

## Implicit and Explicit Bias Towards Black and White Transgender and Cisgender Men

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*Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) frames our examination of college students' perceptions of Black and White transgender and cisgender men with attention to participants' prior contact and own social identities. A total of 280 college students participated in 2x2 factorial design online experiment administered via Qualtrics in which they randomly viewed a photo and description of a Black transgender man, White transgender man, Black cisgender man, or White cisgender man, and then completed subsequent measures addressing their communicative attitudes toward them (i.e., social attraction, desired social distance), measures of implicit bias (toward transgender people; Axt et al., 2021; Carpenter et al., 2019), and transphobia and subtle racism. We found a significant positive association between prior intergroup contact and transphobia. Participating cisgender men, compared to participating cisgender women, had higher implicit bias toward individuals identifying as transgender. A main effect of gender, but not race, of the photographed individual and participants' ratings of their social attractiveness emerged. We also found that participants desired significantly more social distance from transgender men compared to cisgender men and had significantly greater social attraction toward cisgender men compared to transgender men. These findings, as well as their implications for SIT, are discussed as well as practical implications for dominant group members seeking to reduce negative attitudes towards individuals identifying as transgender.*

**Keywords:** intersectionality, social identity, intergroup contact, Black masculinity, implicit bias, transphobia

### Introduction

Individuals confirm themselves and others through interactions, putting communication at the center of identity (Social Identity Theory; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social category or group membership, from a social identity perspective, is pivotal as it involves both emotional attachment to the group(s) and social consensus on how a given group is perceived (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Individuals belonging to multiple marginalized groups must navigate a society that so often traduces who they are via multiple systems of oppression and unique systemic disadvantages (Crenshaw, 1991). Gender and racial identity are two such social categories that are highly visible and typically salient early in life (Carver et al., 2003; Egan & Perry, 2001; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Intersecting racial and gender identities carry considerable consequence when someone shifts out of their category-based norms to bravely assert that their sex assigned at birth is not their true identity.

More recently, Nash (2008), a Black feminist scholar, has criticized the lack of clear definitions, methodology, and empirical validity of intersectional scholarship. Most relevant to the current study, though, is her particular critique that Crenshaw's (1989) conceptualization of intersectionality “render[s] Black women's experiences the aggregate of race and gender” (Nash 2008, p. 7) and that Black women are positioned as “prototypical intersectional subjects” (p. 8). In some ways, this enhances rather than lessens their burden. Further, Nash (2008) professes that intersectional scholarship may neglect the ways that other intolerance schemas (e.g., transphobia) intersect with patriarchy and racial oppression. Nash (2008) points out that a goal of both intersectional and Black feminist scholarship is to move beyond binary thinking and categorizations—such as race and gender—which the current study works toward in examining the unique (mis)treatment of Black transgender men as they are subject to intersecting

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oppressive systems of patriarchy, racism, and transphobia. Thus, in this study, we assess public perceptions—both communicated (explicit bias) and implicit—of transgender men, and we also consider the role of these men’s race. Using cisgender men and White men as comparisons, we address perceptions of and behaviors toward individuals with unique intersectional identities as Black transgender men, taking into account stereotypical and normalized hypermasculinity associated with the Black male identity (Davis, 2001; Rogers et al., 2015) and the hyper(in)visibility of individuals who identify as transgender (Petermon, 2020).

## **Literature Review**

### **Intersectional Identities of Black Men**

Theoretically driving this study, SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) recognizes the importance of social groupings to human interactions and wellbeing. Originally born out of interest to explain intergroup conflict, SIT distinguishes between one’s personal identity, or their perception of themselves as a unique individual, and one’s social identity, or their combined membership in particular social groups. Individuals are emotionally involved in their group memberships (or categories) which also carry some social consensus. SIT theorists also point out that intergroup conflict arises often without warrant or the presence of competing group interests and suggest that mere saliency of group difference is enough to trigger competition over—real or perceived—scarce resources. In the college classroom, scarce resources might be defined by students as good grades or attention from instructors.

Additionally, SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) claims that individuals strive for positive self-evaluations through their own group memberships and comparison to groups and thus seek to achieve status by evaluating their own groups as superior to others on some social dimension. These groups also come with connotations which threaten one’s personal identity. Thus, individuals will strive for positive social identities based on favorable comparisons and when a social identity is unfavorable, individuals will enact certain responsive strategies, some of which—to be discussed—are related to gender performance. SIT is employed here as a lens to examine communication interactions among college students based on perceived intersectional social identities of others in college classroom settings.

Gender is one prominent, visibly determined social category. Gender has been defined as a multidimensional construct involving the mere knowledge of gender categories, felt compatibility with one’s own gender assignment, felt pressures to conform to this assigned gender, and attitudes toward gender groups (Carver et al., 2003; Egan & Perry, 2001). Individuals develop stable conceptions of their gender identity by middle childhood and also have a sense of how typical a member they perceive themselves to be of their gender category (Egan & Perry, 2001). Felt gender compatibility is positively related to psychological adjustment through self-esteem and peer acceptance, whereas felt pressure for gender conformity and intergroup gender-based bias can be harmful (Carver et al., 2003; Egan & Perry, 2001).

As with gender identity, membership within one’s racial group becomes salient around age 3–4. Once salient, individuals develop a racial lens through which they interpret and reflect on many of their experiences and social interactions throughout their lifetime (Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Negative race-based experiences (e.g., stereotyping) are negatively related to academic achievement, which is mediated by assimilation, as children are further harmed when highly concerned about how they are viewed by their peers (Smalls et al., 2007). In striving to be equated with dominant group members in their social circles, self-identifying racial minorities show less interest and curiosity about academic materials and activities, less persistence in their education, and more problematic behavior at school (Smalls et al., 2007).

While gender and racial identities are salient group memberships that have major communication implications, the impact of an individual’s combined gender and racial identities is even more complex. Their intersections produce exclusions from both feminist theory and antiracist policy, and unique marginalization far greater than the sum of the two systems (Crenshaw, 1991). In shifting to Black men’s identities, we move toward addressing the interplay of these identities and biases. Seminal works by

Davis (2001) and Rogers and colleagues (2015) suggest that gender centrality and masculinity are prevalent in the expression of the Black cis male identity. Additionally, Black women rated their intersectional identities as more important than womanhood or Blackness alone (Settles, 2006), so it is possible that Black men experience similar saliency of their racial and gender identities. As early as middle school, Black children whose sex was assigned male at birth demonstrate understanding and value in traditionally masculine ideals and evaluate their peers based on physical appearances, clothing, and rapport with female classmates thus producing and reproducing their communicatively defined authentic Black masculine identity (Davis, 2001).

Being hypersexualized at school also made it more difficult for young Black boys to challenge norms associated with hypermasculinity (Davis, 2001). Emphasized gender centrality was also found amongst Black male students enrolled in an all-Black male charter school. They experienced related anxieties about being perceived as gay due to their attendance at an all-male school. These same young Black men indicated higher gender identification than racial identification, reflecting the powerful American gender binary which places men as superior to women (Rogers et al., 2015) which may also extend to trans identities.

Several researchers have attempted to understand why masculinity is so central to the Black male identity (Cunningham, 1999; Cunningham et al., 2013; Spencer et al., 2004). One study found that exaggerated masculinity was associated with exposure to negative social experiences via negative stereotyping in communities and secondary educational settings (Cunningham, 1999), and these effects held true over time (Cunningham et al., 2013). Hypermasculine attitudes may emerge as result of risks and stress related to the structure, composition, and scarce resources of urban neighborhoods in addition to general socialized gender norms in the U.S. in a sample of Black adolescent cis-males (Spencer et al., 2004). Scholars like Cabrera and colleagues (2022) also argue that men of color are underrepresented—compared to their female counterparts—and marginalized within higher educational settings, in part, because of their gender and thus that intersectionality and other theories of identity can be used to understand the duality of both gendered racialization and racialized gender.

Taken together, these results suggest that the development and/or expression of hypermasculinity may be a consequence of, or coping mechanism for, adverse experiences related to Black men and boys' racial identity. Because of this, Black transgender men likely are further challenged to confirm their identified gender in social interactions, both within their racial ingroup and with those belonging to other social categories.

### **Psychosocial Traits Related to Perceptions of Individuals Who Identify as Transgender**

In accordance with SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), we highlight the dynamic aspects of identity, and begin assessing perceptions of Black transgender men their unique identity intersection. There is no known assessment of this specific phenomenon. This is intriguing because prototypical stereotypes of Black people generally reflect only Black *men* and disregard other gender identities of those who identify as Black (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). Interestingly, Black women experience more depressive symptoms and decreased self-esteem after experiencing interference with their Black identity, as compared to interferences with femininity (Settles, 2006). Taken together, it is possible that Black women, nonbinary, and/or transgender individuals have their experiences further muted by a dominant discourse about Blackness that centers on Black men, albeit harmful. Even when this harmful communication is condemned, addressing stereotypes about Black men alone may do little to acknowledge the discrimination experienced by Black women, nonbinary, and/or transgender individuals, further placing a premium on Black masculinity.

In addressing transgender identities generally, many researchers have investigated psychosocial traits (e.g., Miller et al., 2000; Roberts et al., 2017; Smiler & Gelman, 2008), demographic variables (e.g., Flores, 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013), and social experiences (e.g., Ching & Xu, 2018; Flores, 2015; King et al., 2009) that may contribute to perceptions of individuals who identify as transgender. Some researchers have also investigated how perceptions of transgender individuals influence support for public

policies which advocate for transgender rights (e.g., Axt et al., 2021; Flores, 2015; King et al., 2009). Taken together, the extant body of research provides an overview of many of the mechanisms contributing to general perceptions of individuals who identify as transgender.

Regarding psychosocial traits, while implicit transgender attitudes predicted gender essentialism (or the belief that biological sex is the primary determinant of gender) over and above explicit attitudes toward transgender individuals, both implicit and explicit preference for cisgender individuals is positively associated with transphobia (Axt et al., 2021). Gender essentialism is also associated with individuals' desired sociopolitical distance from transgender individuals (Roberts et al., 2017) and conformity to social norms related to masculinity (Smiler & Gelman, 2008). Gender essentialism led to stereotyping and transprejudice in an experimental investigation (Ching & Xu, 2018) and negative attitudes among heterosexual individuals toward transgender people were correlated with authoritarianism (endorsement of strict obedience to authority), as well as conservatism, binary conceptions of gender, and anti-egalitarian beliefs (Norton & Herek, 2013). Disgust sensitivity and authoritarianism were also found to be indicative of greater opposition to transgender bodies and rights and therefore their means of nonverbal identity expression in social contexts (Miller et al., 2000).

SIT posits that one's own social identity in part drives perceptions of outgroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Gender and sexuality were found to moderate the relationship between implicit and explicit preferences for cisgender individuals and transphobic attitudes (Axt et al., 2021). Several studies reveal cisgender men's generally less favorable attitudes toward transgender people than those held by cisgender women (Flores, 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013; Smiler & Gelman, 2008). Additional demographic variables that have been demonstrably linked to negative attitudes toward individuals who identify as transgender include perceivers who are Republican, Born Again Christians, and Black (Flores, 2015).

Across social categories of perceivers, having prior social contact with someone from a perceived outgroup (Allport, 1954), has also been shown to influence attitudes toward individuals who identify as transgender (Axt et al., 2021; Ching & Xu, 2018; Flores, 2015). This intergroup contact is also associated with decreased desire for social distance from them, transprejudice, and discrimination as well as increased awareness of discrimination (King et al., 2009). Contact with individuals who are transgender is related to increased support for civil rights and policies that protect their rights (Axt et al., 2021; Flores, 2015; King et al., 2009). This study employs both social identity-based and communication components in addressing public perceptions of transgender and cisgender Black and White men.

## **Rationale**

Worthen (2013) argues that both the gender and sexuality of the target of prejudice are important, unique constructs contributing to the marginalization of certain social identities. We extend this to incorporate race. SIT asserts individuals' use of categories such as race and gender for social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and that both gender and race are central to an individual's status within social hierarchies (Sidanius & Pratto, 2004). Thus, members of traditionally marginalized social categories are, at least implicitly, encouraged to engage in outgroup derogation of individuals perceived to be of a lesser status in a given social hierarchy. This derogation may be implicitly expressed by lowered perceptions of social attraction (McCroskey et al., 2006) and increased desired social distance (Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015). Research supports this claim in that minority individuals that are relatively high in status exhibit increased ingroup bias (Rudman et al., 2002) allowing groups to maintain their powerful positions in social hierarchy, according to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Additionally, minority individuals relatively low in status have reported greater degrees of ingroup devaluation compared to those perceived as higher in social status (Rudman et al., 2002) likely in attempt to move toward a higher position in the same social hierarchy. This both reflects Nash's (2008) point that individuals at the same social category intersections have varying degrees of oppression and privilege and that may contribute to the marginalization of Black transgender men as they may encounter additional barriers to identity expression in their own racial social group due to identification (or lack thereof) with masculine norms.

College is an environment where many students of color struggle to confirm their social identities and whose performance may suffer (Cabrera et al., 2022). This is due to adverse experiences in their environment that often vary as function of their previous experiences with racism and discrimination (Curtis-Boles & Bourg, 2010; Torres et al., 2010; Trent et al., 2020). As a result, men of color are generally underrepresented in college enrollment, retention, and graduation rates (Cabrera et al., 2022). Alternatively, this environment may also provide college students the freedom to reflect upon and explore their gender and/or sexual identities for the first time (Stevens, 2004) albeit still in a society that traduces both those racialized as non-White and gender identities existing outside of the male/female binary. The current study will investigate U.S. college students' perceptions of individuals who are transgender with differing racial identities. Therefore, the current study posits the first three hypotheses.

**H1:** Black men will be rated (a) higher on desired social distance and (b) lower on social attraction than White men.

**H2:** Transgender men will be rated (a) higher on desired social distance and (b) lower on social attraction than cisgender men.

**H3:** There is a significant interaction effect between race and gender on the ratings of desired social distance and social attraction, such that Black transgender men will be rated (a) higher on desired social distance and (b) lower on social attraction than their White transgender counterparts.

In addition to examining college students' differential attitudes toward individuals who identify as Black transgender men vs. White transgender men vs. Black cisgender men vs. White cisgender men, we also sought to replicate previous findings which link both implicit and explicit forms of bias against individuals who are transgender. Additionally, college students may or may not have knowingly encountered individuals with identities that exist outside of the gender binary and such intergroup contact may improve attitudes toward outgroups under optimal conditions (Harwood, 2010). Thus, we examined our participants own identities (e.g., Flores, 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013; Smiler & Gelman, 2008) and previous intergroup contact with individuals identifying as transgender, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (e.g., Axt et al., 2021; Ching & Xu, 2018; King et al., 2009). Based on aforementioned trends, we posit the study's final two hypotheses.

**H4:** Compared to cisgender women, cisgender men will score (a) higher on transphobia and (b) have more negative implicit attitudes—measured via IATgen (Carpenter et al., 2019) toward individuals who identify as transgender.

**H5:** Compared to those who have not, participants who have had prior contact with individuals who identify as transgender and other LGB individuals will (a) score lower on transphobia and (b) have more positive implicit attitudes toward individuals who identify as transgender.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 280 college students whose ages ranged from 18 to 35 ( $M = 20.01$ ,  $SD = 1.86$ ). Participants were relatively evenly distributed across class rank with  $n = 80$  (28.6%) in their first year, followed by sophomores ( $n = 67$ , 23.9%), seniors ( $n = 66$ , 23.6%), and juniors ( $n = 65$ , 23.2%) with  $n = 1$  (0.4%) participant selecting "Other." Participants primarily identified as cisgender women ( $n = 187$ , 66.8%), followed by cisgender men ( $n = 86$ , 30.7%), two ( $n = 2$ , 0.7%) nonbinary individuals, and one ( $n = 1$ , 0.4%) transgender woman. Two ( $n = 2$ , 0.7%) participants elected not to answer this question and two ( $n = 2$ , 0.7%) participants selected "Other." This sample was predominantly heterosexual ( $n = 243$ , 86.8%), with a few participants identifying as bisexual ( $n = 20$ , 7.1%), lesbian ( $n = 3$ , 1.1%), and gay ( $n = 1$ , 0.4%). Six ( $n = 6$ , 2.1%) participants selected "Other" and seven ( $n = 7$ , 2.5%) participants elected not

to disclose their sexual orientation. This sample was predominantly White ( $n = 231$ , 82.5%) with remaining participants identifying as Black/African American ( $n = 16$ , 5.7%), Middle Eastern ( $n = 10$ , 3.6%), Asian/Asian American ( $n = 8$ , 2.9%), Hispanic/Latinx ( $n = 5$ , 1.8%), and Indigenous/Native American ( $n = 1$ , 0.4%). Five ( $n = 5$ , 1.8%) participants selected “Other” and four ( $n = 4$ , 1.4%) participants elected not to disclose their racial identity.

## Procedures

After IRB approval, participants completed an anonymous online survey administered via Qualtrics. Within the survey, they were randomly assigned into one of four conditions in a 2x2 factorial design with a gender photograph/description condition (cisgender man or transgender man) and a racial photograph/description condition (Black or White). In each condition, the participant (1) viewed a photo of an individual paired with a vignette describing the pictured individual’s enacted social identity and (2) responded to a series of questions about their perceptions of the individual and the other assessed variables and demographics. The vignettes read as follows: “Dee, the photographed individual, is a student at your college or university and has the same major as you. Dee identifies as a [transgender] man. Imagine the following situation. You are enrolled in a course at your college or university in which there will be several group assignments over the course of the semester. Your instructor chooses the groups and Dee is placed in your group. You will be required to work with Dee on several assignments that will significantly influence your grade at the end of the semester. Try to imagine the situation.” Participants were recruited via convenience sampling through communication courses at a large university in the Midwest United States and through the first author’s personal network on Facebook. Students received marginal extra credit for their participation. As detailed below, the survey was designed to measure: Desired Social Distance (Bogardus, 1933; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015), Social Attraction (McCroskey et al., 2006), Transphobia (Nagoshi et al., 2008), Implicit Attitudes toward individuals who identify as transgender (Axt et al., 2021; Carpenter et al., 2019), and Subtle Racism (Henry & Sears, 2002), as well as demographic variables and prior intergroup contact with transgender and other LGB individuals.

## Instrumentation

### *Desired Social Distance*

Participants’ desired social distance from the pictured individuals was measured using a formerly adapted version of the Social Distance scale (Bogardus, 1933; Gillespie-Lynch et al., 2015). The Social Distance scale is a 6-item measure that asks participants to rate on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Extremely Unwilling*) to 7 (*Extremely Willing*) the degree to which they would be willing to perform each behavior toward an individual. Originally designed to target individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the items were adapted slightly to reflect willingness to perform these behaviors toward the individual in the viewed photo. Sample items include, “How willing would you be to move next door to Dee?” and “How willing would you be to make friends with Dee?” A reliability coefficient  $\omega$  of .830 was obtained for this measure.

### *Social Attraction*

Participants’ social attraction toward pictured individuals was measured using the Social Attraction subscale of the Interpersonal Attraction scale (McCroskey et al., 2006). The Social Attraction scale is a 12-item measure that asks participants to respond on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) with a series of statements to assess how socially attractive they find an individual. Sample items include, “I think Dee could be a friend of mine,” and “Dee just wouldn’t fit into my circle of friends.” A reliability coefficient  $\omega$  of .921 was obtained for this measure.

### **Transphobia**

Participants' transphobia was measured using the Transphobia Scale (Nagoshi et al., 2008). The Transphobia scale is a 9-item measure that asks participants to rate on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) with a series of statements to assess their explicit attitudes toward individuals who identify as transgender. Sample items include, "I don't like it when someone is flirting with me, and I can't tell if they are a man or a woman," and "I believe that the male/female dichotomy is natural." A reliability coefficient  $\omega$  of .930 was obtained for this measure.

### **Implicit Attitudes Toward Individuals Who Identify as Transgender**

Participants' implicit attitudes toward individuals who identify as transgender was assessed using an IATgen version of the image transgender Implicit Association Test (Axt et al., 2021; Carpenter et al., 2019). Participants'  $d$ -scores indicated their implicit bias towards individuals that identify as transgender such that higher scores with any value exceeding  $|0.65|$  indicating strong bias indicated a more negative bias towards individuals who identify as transgender ( $M = 0.17$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ).

### **Subtle Racism**

Participants' subtle racism was measured using the Symbolic Racism 2000 scale (Henry & Sears, 2002). This scale is a 16-item measure that asks participants to rate on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly Agree*) their agreement with a series of statements addressing symbolic racism. Sample items include, "Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors," and "Over the past few years, Blacks have gotten less than they deserve." A reliability coefficient  $\omega$  of .789 was obtained for this measure.

### **Prior Intergroup Contact**

In line with previous investigations of intergroup contact (e.g., Rittenour, Baker, et al., 2020; Rittenour, Kromka, et al., 2018) participants' intergroup contact was assessed using a composite variable calculated from four yes/no single-item measures to determine the degree, if at all, of their personal contact with individuals with one or more individuals identifying as transgender, lesbian, gay, or bisexual. The items were, "Do you know someone who identifies as transgender?" "Do you know anyone who knows someone who identifies as transgender?" "Do you know someone who identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?" and "Do you know anyone who knows someone who identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual?"

## **Results**

To assess the first three hypotheses, a series of independent samples  $t$ -tests and a two-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to examine differences in participants' desired social distance from and social attraction towards the photographed individual based on that individual's race and gender. A series of independent samples  $t$ -tests confirmed that mean scores significantly differed on measures of both participants' desired social distance between Black men ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) and White men ( $M = 4.87$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ )  $t(238) = 0.235$ ,  $p < .05$  and social attraction toward between Black men ( $M = 5.70$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) and White men ( $M = 5.78$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ )  $t(256) = -0.597$ ,  $p < .05$ . These scores did not significantly differ between Black and White men (i.e., when data from participants exposed to the two stimuli featuring Black men were combined and the two stimuli featuring White men were combined for analysis). Cohen's  $d = .030$  for desired social distance and Cohen's  $d = -.074$  for social attraction indicating minimal effect of the photographed individual's race on both desired social distance and social attraction. However, participants' scores on measures of both participants' desired social distance between transgender men ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) and cisgender men ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ )  $t(256) = -1.737$ ,  $p < .05$  and social attraction towards transgender men ( $M = 5.60$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) and cisgender men ( $M = 5.87$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ )  $t(256) = -2.063$ ,  $p < .05$  did significantly differ between transgender and cisgender

men (i.e., when data from participants exposed to the two stimuli featuring transgender men were combined and the two stimuli featuring cisgender men were combined for analysis). Cohen's  $d = -.216$  for desired social distance and Cohen's  $d = -.257$  for social attraction indicating small effect sizes of the photographed individual's gender on both desired social distance and social attraction.

The results of the ANOVA did not reveal a statistically significant interaction between factors on desired social distance,  $F(1, 254) = 0.125, p > .05 (\eta_p^2 = 0.00)$ ; nor on social attraction  $F(1, 254) = 0.003, p > .05 (\eta_p^2 = 0.00)$ . There was, however, evidence of a main effect of the individual's gender identity on social attraction  $F(1, 254) = 4.077, p < .05 (\eta_p^2 = 0.016)$  indicating a large effect of the photographed individual's gender identity on participants' social attraction toward the individual such that individuals were rated higher on measures of social attraction when they did not identify as a transgender man. The main effects of gender on desired social distance  $F(1, 254) = 3.127, p > .05 (\eta_p^2 = 0.012)$ ; and race on both desired social distance  $F(1, 254) = 1.29, p > .05 (\eta_p^2 = 0.001)$  and social attraction  $F(1, 254) = .209, p > .05 (\eta_p^2 = 0.001)$  were not significant. Thus, H2 received mixed support while H1 and H3 were not supported. See Table 1 for group means based on condition for participants' dislike/less social attraction toward and desired distance from the pictured men.

**Table 1**

*Group Means Based on Condition*

	Black Transgender Man	Black Cisgender Man	White Transgender Man	White Cisgender Man
1. Desired Social Distance	4.80	5.03	4.69	5.03
2. Social Attraction	5.58	5.84	5.63	5.91

*Note.* These means were not statistically significantly different from each other.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that there would be a difference between cisgender men and cisgender women's scores on measures of (a) transphobia and (b) implicit attitudes towards individuals who identify as transgender. The result of an independent samples  $t$ -test was insignificant  $t(269) = 2.189, p > .05$ , Cohen's  $d = -.89$  and did not support H4a as cisgender men and cisgender women's scores on a measure of transphobia did not significantly differ from each other. The results of an independent samples  $t$ -test supported H4b  $t(259) = 12.953$ , Cohen's  $d = -.13$  (minimal effect size), indicating that cisgender men scored significantly higher on negative implicit bias towards individuals identifying as transgender ( $M = 0.21, SD = 0.53$ ) compared to participating cisgender women ( $M = 0.16, SD = 0.40$ ).

Hypothesis 5a predicted a negative relationship between participants' prior intergroup contact with individuals who identify as transgender and other LGB individuals and their scores on a measure of transphobia. Interestingly, a significant positive relationship was revealed  $r = .337, p < .001$  and thus the hypothesis was not supported. Hypothesis 5b predicted a negative relationship between participants' prior contact with individuals who identify as transgender and other LGB individuals and their scores on a measure of implicit bias towards individuals who identify as transgender as measured via IATgen (Carpenter et al., 2019). Results of a Pearson correlation were nonsignificant and thus did not support this hypothesis  $r = 0.03, p > .05$ . Please see Table 2 for the correlation matrix of variables in this study.



**Table 2***Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Transphobia	3.05	1.57	—		
2. Subtle Racism	1.89	0.76	.574**	—	
3. Prior Intergroup Contact	5.14	1.61	.337**	.202**	—

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .001$ 

## Discussion

This study addressed college students' attitudes toward Black and White transgender men and cisgender men. Our empirical interest targets perceptions and social prescriptions contributing to the marginalization of Black transgender men. In experimenting with race and gender identity through photographs and vignettes, we found a main effect of gender of the photographed individual and participants' ratings of their social attractiveness. Additionally, participants desired significantly more social distance from transgender men compared to cisgender men and had significantly greater social attraction toward cisgender men compared to transgender men. We also found that participating cisgender men, compared to participating cisgender women, had higher implicit bias toward individuals identifying as transgender. Finally, we found significant positive associations between transphobia and prior intergroup contact. Implications of these findings as they relate to participant characteristics, prejudicial attitudes, and intergroup contact are first discussed, followed by potential strategies for post-positivist researchers to join others in meaningfully contributing to the body of literature exploring intersectional identities. Limitations and future directions will also be addressed.

### Hegemonic Masculinity

In cultural contexts, like the U.S., where masculinity is traditionally narrowly defined (Smiler & Gelman, 2008), gender identities existing outside the male-female binary represent a greater threat to power for cisgender men who inhabit higher placements in social hierarchies. Cisgender men participating in our study had significantly more negative implicit attitudes towards individuals who identify as transgender; but there were no significant differences in explicit, transphobic attitudes based on participants' cisgender identities. In this way, our findings replicated previous moderation effects of gender, for cisgender individuals, on explicit transphobic attitudes and implicit bias (Axt et al., 2021). Heterosexual individuals' negative attitudes towards individuals who identify as transgender has been linked to other problematic ideologies of authoritarianism, binary conceptions of gender, and anti-egalitarian beliefs (Norton & Herek, 2013).

### Intergroup Contact

In our investigation, a positive relationship emerged between self-reported transphobia and participants' prior intergroup contact experiences with individuals who identify as transgender and LGB individuals. This finding is in line with previous research investigating attitudes about people who identify as transgender. Specifically, Norton and Herek (2013) found that attitudes toward individuals identifying as transgender are less favorable than those toward other LGB individuals. Knowledge about

individuals who identify as transgender has also demonstrably been associated with more positive attitudes and behaviors towards individuals who identify as transgender which in turn may carry over to other LGB groups or individuals (Flores, 2015; King et al., 2009). We inquired about prior intergroup contact in the context of both direct and extended interpersonal relationships and given the richness of these types of “contact spaces” and their tendency to result in high levels of self-involvement (Harwood, 2010), perhaps these experiences included something negative. Future researchers might deeply investigate the subjective experiences participants have had in instances of intergroup contact.

Somewhat relatedly, no demonstrated richness (i.e., cues, channels, feedback) and self-involvement (Harwood, 2010) in our study may have contributed to the null findings regarding our first and third hypotheses. Nonetheless, we still attempt to answer Worthen’s (2013) call to consider all identities which may make an individual a target of prejudice and unpack the unique constructs contributing to the marginalization of Black transgender men. Given that gender has been historically—and may likely still be—less rigid for women than men, especially for Black men (Davis, 2001), and given that Black women have reported in the past that they were more impacted by racist slights than gendered ones (Settles, 2006), it is possible that participants’ responses on measures of social attraction and desired social distance may have differed given the persistence of these gendered and racial dynamics in the U.S. Future research might reflect a greater variety of gender identities. Juxtaposed to our post-positivist exploration of identities adjacent to our own White, cisgender female identities, we invite and encourage scholars of diverse positionalities and methodologies to further assess the (mis)treatment of individuals with such unique, intersectional identities as Black transgender men and explore the intersection of race and gender more deeply than as mere category membership.

### **Outgroup Members’ Attitudes toward Intersecting Identities**

We join scholars interested in giving voice to the experiences of groups afflicted by multiple systems of oppression, assuming structural, political, and representational dimensions each with distinct, but related, consequences to one’s social identity, just as Crenshaw (1991) had revealed in her piece attending to this across empirical and legal realms. SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) allows us to unpack how dominant group members perpetuate, or least make salient, inequities in their intrapersonal and relational communication.

Quick assignment to distinct categories based on social cues influences subsequent communication, which SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) positions as a pivotal process in the enactment of identity. According to SIT, individuals’ unique sense of identity is threatened when confronted with negative connotations of the groups to which they are perceived to belong (e.g., gender, race), usually held by dominant group members (e.g., gender essentialism). When confronted with such negative stereotypes, this may lead individuals belonging to marginalized groups to internalize their perceived inferiority and in turn enact certain social mobility strategies, such as individual mobility, which weaken their ties to the group and thus decrease ingroup solidarity. On the other hand, confronting these negative stereotypes may also lead to increased solidarity and encourage social mobility strategies of social creativity and social competition which function to positively reframe group membership and inspire collective action to improve the conditions of existing in that group, respectively.

Importantly, race is more than mere category membership and the combination of traditionally marginalized race and gender identities do not, in and of themselves, equate to intersectionality; our null findings make poignant their socially constructed nature. As discussed above, when gender centrality and masculinity are expressed as part of Black, cis-male identity, it may be a consequence of the marginalization they face due to their race (Davis, 2001; Rogers et al., 2015). Relatedly, scholars like DeCuir-Gunby and Schutz (2014) advocate for use of race-focused (i.e., placing race at the center of analysis) and race-reimagined (i.e., race-influenced perspectives on phenomena) constructs over using race for descriptive, comparative, and explanatory purposes as does the current study. Because group membership must be salient in order to trigger intrapersonal intergroup processes, according to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the meanings around race and gender are cocreated through exchange and

interaction which were not present in this study. Likewise, given that our sample was predominantly educated White women at a predominantly White institution, and that visibility and saliency of gender emerge early in life (Carver et al., 2003; Egan & Perry, 2001), it is possible that gender was more salient than race to our participating college students. Interestingly, both cisgender men and cisgender women hold gender discriminatory behaviors less accountable if the behavior can be attributed to implicit (versus explicit) bias (Daumeyer et al., 2021). Additionally, women hold men—but not women—more accountable after displaying gender discrimination (Daumeyer et al., 2021).

Because our participants were majority dominant group members racially, but not necessarily gendered, SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) might suggest that gender identity was more salient to our participants—due to where their own gender places them in a social hierarchy—and thus was used as the basis for social comparison over race, especially given that “transgender” was the only explicitly named (as opposed to merely appearing in the photograph) social category in the vignettes, possibly contributing to the main effect of gender on social attraction. Furthermore, colorblindness is named as an essential tool in upholding oppression of and violence perpetrated on intersectional gender-nonconforming non-White communities in both dominant media and hegemonic institutions like higher education (Fischer, 2019). Group means for desired social distance and social attraction based on condition did emerge in the expected pattern (i.e., depicted White cisgender men were rated most favorably on both, followed by Black cisgender men, followed by White transgender men, and with Black transgender men being rated the lowest on both), despite the lack of statistical significance. Perhaps these results would reach significance in contexts among a broader age and racial makeup of participants, as well as contexts in which communicatively defined authentic Black masculine identities are more salient (Davis, 2001) or actively endorsed (Rudman et al., 2002). Among Black men, a black sheep effect may occur in which Black transgender men’s defiance of traditionally valued masculine norms is viewed as egregious to those holding Black masculinity in high regard (Rogers et al., 2015). This might also lead to increased ingroup derogation, or harsh criticism of members of one’s own marginalized group, among Black transgender men as they attempt to reconcile the negative connotations associated with their social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

For the broader population, prototypical portrayals of Black people in general reflect only Black cisgender men (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013), so it is also possible that some our participants may have implicitly judged even the transgender Black man in line with the socially constructed stereotypical hypermasculine Black cisgender man, thus potentially contributing to null findings for an interaction effect of race and gender on desired social distance and social attraction. These trends would also be better assessed had we included women in the vignettes, a limitation we accepted to achieve sufficient power (though future scholars might employ Solomon four and other designs for clarification of trends). We acknowledge, though, that Black women’s experiences of violent communication transcend the traditionally understood boundaries of race or gender discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991), and warrant additional interventions.

### **Practical Implications**

Dominant group members may reduce their own prejudice towards individuals who identify as transgender by addressing their explicit prejudicial attitudes (i.e., transphobia) and implicit bias. However, in accordance with Daumeyer and colleagues’ (2021) findings, individuals must also be motivated to reduce their implicit biases, not just simply be aware that they exist, for prejudice reduction to effectively occur. College instructors may foster positive intergroup contact opportunities by facilitating cooperative learning activities in classes with diverse students by creating situations conducive to Allport’s (1954) four conditions helpful for intergroup contact (i.e., equal status, cooperative tasks, common goal, authority support for egalitarian norms). It is possible that college students may be able to empower each other by embracing a common in-group identity (Dovidio et al., 2004) characterized by the autonomy and self-exploration afforded by a college environment.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Apart from aforementioned concerns about the experimental stimuli being vignettes and the demographic characteristics of the sample (and, to a lesser degree, the vignettes), the current study has other limitations worth noting. First of all, it should be noted that the vignettes were not pilot tested prior to this study, nor did we statistically control for potentially confounding variables between conditions so our findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution. Additionally, when possible, post-positivist researchers should avoid using social category membership, alone, as a predictor on some outcome variable and instead incorporate both race-focused and race-reimagined constructs into their variable analytic research designs (DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2014). Also, outcome variables of desired social distance and social attraction were employed in this study as potential forms of outgroup derogation, perhaps future studies can consider other, more overt forms of outgroup derogation (e.g., efforts to exclude someone from a group project assigned in a college class). Examining richer (Harwood, 2010) interactions in actual college classrooms or lab spaces will also allow for a complex examination of how competition for—real or perceived—scarce resources in higher education spaces may influence intergroup interactions among students. Somewhat relatedly, we recommend that future researchers employ a measure that assesses degree of intergroup contact (e.g., quantitative dimension of intergroup contact; Islam & Hewstone, 1993) rather than assessing mere knowledge of targeted outgroup members as in the current study. However, the current study yields implications for intergroup contact experiences and prejudicial attitudes among dominant group members that we hope will be heuristic for future scholars who wish to explore (mis)treatment of outgroups from a social identity perspective.

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