008). This might then also explain our quite surprising finding that, contrary to their culture's tradition, Indian participants endorsed belief in a gender binary significantly more than did U.S. participants.

Not all studies that have examined attitudes toward MtF and FtM transgender individuals separately have documented significant differences (e.g., Worthen 2016), but male participants have been found to be more prejudiced than women are in the vast majority of studies. The almost complete absence of gender effects in the current study was therefore unexpected and might be due to sample characteristics. The absence of another effect, namely that of the age of the transgender youth, might appear similarly unexpected and even counterintuitive, but several studies have documented that concerns about a link between childhood gender nonconformity and adult non-heterosexuality, one of the factors that fuel transprejudice, already play a role in prepubescent children (Elishberger et al. 2016; Kane 2006; Martin 1990; Rahilly 2014). Male-to-female transgender adolescents and young adults in Grossman et al.'s (2006) research, as well as their non-heterosexual counterparts in D'Augelli et al.'s (2006) study, recalled being called derogatory names based on their gender nonconformity at only around eight years of age, on average, which further supports the notion that prejudice is not reserved for transgender adults or even adolescents, but also targets children.

With only a few exceptions, research on the factors that account for individual differences has focused on adult-directed transphobia in Western samples. The findings of these studies informed our theoretical model, according to which disapproval of transgender youth is based on general social conservatism, gender-specific conservatism, and the belief that transgender identity is caused by environmental factors. The findings from our U.S. sample were largely consistent with this model, both at the level of bivariate relationships and in terms of the regression analysis, and thus they imply that the processes that give rise to prejudice against transgender youth are the same as those that foster prejudice against transgender adults. Interestingly, the vast majority of the linkages among the predictor variables were significant for U.S. participants as well, suggesting a coherent ideology in which religious beliefs, political convictions, views of gender, and assumptions about the causes of transgender identity are all aligned. This pattern of internal consistency is not entirely

surprising; after all, in the United States, people with conservative religious beliefs tend to be affiliated with the conservative Republican political party (Lipka 2016), and both political and religious conservatism are associated with attributing same-sex orientation to non-biological causes (Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008) as well as with stronger endorsement of gender binary belief (Norton and Herek 2013), and so on.

The findings from our Indian sample differed in several ways: neither political conservatism nor personal contact with gender or sexual minorities were associated with attitudes; stronger endorsement of both environmental *and* biological causes of transgender identity were linked with stronger disapproval; and relatively few of the correlations among the predictor variables were significant. Concerning the first of these, it is possible that a lack of strong political convictions caused the lack of effect of political views. Although the current political situation in India has been described as highly polarized (Venugopal 2016), much like that in the United States (Pew Research Center 2014), that polarization was only reflected in our U.S. sample, a 29% minority of whom self-identified as politically moderate (compared to a 62% majority of Indian participants). It is also possible that social issues are not politicized to quite the same extent in India as they are in the United States, or that negative attitudes toward gender minorities are so deeply ingrained that they are widely shared by people across the political spectrum.

The lack of an association between attitudes and personal contact with minorities in our Indian sample, even at the bivariate level, was also unexpected. The vast majority of Indian participants reported neither knowing a transgender (83%; the same as in the U.S.) nor a non-heterosexual person (78% versus only 42% in the U.S.). The low rate of direct contact with sexual minorities may be due to a variety of reasons: matters of sexuality are rarely openly discussed in India (Bhattacharya 2014); sexual activity between men is not necessarily associated with a gay social identity (Dutta 2012a) and women are expected to both suppress their sexual needs and abstain from extra-marital sex altogether (Asthana and Oostvogels 2001); and, finally, India's persistent homophobia (Dewan 2015) presents serious obstacles to coming out (Kole 2007). Personal contact with transgender individuals tends to be relatively rare for most people in both countries simply because only a small percentage of the general population identifies as transgender—somewhere between .01% (Harris 2015) to .5% (Conron et al. 2012) in the United States and .04% to .28% in India (Nagarajan 2014). However, in contrast to our Indian sample, those relatively few participants in our U.S. sample who reported personal contact with a transgender person *did* express significantly more favorable attitudes than those who did not. Considering both the low social status of India's hijras and the country's endemic homophobia, we think it is likely that instances of ineffective (e.g., lack of equal status and/or common goals; see Pettigrew and Tropp 2006) or even unfavorable personal contact occurred to a greater extent in our

Indian than our U.S. sample, which would serve to counteract whatever positive and prejudice-reducing effects might have been present for some (Barlow et al. 2012).

The finding that stronger endorsement of biological causes of transgender identity was associated with greater disapproval in Indian participants is not only the opposite of what we found in our U.S. sample, but also contrary to what several other studies have shown, which is that prejudice is lessened when biological factors are assumed to be at work (Elischberger et al. 2016; Haider-Markel and Joslyn 2008; Haslam and Levi 2006). The fact that all but one (genetics) of the seven individual potential causes we enumerated were positively correlated with disapproval, regardless of whether they were biological or environmental, suggests that the more disapproving Indian participants were simply keener on identifying a cause—*any* cause—for what they viewed as undesirable behavior in a child or adolescent.

One of the few consistent findings across our two samples was the role of religion-based disapproval. Although the association between religious conservatism and disapproval of transgender youth was expected, the fact that Indian participants reported higher average levels of both religious disapproval and gender binary beliefs than their U.S. counterparts was surprising considering that Hinduism, the majority religion in India, has been described as offering more support for non-heterosexuality than most other world religions (Hunt 2011). We did not ask participants about their religious denomination, so we cannot evaluate the possibility that Hindus were underrepresented in our sample, but we think that the more likely explanation for our findings resides in the fact that most religious texts are open to interpretation and can thus be used to support transgender prejudice as well as transgender equality (Yip 2005).

Limitations and Future Directions

One important limitation of our study is that both participant samples represented only particular segments of their respective cultures. The U.S. sample suffered from the well-known oversampling of liberal and educated individuals, even though MTurk samples have also been shown to be more diverse than college student samples (Paolacci and Chandler 2014); we therefore suspect that our findings present a rather conservative estimate of the true extent of disapproval of transgender youth in the United States. Given that participation required both access to the Internet and at least a moderate degree of English proficiency, the Indian sample was biased in terms of higher income and better education relative to the general population (ICEF 2014; Wu 2016). In fact, educational attainment in Tamil Nadu, the state of residence for half of our Indian sample, is higher (Government of Tamil Nadu n.d.) and poverty rates are lower (Government of India Planning Commission 2013) than they are for India as a whole. The Western influence that comes with education and access to the Internet might have served to make attitudes toward

transgender people more disapproving in our Indian sample relative to the country as a whole, which might also explain Indian participants' strong endorsement of a gender binary belief. However, the fact that gender-related social problems, such as domestic violence against women, persist particularly among India's less well-educated rural population (Stephenson et al. 2006) might suggest that our sample potentially *underestimated* the true extent of transprejudice in India. Finally, our samples might also have been biased due to the fact that respondents self-selected to participate in our study, which might attract individuals with particularly strong opinions on the topic. Although this could account for some of the liberal bias in our U.S. sample, it appears to have played a negligible role for our Indian sample, in which both very low and very high disapproval scores occurred infrequently.

The possibility that our survey instruments were less culturally appropriate for Indian than U.S. participants presents another limitation. This is an issue in cross-cultural research more generally (Van de Vijver and Leung 2000), but has also been noted specifically with regard to transphobia research (Winter et al. 2009). In the current study, its most noticeable impact occurred in terms of our predictors: fewer of our predictor variables were correlated with attitudes in our Indian than in our U.S. sample, and virtually all of these associations were weaker, which suggests that the inclusion of additional factors might allow us to better understand the attitudes of Indian participants. Qualitative research could play an important role in identifying them; in fact, an open-ended prompt in our study provided a clue as to one of them, namely the central role of the family in Indian culture (Verma and Saraswathi 2002): Several Indian participants commented that the youth's transgender identity might negatively affect their current family or pose problems in the future with finding a partner and starting a family of their own.

Considering that ours appears to be the first study to systematically address the question of the correlates of transprejudice in India (and one of only a few in Asia), it will be important to replicate our findings with respect to religion, politics, gender binary belief, and personal contact to minorities, as well as to explore them more fully. It would, for instance, be useful to address the question whether (or by whom) gender binary belief is viewed as a modern alternative to gender pluralism and to examine more closely the nature of personal contact with gender or sexual minorities in those who have reported it in an effort to find out why it does not have the same impact on attitudes that has been documented in other cultures.

Practice Implications

An understanding of the factors that promote negative attitudes toward transgender youth would ideally be used to inform strategies to combat transphobia and discrimination. As Swearer et al. (2010) have argued specifically with respect to bullying,

behavior is shaped not only by individual characteristics but also by the social ecologies in which it takes place, such as schools, families, and society at large. The inflammatory and factually incorrect rhetoric on transgender issues used by some public figures with influence in U.S. politics (e.g., see Flores 2016) and religion (e.g., Dobson 2016) contributes to a climate in which transphobia can flourish. A similar state of affairs appears to exist in India, where even the 2014 Supreme Court decision that granted official third gender status to hijras was rife with transphobic language, such as using the term “eunuch” interchangeably with hijra (Semmalar 2014b). Thus, the record needs to be corrected whenever possible, which includes challenging the notion of a strict gender binary, the related assumptions about biological sex and sexual orientation, and the claim that transgender identity is inherently pathological (Newman 2002), as well as rejecting the claim that transgender children are merely pretending to be something that they are not (see Olson et al. 2015) or that they have voluntarily chosen their identity, when studies clearly suggest genetic and hormonal contributions (Byne 2006; Endendijk et al. 2016; Knafo et al. 2005).

In the United States, the vast majority of children and adolescents attend school for many years. The school context presents serious problems for many transgender students, but could also be used in efforts to reduce transphobia by encouraging student organizations such as Gay-Straight Alliances, making fact-based educational materials about gender available at the school library, including positive representations of minorities in the curriculum, training teaching and administrative staff to become allies of transgender students, and having clear school policies (e.g., against bullying) that specifically address gender (cf. Kosciw et al. 2014). Of course, school systems in the United States are not free of political and sometimes religious influence, which can counteract such efforts. The fact that gender-nonconforming male-assigned youth in India often drop out of school early because of being ostracized (cf. Goel 2016; Winter and King 2011), along with reports of severe and systemic discrimination of other marginalized groups in the country's schools (e.g., tribal or religious groups; Human Rights Watch 2014), make such efforts appear like rather remote possibilities there.

Conclusion

Attitudes toward transgender youth are situated in a broader culture surrounding gender, including people's beliefs about how many genders there are and to what extent one's gender identity is malleable. Other aspects of culture, such as particular interpretations of religious texts, also play a role. Although participants in the United States were very supportive of transgender youth, overall—and especially relative to their Indian counterparts—a cautionary note is warranted in light of reports about widespread maltreatment of transgender children and adolescents in both countries. At the same time,

however, there are also reasons for cautious optimism, such as the explicit recognition of transgender students' rights by the federal U.S. government in 2016 (and the emphatic continued protection of those rights by several state governments following the Trump administration's withdrawal of federal support; e.g., New York State Education Department 2017), or the appointment of the first openly transgender police officer in Tamil Nadu (BBC News 2015). Considering that education can challenge even deep-seated beliefs about gender and gender roles (Verma et al. 2006), we think that disseminating factually correct information about transgender youth (see Boskey 2014, for recommendations specifically regarding sexuality education) can build on such progress and play a role in further reducing transphobia.

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Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

The research reported in this manuscript was approved by Albion College's Institutional Review Board.

Participants gave voluntary informed consent to participate and were debriefed at the conclusion of the study.

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