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PROTECTIONS FOR ALL? ATTITUDES TOWARD CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS  
FOR TRANS AND GENDER NON-BINARY INDIVIDUALS

by

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A Dissertation

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## **Abstract**

Despite the increase in visibility and recognition, the rights of LGBTQ+ people continue to be debated and politically challenged. Transgender and gender non-binary people specifically face barriers to healthcare, government documents, and public accommodations. Due to the lack of literature connecting attitudes and expansive systemic protections for this population, this study aims to examine the impact of several constructs and identify what may be critical to explore in future research as components of attitudinal change. Empathy, contact, salience of religious identity, gender role belief, political affiliation, and gender were all identified in previous literature as having a relationship with attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people. Thus, they were utilized in this study to assess their relationship with attitudes toward expansive civil rights protections for TGNB individuals. 99 college students in the United States were participants. A hierarchical multiple regression indicated that empathy and gender role belief remained related to attitudes toward civil rights protections for TGNB individuals when accounting for the other variables. Participants were more likely to support expansive civil rights protections if they experience higher levels of empathy and have less strict gender role beliefs. Further, findings indicate empathy acts as a mechanism in the relationship between contact and attitudes toward civil rights protections. The impact of empathy and gender role beliefs should be considered when exploring how to increase support for expansive civil rights protections for TGNB people even when controlling for other factors known to be related to attitudes. Discussion and implications for future research are provided.

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## Introduction

Since 2005, research, media, and legislatures have increased discourse in topics related to transgender and gender non-binary (TGNB) persons. There appears to be a shift towards recognition and growing social acceptance of TGNB people in the United States. Nevertheless, there is significant debate, negative media portrayal, and polarization surrounding the rights of TGNB individuals (Becker & Jones, 2020; Jones & Brewer, 2018; Schneider et al., 2009; Scout, 2016; Watjen & Mitchell, 2013). The TGNB community continues to face marginalization and misunderstandings both in their identities and experiences (Bauer et al., 2009). Specifically, TGNB individuals confront healthcare barriers, workplace concerns, and direct harassment at disproportionate levels (Bauer et al., 2009; Clements-Nolle et al., 2001). Unemployment occurs at twice the rate of the general public for TGNB people, and they are at risk for violence, especially sexual violence, beginning at a young age and continuing throughout their lifetime (Grant et al., 2011; Stotzer, 2009).

TGNB individuals are often marginalized through both overt and covert discrimination. When polled, 63% of TGNB individuals reported experiences of discrimination that negatively impacted their quality of life (Grant et al., 2011). These include unstable housing, bullying, work concerns and loss of jobs due to bias, physical and sexual assault, loss of relationship and social support, and denial or restriction of medical services. In addition, TGNB individuals often experience negative health and life quality consequences due to discrimination and marginalization. For example, previous research has identified higher rates of and increased risk factors for depression, suicidality, and substance use in the TGNB community (Clements-Nolle et al., 2001; Reisner et al., 2014; Rotondi, 2012).

To make wide-spread societal change and combat the negative outcomes of discrimination, the effects of systemic and societal influences on TGNB issues are important to explore. Because negative attitudes towards TGNB people can have such harmful repercussions for the TGNB community, it is necessary to better understand both the factors that drive negative attitudes towards this group and also how these negative attitudes impact attitudes toward legislation designed as protections or non-discrimination acts for TGNB people.

Transgender individuals throughout this study are defined as those whose gender identity does not match the sex assigned at birth. Gender non-binary will be utilized to apply to all individuals whose behavior and gender identity do not align with a dichotomous understanding of gender as being either man or woman. Gender non-binary includes individuals whose gender includes aspects or characteristics of both men and women or those who identify outside of the traditional man and woman gender binary (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016; PFLAG, 2019).

GLAAD (2012), in their guide to terminology with the LGBTQ+ community, states using correct terminology in conversations about this group can have a powerful impact. Using current relevant language fights against reinforcing outdated and incorrect beliefs. Because the studies referenced throughout this dissertation are from many different disciplines and time periods, the terminology used (e.g., to refer to TGNB and LGBTQ+ persons) may be antiquated. Although the terms used for minority groups throughout current study also may become obsolete, attempts have been made to use terminology that is deemed acceptable both in research and the LGBTQ+ community.

Despite an increase in research on the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community as a whole, there are differences in the experiences of transgender and gender non-binary people compared to experiences of diverse sexual orientations. Specifically, TGNB individuals often have different policy interests (Currah & Minter, 2000). They may rely more on federal and state governments to recognize their identity more than cisgender people, particularly regarding legal barriers such as changes to legal names and official documents (Taylor, 2007).

Given the impact of public opinion and legislature change, civil rights protections are highlighted in this study. Rights and protections for TGNB individuals can alter public opinion and attitudes to foster a more positive living environment. In such an environment, TGNB individuals would be safer being open about their gender identity and more able to utilize available resources (King et al., 2009).

### **Changing Protections**

Discrimination in employment, housing, and health care are often identified as areas where the relationship between civil rights protections, inequalities, public opinion, and voting meet (National Center for Transgender Equality, 2020). As of April 2023, there are 348 in-progress anti-LGBTQ+ bills and legislation in the United States with 27 additional passed so far this year (ACLU, 2023). Many of these bills specifically target TGNB individuals in education, healthcare, and free speech & expression. These bills create unjust treatment and reinforce negative beliefs and stereotypes of transgender people (Freedom for All Americans, 2022).

In the wake of hectic recent changes in rights and legal actions pertaining to the TGNB community, it is critical to discuss the current socio-political climate. Since 2016, former U.S. President Donald Trump repealed protections for transgender students through the Department of



Education, enacted a transgender military ban, delayed housing programs for homeless LGBTQ+ youth, stated federal anti-discrimination laws for employees and workers do not include transgender people, enforced religious liberties for healthcare professions who wish to deny service based on gender identity status, and removed anti-discrimination policies set by President Obama within the Affordable Care Act (Bowers & Whitley, 2020).

In conjunction with the change in presidency in 2021, TGNB rights have continued to be debated. While some civil rights protections have been gained federally, such as the Biden administration working to expand Title VII and IX to include TGNB identities, the Human Rights Campaign identified 2021 as the worst year in recent history of LGBTQ+ legislative attacks on the state level (Human Rights Campaign 2021). In the last three years, TGNB athletes alone have experienced anti-trans sports bans in 20 states preventing transgender students from participating in sports consistent with their gender identity (ACLU, 2023). In addition, bills have been proposed which would restrict access to gender-affirming medical care and restrooms, allow religious belief as justification to deny services, and permit restrictions on legal paperwork and gender-affirming documents (Freedom for All Americans, 2022; Horne et al., 2021; Human Rights Campaign 2021). Protections at the federal, state, and local level help reduce TGNB-related injustices by clearly defining what is lawful and acceptable behavior from the perspective of power or government (King et al., 2009). Enacting and expanding civil rights protections for minority groups can influence public opinion (Kreitzer et al., 2014; Lax & Phillips, 2009).

Gender minorities reported heightened symptoms of anxiety and depression during a state referendum removing TGNB protections (Horne et al., 2021). Further, increased suicidality in TGNB college students was found to be related to denial of affirming bathroom access, and

TGNB individuals report feeling the need to take safety precautions, including presenting more or less masculine/feminine, to protect themselves against discriminations and violence (Seelman, 2016; Weinhardt et al., 2017). Weinhardt et. al., (2017) also found that having systemic protections is related to well-being in TGNB youth. When exploring wellbeing and adequate bathroom access for example, trans youth who did not feel safe due to lack of access, choice, or anti-harassment protections in school and public restrooms had lower levels of resiliency and higher levels of stress and anxiety.

Perceived discrimination and acute prejudicial events in policy and legislation can be viewed by LGBTQ+ individuals as minority stressors and have adverse consequences on health and healthcare outcomes (Rostosky et al., 2009). Levitt et al. (2009) identified theme clusters in qualitative interviews about anti-LGBTQ+ legislation including “initiatives lead to constant painful reminders that I’m seen as less than human by our government and public laws” and “there is a personal need to manage my emotions at these legislative initiatives or movements. Like anger, hurt, or guilt”. Similarly, research appears to suggest legal protections for marginalized groups, including TGNB people, can improve their health and wellbeing (Goldenberg et al., 2020; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2012; Hughto et al., 2021). Transgender people living in states with less protective policies are at higher likelihood of avoiding healthcare even when necessary due to fear of mistreatment (Goldenburg et al., 2020).

Knowing the impact that protections can have, the current study will explore the relationship between attitudes and support for expansive civil rights protections. Psychological research has been proactive in the investigation of attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community, yet there is little research that connects factors related to the attitudes, decision-making, or civil

rights protections for TGNB individuals. Increasing understanding of factors related to attitudes towards expanding civil rights protections for TGNB individuals can further inform prevention, practice, and policy for TGNB protections.

### **Attitudes Toward Civil Rights Protections**

Although access to civil rights protections would appear on the surface to be an inalienable right for all citizens of the United States, it is clear that some do not hold this belief for those in the TGNB community. Research suggests prejudices and negative social attitudes can impact law and policy (Worthen et. al, 2017). Policymakers respond to public opinion and attitudes, but the public also adjusts preferences over time in reactions to changes in protections (Lax & Phillips, 2009; Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). Attitudes about policy and protections have great impact on what becomes enacted in law even when controlling for ideology of elected officials, interest groups, and issue environments (Lax & Phillips, 2009). Empathy, contact with TGNB individuals, salience of religious identity, and gender role beliefs all have been identified in the extant literature as potentially influencing attitudes about protections for TGNB individuals specifically.

### **Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to understand or experience a feeling on behalf of another and is often considered one of the pillars of being human and the humanization of others. (Davis, 1980; Waal, 1997). Empathy begins with an emotional stimulus relating to a target - could be a gesture, vocalization, etc. which triggers a somatic response to change emotional states. This change in affect can trigger cognitive processes like decision-making and perception. Empathy can have motivational properties and may be a motivator in how people make decisions about law and

policy (Coplan & Goldie, 2011). When people experience more empathy for a disadvantaged group, it can increase their motivation to adopt different political ideologies and opinions on political changes to reduce the plight of the group (Hoffman, 1990, 2001). To inform changes in legislation and research, the impact of empathy continues to be explored in many fields of study, such as social welfare and healthcare (Heyes, 2018; Posick et al., 2014).

Attitudes towards outgroups, or groups an individual may view as different from themselves, improve through gaining empathy for the population even if the attitudes are strongly endorsed (Batson, et al., 1997; Vescio, et al., 2003). Broockman & Kalla (2016) went door-to-door in a research experiment exploring the impact empathy may have on 501 voters regarding TGNB civil rights protections. The conversations included perspective-taking tasks, information on the definition of transgender, dialogue regarding the voter's views, and videos about both sides of a law protecting transgender individuals being repealed. There was a significant increase in acceptance of transgender people and support for nondiscrimination laws due to the participants attitudinal shifts after an empathy-building task.

Empathy is one of the main pillars of human morality and seeing others as human (Waal, 1997). Empathy is regarded often as the opposite of dehumanization and research has begun to explore how dehumanization tendencies can be prevented or reduced by developing empathetic and perspective-taking skills (Hamby, 2018). Where dehumanization occurs, there is reduced empathy and greater tolerance of poor treatment, cruelty, and exclusion from moral concern (Vaes et al., 2012). In research on gay individuals, instances of dehumanization often arise in the form of hate crimes, anti-gay rhetoric, and descriptions of aggression (Fasoli et al., 2016). Recognizing the impact of dehumanization and empathy on how people conceptualize others, it

becomes important to consider what other factors impact attitudes that will, in turn, impact political attitudes and decision-making.

### **Contact**

The contact hypothesis, which has been widely researched in relation to minority groups, states that those considered to be in the majority have lesser amounts of prejudice towards individuals they consider to be out of their group when there has been personal contact with them (Allport, 1954). The association between more quality and quantity of contact and favorable attitudes toward TNGB individuals is strong (Claman, 2008; Flores, 2015; King et al., 2009; Norton & Herek, 2013; Tee & Hagerty, 2006) and has been substantiated for the broader LGBTQ+ community as well (Finlay & Walther, 2003). Contact also appears to be associated with more positive attitudes to other minority populations, including racial and ethnic minorities (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Tadlock et al. (2017) tested contact theory with TGNB individuals and found increased contact was associated with more positive attitudes towards transgender rights, but further research is needed to consider how contact specifically effects attitudes towards political change and rights for minority groups. Contact with TGNB people may be less frequent than with other identities within the LGBTQ+ community (Tadlock et al., 2017). Moreover, Hoffarth & Hodson (2018) highlighted the potential connection between both frequency of contact and positive contact interactions with decrease in anti-transgender bias.

### **Salience of Religious Identity**

In the current study, salience of religious identity is defined as the importance of persons' religious beliefs to who they consider themselves to be as persons. Intensity of religious belief, a working knowledge of their belief system, attendance at religious institutions, and the amount of

private devotion to religion, all play a role in this construct (Huber & Huber, 2012). Previously, religiosity has shown a relationship with political and social attitudes (Dimaggio et al., 1996; Manza & Brooks, 1997; Worthen, 2012). In research about attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community, higher religiosity has been identified as having a positive relationship both with intolerance and negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals (Claman, 2008; Finlay & Walther, 2003). Further, those who take part in religious practices display less positive attitudes towards transgender people specifically (Bukhari et al., 2016; Tee & Hegarty, 2006; Worthen, et al., 2017). Recognizing the link between saliency in religious identity and political attitudes as well as with attitudes towards transgender individuals, it becomes necessary to examine the impact religious identity may have on attitudes about TGNB civil rights protections.

### **Gender Role Belief**

Prejudice and bias toward TGNB individuals may also stem partially from the belief that LGBTQ+ individuals do not follow traditional or societally appropriate gender roles (Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2019). The values and ideology held about proper behavior, appearance, and interaction for men versus women are known as gender role beliefs (Kerr & Holden, 1996; Nierman et al., 2007). For the TGNB population, belief systems that include strict definitions of traditional gender roles are associated with negative attitudes and both anti-gay and anti-trans prejudice (Nierman et al., 2007). Further, the endorsement of a binary construction of gender (i.e., that it consists only of male and female, and that these are dichotomous constructs at opposite ends) and the endorsement of male gender roles are related to transphobia. TGNB people are more likely to be the targets of prejudice due to disruption of gender norms (Makwana et al., 2018).

## **Known Connections**

Further, gender and political affiliation both appear to be correlated with attitudes towards transgender individuals in the past. Gender has been identified as a reliable predictor of attitudes towards transgender people and rights (Harrison & Michelson, 2019; Kerns & Fine, 1994; Nierman et al., 2007). More specifically, men appear to hold greater negative attitudes toward TGNB people (Erikson & Tedin, 2015; Norton & Herek, 2013; Tadlock et al., 2017) than women (Greenburg & Gaia, 2019; Nagoshi et al., 2008).

Traditionally, political conservatism has been associated with more negative beliefs about TGNB people overall (Flores et al., 2015, Norton & Herek, 2013; Tadlock et al., 2017). Flores (2015) identified being a Republican is a predictor of negative attitudes towards TGNB individuals. This can be anecdotally supported by Republican led state legislatures who are more likely to enact policies banning gender-identity protections. Republican state legislatures have less TGNB inclusive nondiscrimination laws than Democrat led state legislature (Flores, et al., 2018). Republicans were also found to be less likely to change in their support or opinion of LGBTQ+ individuals after change in policy or civil rights protections are enacted by governing bodies (Kreitzer et al., 2014).

## **Purpose of Study**

Despite the increase in visibility in the experiences of the TGNB community, a gap in the literature still exists as to how attitudes and beliefs are related specifically to attitudes about the rights of gender diverse persons (Flores, 2015). Many factors that contribute and relate to attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community have been explored, but whether those factors are related to individuals' attitudes and decisions regarding TGNB civil rights protections, policies,

or legislation is still relatively unknown. This research has potential for a wide range of implications from increased understanding of the nature and manifestations of gender related attitudes as well as practical methods that can be employed to reduce negative attitudes and prejudices in our society. In addition, while it appears through literature review that there is a case for each individual concept of empathy, contact, salience of religious identity, and gender role belief to be explored in their relation to attitudes toward civil rights protection for TGNB people, a gap also exists in how these concepts may interact.

The present study will extend the current literature by identifying several constructs that may affect attitudes toward systemic changes for the TGNB population. Specifically, empathy, contact with TGNB individuals, salience of religious identity, and gender role belief will be examined with regard to their relationships with attitudes about expansive civil rights protection for TGNB individuals.

### ***Research Question 1***

Do the combined variables of empathy, contact, salience of religious identity, and gender role belief significantly predict attitudes towards civil rights protections for TGNB individuals?

**Hypothesis 1.** Empathy, contact, gender role beliefs, and salience of religious identity will be related to attitudes towards civil rights protections for TGNB individuals.

### ***Research Question 2***

How much of the variance in attitudes towards civil rights protections for TGNB individuals is uniquely predicted by the four main variables (empathy, contact, salience of religious identity, and gender role belief)?



**Hypothesis 2.** Empathy will have the greatest impact of attitudes toward civil rights protections for TGNB individuals.

***Research Question 3***

Does empathy mediate the association between contact with TGNB individuals and attitudes toward TGNB civil rights protections?

**Hypothesis 3.** Empathy will mediate the relationship between contact and attitudes towards civil rights protections for TGNB individuals. Greater levels of contact will result in higher empathy, which will predict more positive attitudes towards TGNB civil rights protections. At higher levels of empathy, the relationship between contact with TGNB individuals and support for civil rights protections for TGNB individuals will be stronger.

## Method

### Participants

Participants consisted of 99 college students recruited through a departmental pool based in the Educational Psychology program at the University of Memphis. The University of Memphis is located in the Mid-South region of the United States. One hundred and twenty-five individuals initially began the study with 26 removed due to significant missing data. These participants did not complete one or more total measures.

Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 50, with the majority falling between the ages of 18-30 (88%). Participants identified as cisgender women ( $n = 76$ , 77%), cisgender men ( $n = 13$ , 13%), gender non-binary or non-conforming ( $n = 7$ , 7%), and preferred not to respond ( $n = 3$ , 3%). Fifty-one percent were White/Caucasian ( $n = 51$ ), 36% Black/African American ( $n = 36$ ), 3% Hispanic/Latino ( $n = 3$ ), 7% Biracial/multiracial ( $n = 7$ ), 1% American Indigenous/Alaska Native ( $n = 1$ ), and 1% preferred not to respond.

**Table 1**

*Additional Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

	<i>N</i>	%	<i>SD</i>
Sex			3.7
Male	16	16.2	
Female	83	83.8	
Sexual Orient.			1.35
Heterosexual	75	75.8	
Bisexual	16	16.2	
Pansexual	2	2	
Asexual	1	1	
NR	5	5.1	
Political Affiliation			1.6
Liberal Dem	16	16.2	
Moderate Dem	22	22.2	
Moderate Repub	18	18.2	

	<i>N</i>	%	<i>SD</i>
Conserv Repub	10	10.1	
Independent	27	27.3	
Other	6	6.1	
Relig Affil			2.36
Prot Christian	56	56.6	
Catholic	11	11.1	
Jewish	2	2	
Muslim	1	1	
None	21	21.2	
Other	8	8.1	

*Note.* *n* = 99. NR= prefer not to respond. Liberal Dem= liberal democrat, Moderate Dem= moderate democrat, Moderate Repub= moderate republican, Conserv Repub= conservative republican. Relig Affil= Religious Affiliation, Prot Christian= Protestant Christian.

## Measures

Participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire that included gender, sex, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, religious affiliation, and current college major. They were asked to complete the following measures: Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980), contact with TGNCB people, Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS; Huber & Huber, 2012), Short Version of the Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS; Kerr & Holden, 1996; Brown & Gladstone, 2012), a set of questions addressing Attitudes toward Expansive Civil Rights Protections (Flores et al., 2015), and Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale – Short Form C (M-C SDS Form C; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Reynolds, 1982).

## *Empathy*

Empathy was measured by the 28-item Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980). The instrument contains four 7-item subscales: Empathic Concern, Personal Distress, Perspective Taking, and Fantasy. The Empathic Concern scale assesses how individuals experience feelings of sympathy and compassion for others, and the Personal Distress scale assesses how individuals

experience feelings of distress in response to others. The Perspective Taking scale assesses the ability to adopt and understand others psychological point of view, and the Fantasy Scale assesses the ability to visualize oneself in fictional scenarios with fictional characters. The items were responded to on a 5-point Likert-style scale ranging from “does not describe me well” to “describes me very well.” Higher scores indicate higher levels of constructs measured by each scale; eight items are reverse scored. The Personal Distress and Empathic Concern scales assess affective components, and the Perspective Taking and Fantasy assess cognitive components. Total scale for this measure containing all subscales is used to measure empathy.

The standardized alpha coefficients for scores on the subscales for college-aged men and women, respectively are .77 and .75 for Personal Distress, .68 and .73 for Empathic Concern; .71 and .75 for Fantasy, and .78 and .79 for Perspective Taking. Test-retest reliability coefficients over a 60-to-75-day period for scores on the four subscales ranged from .61 to .79 in men and .62 to .81 in women (Davis, 1980, 1995). The IRI shows concurrent validity, as both Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking are associated with healthy interpersonal functioning and high self-esteem. Convergent validity has been assessed in studies that indicate Perspective Taking scores are correlated with other cognitive empathy measures, and Empathic Concern scores are correlated with emotional empathy measures (Davis, 1983). Additionally, the IRI has been validated in and translated to nine different cultures and languages (Konrath, 2013).

### ***Contact***

Consistent with literature that examines the effects of out-group contact, quantity and quality of personal contact with TNGB individuals was assessed using five questions (Al Ramiah et al., 2014; Norton & Herek, 2013). Participants were asked to select if they have a transgender

or gender non-binary family member, close friend, personal acquaintance, or had seen representation of this population in the media. The two items that follow to assess contact are, “How often do you come into contact with transgender or gender non-binary people,” and “How many friends or close acquaintances do you have who identify as transgender or gender non-binary.” The next item inquires how often participants spend time with transgender or gender non-binary friends ranging from never (1) to weekly (5). The final item asks participants to indicate their overall perception of their past experiences with transgender or gender non-binary individuals on a five-point Likert scale from very negative (1) to very positive (5). Total score is used to measure contact.

### ***Salience of Religious Identity***

Salience of religious identity was measured by the widely used Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS; Huber & Huber, 2012). The CRS measure tests five core dimensions of religious identity salience: public practice, private practice, religious experiences, ideology, and an intellectual dimension. Public practice refers to the involvement of the individual in religious services and a social community network, whereas private practice refers to how respondents devote themselves to their religion on their own through activities such as rituals or prayers. Religious experience refers to an individual’s emotional connection or contact with his or her belief. Huber and Huber (2012) provided an example of this as “being at one” or having “one to one experiences” (p. 715) with their religious power, deities, or other higher power. Ideology is essentially a belief system, which includes the belief in a transcendent reality. The final core piece is the intellectual dimension, which refers to individuals’ knowledge of their own religion and their ability to explain their beliefs. Sample items include questions such as, “How often do

you take part in religious services?” and “How important is it for you to be connected to a religious community?”.

The CRS has been translated into 20 languages and validated with 20 different cultures. It consists of 15 items assessed on a 5-point Likert scale.; higher scores indicate a more central religious system. The 5-point Likert scale range changed depending on question structure: never to very often, not at all to very much so, and never to several units of time commitment in prayer or religious services. Coefficient alphas for scores on subscales that measure dimensions of religious salience range from .80 to .93 on samples of students. Scores on the overall scale range from .92 to .96. High correlations have been found between CRS scores and self-reports of the salience of religious identity, with a correlation coefficient of .83 in a college student sample. CRS scores display acceptable internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminative validity among college student samples (Fradelos et al., 2018; Gheorghe, 2019; Huber & Huber, 2012).

### ***Gender Role Beliefs***

To assess beliefs about appropriate gender roles, the Short Version of the Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS; Kerr & Holden, 1996; Brown & Gladstone, 2012) was utilized. The Short Version of the GRBS consists of 10 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (7); one item is reverse-scored. Sample items include questions such as “Women should have as much sexual freedom as men,” and “The initiative in courtship should usually come from the man.” Higher total scores indicate less strict adherence to gender roles.

The Short Version GRBS has strong internal consistency for both men ( $\alpha = .76$ ) and women ( $\alpha = .81$ ) (Brown & Gladstone, 2012). Brown and Gladstone (2012) assessed construct validity by examining the GRBS and relationship with gender, religiosity, political ideology. Overall, women supported more feminist beliefs than men as expected based on previous research ( $t(330) = -5.21, d = .59, p < .001$ ). Other correlations for total scale score were significant ( $p < .001$ ) in the predicted direction among participants: religiosity ( $r = -.32$ ), political ideology ( $r = -.49$ ). There is a positive correlation between total scores in test-retest ( $r = .86$ ), and no significant differences between test-retest total scores of individual scale items ( $p > .11$ ). There is a significant correlation between total scores for the initial 20-item version and the 10-item version ( $r = .91, p < .001$ ) (Brown & Gladstone, 2012).

### ***TGNB Expansive Civil Rights Protections***

Attitudes toward TGNB Expansive Civil Rights Protections were surveyed through questions created by Flores et al. (2015) that were adapted from literature surrounding transgender policy, rights, and systemic transgender issues (Flores, 2015; Hill & Willoughby, 2005; Tadlock et al., 2017). The questions were adapted to specifically address TGNB expansive civil rights protections instead of general attitudes toward policy and law change. The TGNB community has specific political concerns that other minority communities may not experience and thus require a form of measurement that includes specifically TGNB civil rights protection concerns. Flores (2015) constructed 9 items that group into two constructs: policies relating to equality ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) and policies uniquely related to accommodations ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ). Sample items include, “Legal protections that apply to gay people should also apply to transgender and gender non-binary people,” “Congress should pass laws to protect transgender and gender non-binary

people from job discrimination,” and “Transgender people deserve the same rights and protections as other Americans.” Responses are scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from completely disagree (1) to completely agree (4).

### ***Social Desirability***

The Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale-Short Form C (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Reynolds, 1982) was included to assess potential for participants to present themselves in a desirable way. The Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale consists of 13 true or false items. One point is tallied for each true response; the total score the sum of true responses. Sample items include “I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone’s feelings,” and “I sometimes feel resentful if I don’t get my way.”

The Short Form C version shows adequate internal consistency ( $\alpha = .76$ ) (Reynolds, 1982). The measure also displays acceptable convergent and discriminant validity compared to the long-form scale and other social desirability scales (Barger, 2002). Confirmatory factor analysis was utilized to test the adequacy of the short form measure and displayed good data-model fit (Fisher & Fick, 1993; Sarbescu et. al, 2012).

### **Procedures**

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board for research with human subjects at the University of Memphis. All instruments and measures were distributed in an online survey format on Qualtrics. Participants derived from several sections of a Lifespan and Development course. The student participants completed three research study assignments as part of course requirements. This study as well as several others were available on their online courseware page to choose and complete at any time throughout the semester. Students accessed



the survey using their online classroom platform. From the classroom page, participants saw the recruitment statement for the present study and could choose to participate. They were informed that they could stop the study at any point at their own volition although they would not receive the course credit for completing the study. To combat order effects, the order of instruments presented to participants was randomized using the Qualtrics system.

## Results

Hierarchical multiple regression was utilized to ascertain whether empathy, contact, salience of religious identity, and gender role beliefs predict attitudes toward TGNB civil rights protections. An a priori power analysis for the hierarchical multiple regression using G\*Power software (Erdfelder et al., 1996) was conducted for the fixed model. An a priori power analysis indicated that, for an effect size of  $f^2 = 0.15$  or  $d = .50-.80$ , 6 predictors, and alpha set at .05, a sample size of 92 was necessary to achieve a power of .80 for the overall multiple regression (Flores, 2018; Vacha-Hasse & Thompson, 2004; Worthen, 2017). Two outliers were identified, and residuals were converted to z-scores. Outliers were left in analysis as 99.9% fell between -3.29 and 3.29 when looking at standardized residual z-scores (Field, 2013). No multivariate outliers were identified. As consistent with Hepner and Hepner (2004), other missing item scores were replaced with the group mean for those items.

A Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to test the normality of the data set and showed the distribution of Attitudes Towards Civil Rights Protections scale departed significantly from normality  $W(99) = 0.96, p < 0.01$ . Based on this outcome and study sample size, residuals and scatter plots were examined and indicated assumption of normality was satisfied (Field, 2013). The Levene test found the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met,  $p = 1.06$ . The scatterplot of standardized residuals indicated the data met assumptions of homogeneity of variance and linearity. The variance inflation factor and tolerance indicate the data met assumption of collinearity. The Durbin-Watson test was utilized, and the data met the assumption of independent errors.

Table 2 displays means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables. As expected, attitudes toward civil rights protections for TGNB individuals were significantly correlated with empathy, contact, salience of religious identity, and gender role beliefs. To conduct the regression analysis, the predictors were entered in as 5 blocks in a model. The first block included political affiliation and gender based on their demonstrated ability to predict attitudes toward both transgender individuals and legislative decision-making (Greenburg & Gaia, 2019; Nierman et al., 2007). In the second block, the total score for empathy was entered. In the third block, contact was entered to identify whether this variable accounts for additional variance over empathy. The fourth block contained salience of religious identity, and the fifth and final block was gender role belief.

**Table 2**

*Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	$\alpha$
1. Empathy		.36***	-.15	-.19*	.45***	.84
2. Contact	.36***		.21*	-.38***	.48***	.81
3. Relig.	-.15	.21*		-.36***	.25**	.69
4. Gen. Bel	-.19*	-.38***	-.36***		-.58***	.86
5. Attitudes	.45***	.48***	.25**	-.58***		.83
Means	98.13	15.74	38.52	30.01	3.21	
SD	13.68	4.79	8.44	12.05	.65	

*Note.*  $N = 98$ . Relig.= salience of religious identity. Gen. Bel= Gender Role Belief, Attitudes= Attitudes Toward Civil Rights Protections. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3***Hierarchical Regression Model of Attitudes Toward Civil Rights Protections*

	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> Change	<i>B</i>	SE	Beta.	<i>t</i>
Step 1	.42*	.18	.18				
Liberal D				.27	.30	.15	.91
Mod D				.03	.29	.02	.11
Mod R				-.18	.29	-.11	-.60
Con R				-.64	.33	-.29	-1.95
Indep				-.23	.29	-.16	-.82
CisMan				.36	.41	.19	.88
CisWom				.52	.37	.34	1.41
GNB				.25	.43	.10	.58
Step 2	.56***	.32	.15				
Liberal D				.18	.28	.102	.65
Mod D				-.02	.26	-.01	-.08
Mod R				-.26	.27	-.15	-.96
Con R				-.57	.30	-.27	-1.92
Indep				-.21	.26	-.14	-.80
CisMan				.37	.37	.19	.99
CisWom				.39	.34	.25	1.14
GNB				.24	.40	.10	.61
Empathy				.02***	.01	.40	4.39
Step 3	.63**	.39	.07				
Liberal D				.02	.27	.01	.08
Mod D				-.11	.25	-.07	-.46
Mod R				-.39	.26	-.23	-1.53
Con R				-.52	.28	-.24	-1.83
Indep				-.23	.25	-.16	-.92
CisMan				.21	.36	.11	.60
CisWom				.19	.33	.12	.57
GNB				.02	.38	.01	.04
Empathy				.02**	.01	.31	3.366
Contact				.04**	.01	.33	3.28

**Table 3 (Continued)**

	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup> Change	<i>B</i>	SE	Beta.	<i>t</i>
Step 4	.66*	.44	.04				
Liberal D				-.02	.26	-.01	-.09
Mod D				-.05	.24	-.03	-.21
Mod R				-.37	.25	-.22	-1.49
Con R				-.47	.28	-.22	-1.71
Indep				-.19	.24	-.13	-.81
CisMan				.21	.34	.11	.62
CisWom				.13	.32	.08	.39
GNB				.02	.37	.01	.06
Empathy				.02***	.01	.38	4.09
Contact				.04**	.01	.26	2.70
Relig				.02**	.01	.23	2.62
Step 5	.74***	.56	.11				
Liberal D				-.11	.23	.06	.48
Mod D				-.11	.22	-.07	.50
Mod R				-.46	.22	-.27	-2.04
Con R				-.47	.25	-.22	-1.89
Indep				-.19	.21	-.13	-.89
CisMan				.16	.31	.08	.52
CisWom				.08	.29	.05	.26
GNB				.02	.33	.01	.07
Empathy				.02***	.00	.33	3.94
Contact				.02	.01	.18	1.99
Relig.				.01	.01	.11	1.26
Gen. Bel				-.02***	.01	-.40	-4.70

*Note.* *N* = 99. Relig. = Salience of Religious Identity. Gen. Bel = Gender Role Belief, Attitudes = Attitudes Toward Civil Rights Protections. \**p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01, \*\*\**p* < .001.

Overall, the results indicate the first model was statistically significant ( $F(8,90) = 2.42, p = .021$ ) and explained 18% of the variance. After entrance of empathy (IRI) at Step 2 the total variance explained by the model increased to 32% and was found to be statistically significant ( $F(9, 89) = 4.72, p < .001$ ). The introduction of empathy explained an additional 15% of the variance in attitudes towards civil rights protections after controlling for gender and political affiliation ( $R^2$  Change = .15;  $F(1,89) = 19.25; p < .001$ ). At Step 3 contact was entered. The total

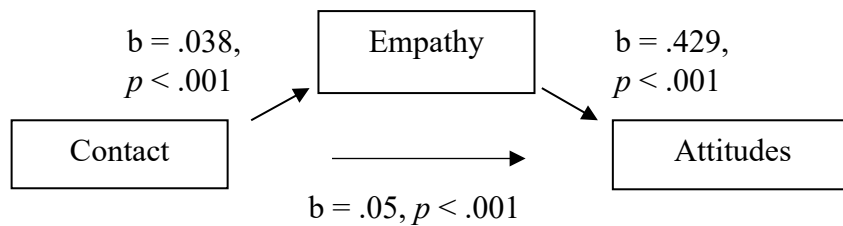
amount of variance explained by the model was 39% ( $F(10,88) = 5.79, p < .001$ ), and contact explained 7% of the variance when controlling for the other factors thus far ( $R^2 \text{ Change} = .07; F(1,88) = 10.77; p = .001$ ). Salience of religious identity was added in the fourth model and the model as a whole explained 44% ( $F(11, 87) = 6.25, p < .001$ ). Salience of religious identity independently accounts for 4% of the variance ( $F(1,87) = 6.88, p = .01$ ). In the final adjusted model ( $F(12,86) = 8.96, p < .001$ ), two out of the six predictor variables were statistically significant: empathy ( $\beta = .33, p < .001$ ) and gender role belief ( $\beta = -.40, p < .001$ ).

To examine whether empathy mediates the relationship between contact with TGNB individuals and attitudes toward TGNB civil rights protections (see Figure 1), the researcher tested the size of the indirect effect using PROCESS. According to Field (2013), it is preferable to directly estimate the effect of the mediation and its confidence interval rather than examining mediation via a series of multiple regressions. The indirect effect is the multiplicative combination of the two direct relationships. Field (2013) recommends the use of Hayes's PROCESS macro for computation and indicating the need for effect size, Sobel's test, and a total effect model. The PROCESS tool is a custom dialog box that can be added into SPSS in order to estimate model coefficients, standard errors, t values p values, and confidence intervals, and also calculate direct and indirect effects in mediation models. A mediation model tests three relationships and their implied effects: a direct relationship between contact with TGNB individuals and empathy (effect a), a direct relationship between empathy and attitudes toward TGNB civil rights protections (effect b), and the indirect relationship between contact with TGNB individuals and attitudes toward TGNB civil rights protections via increased empathy.

The direct path from contact with TGNB individuals to empathy is positive and statistically significant ( $b = .038$ ,  $s.e. = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that people with more contact with TGNB individuals are more likely to have higher scores on the empathy measure. The direct effect of empathy on attitudes toward civil rights protections is positive and statistically significant ( $b = .429$ ,  $s.e. = .12$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating people scoring higher on the empathy measure are more likely to have positive attitudes towards expansions of civil rights protections for TGNB people than those scoring lower. The indirect effect of contact and attitudes toward TGNB expansive civil rights protections is statistically significant as well ( $b = .016$ , 95% C.I. (.0056, .0302). This represents a medium effect,  $k^2 = .119$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Figure 1**

*Mediation Model*



Indirect effect,  $b = .016$ , 95% CI (.006, .03)

Correlation coefficients were obtained to evaluate the relationship between the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale and other measures. The results indicated a significant correlation with both the Interpersonal Reactivity Index,  $r(97) = -.29$ ,  $p = .004$ , and the contact survey,  $r(97) = -.32$ ,  $p = .001$ . A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of political affiliation on attitudes toward civil rights protections. There was a significant effect of political affiliation at  $p < .05$  level for the six conditions [ $F(5,93) = 3.15$ ,  $p = .011$ ]. Post-hoc

comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for liberal democrats and conservative republicans were significantly different than one another ( $p = .007$ , 95% C.I. = [1.67, .16]). There were no other statistically significant differences in mean scores between political affiliations.



## Discussion

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of factors related to attitudes toward expansive civil rights protections for transgender and gender non-binary individuals. During a time of continued political battles over the rights of transgender and gender non-binary people, it is imperative to ascertain what contributes to individual's decisions on support for expansive protections. For the current study, themes in previous research addressing attitudes toward TGNB individuals, such as empathy, contact, salience of religious identity, and gender role beliefs informed the initial hypotheses. Specifically, studies suggest lower levels of empathy (Broockman & Kalla, 2016), lack of contact (Flores, 2015; Tadlock et al, 2017), strong relationship with religion (Bukhari et al., 2016; Worthen et al., 2017), and stricter gender role belief (Nierman et al., 2007; Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2019) are related to negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals.

Thus, it was argued that these factors would be associated with attitudes specifically toward civil rights protections for transgender and gender non-binary individuals. Analysis from this study identified that participants with higher levels of empathy and less strict gender role beliefs have more positive attitudes toward civil rights protections. Empathy, or the ability to understand or experience a feeling, emotion, or behavior of another, can have motivational properties and these motivational properties may impact how people decide support for certain law and policy (Coplan & Goldie, 2011; Hoffman, 1990, 2001). Giving further context to empathy, Albert Bandura's work in dehumanization addresses how people adopt standards of right and wrong which can become a map for how they and others are supposed to behave and think (Bandura, 1999). Where dehumanization and negative attitudes occur, there is reduced

empathy and greater tolerance of poor treatment, cruelty, and exclusion from moral concern (Vaes et al., 2012). One of the ways to regulate one's morals and decision-making is the victim locus, or devaluing outgroup members by depriving them of innately human characteristics (Bandura, 2016). Once dehumanized, members of the outgroup are viewed as less than people, and thus do not deserve to have the same amount of empathy (Cehajic et al., 2009; Hamby, 2018). An example of how dehumanization is used in the political landscape to decrease empathy includes politicians using language that highlights differences such as describing a group of people as "animals" or a "threat" (Hamby, 2018). In reference to protections, Marks (2006) stated that a denial of human rights and recognition for a group of individuals is a denial of their humanity. Thus, this research can contribute to discussion of empathy as a mechanism of change to humanize others and emphasizes the importance of empathy for exploring why people support civil rights protections for marginalized communities.

While contact was initially correlated with attitudes toward civil rights protections, it was not significant when accounting for the other variables in the model. The contact hypothesis that suggests individuals with more contact with others outside of their social group impacts attitudes and prejudice toward the outgroup (Allport, 1954). The strong relationship between higher amounts of contact and increased positive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people is well documented in the literature (King et al., 2009; Norton & Herek, 2013). Limited research suggests contact with LGBTQ+ individuals positively effects attitudes toward transgender people and transgender rights (Flores, 2015, Tadlock et al., 2017). Contact with TGNB people does not significantly impact attitudes toward civil rights protections as empathy and gender role belief do. This may imply that other conditions or interpersonal beliefs must be met for contact to be impactful.

Salience of religious identity was found to be non-significant once accounting for other variables. Religious preferences have been associated with legislative behavior (Arnon, 2018), and, in the United States, approximately nine out of ten congresspeople and all supreme court justices identify as religious (Cragun & Sumerau, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2019). Overall, various aspects of religiosity are heavily discussed in literature as predictors for both political opinion and negative attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals (Guth, 2022; Tadlock et al., 2017). Negative attitudes toward transgender individuals specifically have been related to engagement in religious practices and strongly held religious beliefs (Bukhari et al., 2016; Worthen et al., 2017). Salience of religious identity had weaker statistical significance compared to the other factors. The lesser significance found in this study does create question of whether salience of religious identity alone explains attitudes or if the attitudes of religious individuals regarding TGNB people are beginning to shift as consistent with increasing societal acceptance in the United States as a whole (Williams Institute, 2021).

Congruent with previous literature on attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals, gender role belief was statistically significant in predicting attitudes toward civil rights protections for TGNB people. Participants who endorsed stricter gender role beliefs were less supportive of expansive civil rights protection. LGBTQ+ individuals are often viewed as not aligning with traditional gender roles in the United States (Prusaczyk & Hodson, 2019). Prejudice increases when TGNB individuals violate societal ideals and values of gender or cause discomfort due to gender ambiguity (Costa & Davies, 2012; Makwana et al., 2018). The current study adds to the body of research in this area by exploring the connection between gender role beliefs, law, and decision-making. Gender role belief was one of two significant predictors in the regression model.

Contrary to research suggesting gender as a reliable predictor of attitudes towards TGNB individuals (Harrison & Michelson, 2019; Norton & Herek, 2013), gender was not found to be correlated with attitudes toward civil rights protections for TGNB individuals. Though, this should be interpreted with caution as the current sample was predominately cisgender women. Traditionally, Republicans appear to have less favorable attitudes toward this population, leading to investigation of the relationship between political affiliation and attitudes toward civil rights protections (Flores, 2015, Flores et al., 2018). Similar results were identified in this study with those identifying as conservative Republican holding more negative attitudes toward expansive civil rights protections for TGNB individuals.

The second hypothesis posited that empathy would have the greatest impact on attitudes toward civil rights protections when compared to other factors. A hierarchical linear regression revealed how much of the variance in attitudes toward civil rights protections for TGNB individuals are predicted by empathy, contact with TGNB people, salience of religious identity, and gender role belief independently. Ultimately gender role belief had the largest impact on attitudes toward civil rights protections in the regression, but empathy was also a significant predictor. This contributes to an expanding body of literature exploring the impact of empathy on areas related to political attitudes (Becker & Jones, 2020; Broockman & Kalla, 2016; Sirin et al., 2017). The impact of empathy on attitudes toward civil rights protections is consistent with previous findings that people with greater empathy may be motivated to adopt different political stances to decrease hardship for disadvantaged groups (Hoffman, 2001; Coplan & Goldie, 2011). Empathy may be a critical aspect in increasing support for civil rights protections for transgender and gender non-binary people.

Finally, it was hypothesized that people with greater amounts of contact with TGNB individuals will have more empathy, and, in turn, more positive attitudes toward expansive civil rights protections for TGNB individuals. The results of this study may contribute uniquely to the conversation by identifying how the relationship works. Empathy appears to act as a mechanism by which contact with TGNB people impacts attitudes toward civil rights protections. The significant indirect relationship suggests that while contact is an important predictor for attitudes, empathy is a key factor that contributes to the relationship. More contact results in higher empathy which then will impact more positive attitudes. Further, the mediation model suggests that empathy has a significant relationship with civil rights protections. This result reinforces the continued discussion of the importance of empathy as participants with larger amounts of empathy are more likely to have positive attitudes toward civil rights protections for TGNB individuals. It should also be noted that the relationship between contact and attitudes toward civil rights protections continued to be significant even when accounting for empathy in the model. This implies that empathy may not be the only mechanism that explains or mediates the effect of contact.

### **Limitations**

Certain limitations to the present study must be noted. To begin, this study utilized an undergraduate college student sample. The developmental period many college students are in includes value and attitude exploration, and their attitudes can impact voting and decision-making regarding civil rights protections for TGNB individuals (Holland et al., 2013; Ousely, 2006). Yet, it is important to highlight that those attitudes may not be congruent with those of the general population. Most participants were between the ages of 18-30 years old, and young

college students may have different expectations, perspectives, and habits. Additionally, the sample was predominately cisgender women. Gender differences were not identified in the results, but gender differences in attitudes have been found in other previous research with the LGBTQ+ population.

All measures used in this study were self-report. Scores on self-report measures can be exaggerated or restrict responses. Participants may also have wanted to present themselves favorably due to social pressure or potential awareness of bias. Social desirability had a significant correlation with both the measure used to assess empathy and contact with TGNB individuals. This suggests participants may have had some motivation to present themselves in a socially desirable way. It is interesting to note, and a potential question for future research, that individuals may have wanted to appear as they knew or have encountered more TGNB people despite the transgender community being one of the most marginalized and politically debated minority groups in the United States at this time. The Interpersonal Reactivity Index used to assess empathy is a self-report measure, and people generally may want to present themselves as what they perceive to be capable of understanding other's emotions. Finally, another limitation of this study is related to the instruments. Measures demonstrated adequate reliability and validity previous to use, but some instruments were questionnaires based on prior research. Namely, attitudes toward civil rights protections and contact with TGNB individuals were not developed as a formal scale. Therefore, further research on them may be necessary to ensure the psychometric properties of these measures.

### **Future Research**

Research continues to grow in its understanding of attitudes and how they impact marginalized communities. Today, the transgender and gender non-binary community experiences high levels of discrimination, misunderstanding, and violence. Systemic barriers, including restriction of medical services and upholding laws that allow for discrimination in employment and housing, can impact quality of life for TGNB people. Many of these systemic barriers are upheld by law and policy at the federal and state level. Thus, change and expansion of civil rights protections for this community would be incredibly impactful. Future exploration should include the connection of attitudes to political change as well as how to create support for expansive civil rights protections for marginalized communities. An intention of this research was to explore the role of empathy in attitudes for civil rights protections for TGNB individuals. Some research exists in empathy building interventions, and an appropriate extension of this study may be to utilize an experimental design providing interventions that foster empathy to identify the impact on political decision-making. Further research should be conducted to explore dehumanization and empathy through the lens of injustices (Goff et. al, 2008).

## **Conclusions**

Psychological research has analyzed factors effecting attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community, but a lack of attention has been paid to what contributes to attitudes toward expansive civil rights protections. In 2023 alone, bills have been introduced to attack TGNB rights to healthcare, educational content, freedom of expression, access to government documents, and public accommodations (ACLU, 2023). The findings of this study contribute by identifying that higher levels of empathy and less strict gender role belief are predictors of support for expansive civil rights protections for TGNB individuals during a time when the rights

of LGBTQ+ people are highly debated. Salience of religious identity and contact with TGNB individuals appear to be less impactful compared to empathy and gender role belief in predicting attitudes toward civil rights protections. Empathy was also found to be a mediator between contact with TGNB individuals and attitudes toward civil rights protections. The importance of empathy should be taken into consideration when developing interventions or generating support for expansive civil rights protections and voting changes.



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IRB #: PRO-FY2022-244

Title: Protections for all? Attitudes Toward Civil Rights Protections for Trans and Gender Non-Binary Individuals

Creation Date: 11-30-2021

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Morgan Bullard

Review Board: University of Memphis

Sponsor:

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## Study History

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Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	<b>Exempt</b>
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