Trans*forming leadership impressions: Effects of trans label, gender, & behavior

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Overview

- The primary objective of this study was to examine how transgender (trans) individuals are perceived as leaders.

- We examined how a leader's expressed gender, presence or absence of transgender label, and agentic vs. communal behaviors interact to influence personal and expected societal general impressions of leadership.

Background

- We hold prototypes of leaders and engage in prototype-matching when evaluating leaders.

- The better the match with the leader prototype, the better the impressions of a target's leadership abilities.

- This is particularly problematic for trans leaders, since stereotypes of trans people are generally negative.

- Additionally, leadership is viewed in a gendered way more in line with the male gender role than female gender role.

- Even when female leaders behave in line with the male leadership prototype, they are penalized due to violations of their gender role.

Method

- 336 workers (38.1% female) living in the U.S. completed the study online via MTurk.

- 2x2x2 between-subjects, experimental design
  - Leader expressed gender: Male vs. Female
  - Leader behaviors: Agentic vs. Communal
  - Transgender label: Present (trans) vs. Absent (cis)

- Press release about hiring of new (fictitious) CEO

- Measures:
  - **Leadership impressions.** Adapted GLI Scale→ 2 factors (GLI Self & Society)
  - **Control Measures.** Social dominance orientation (SDO), religiosity, attitudes towards gender identity minorities (ATTI), age
 - All Cronbach's alphas > .70)
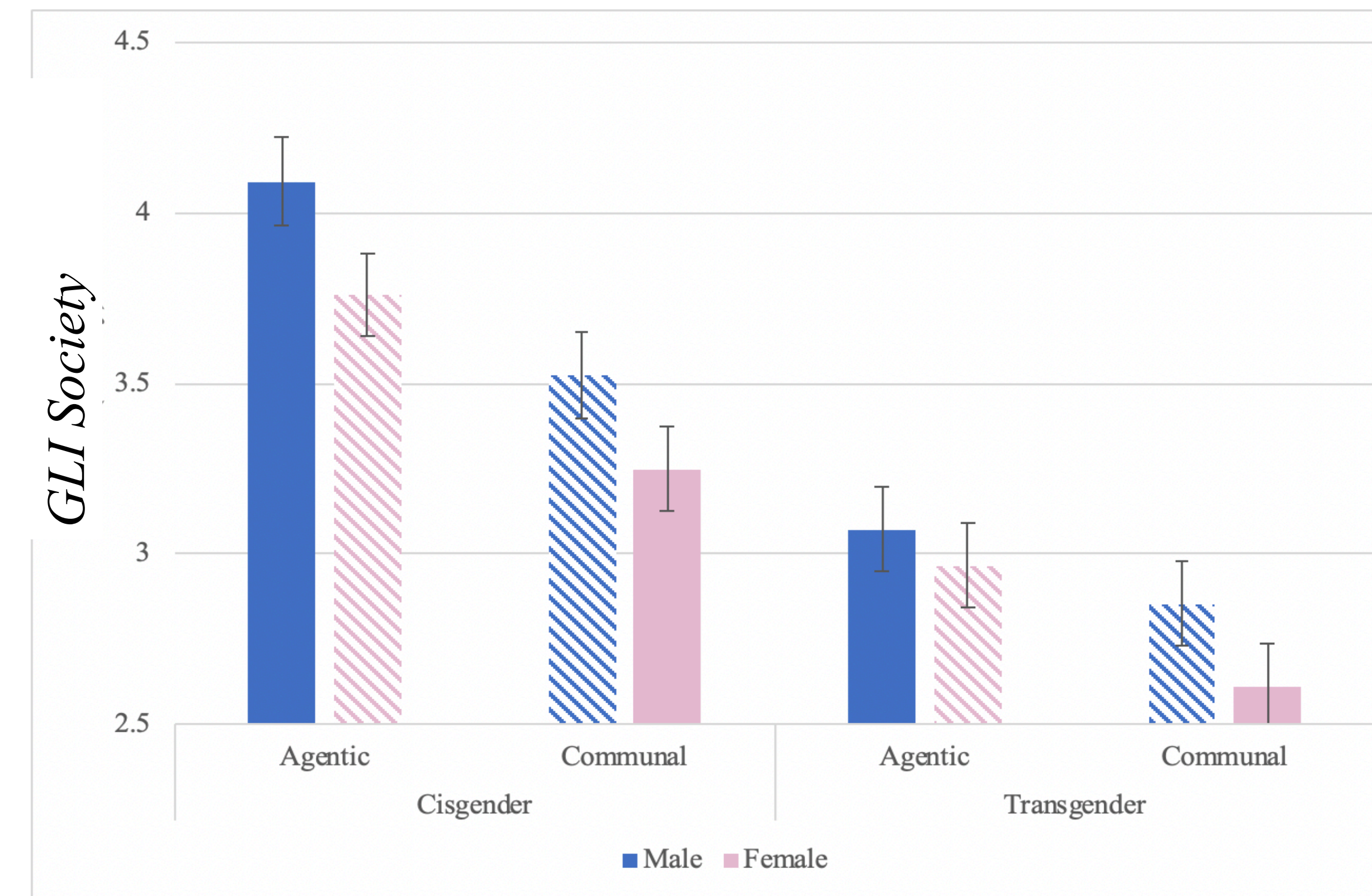
Note: Dashed lines indicate gender role violating behaviors

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Transgender leaders will be rated lower than leaders not described as transgender. (Partially Supported)

Hypothesis 2: Transgender women will be more penalized for the transgender label than transgender men. (Not Supported)

Hypothesis 3: Transgender leaders will be more penalized for using gender-role-violating leader behaviors than cisgender leaders (Partially Supported)
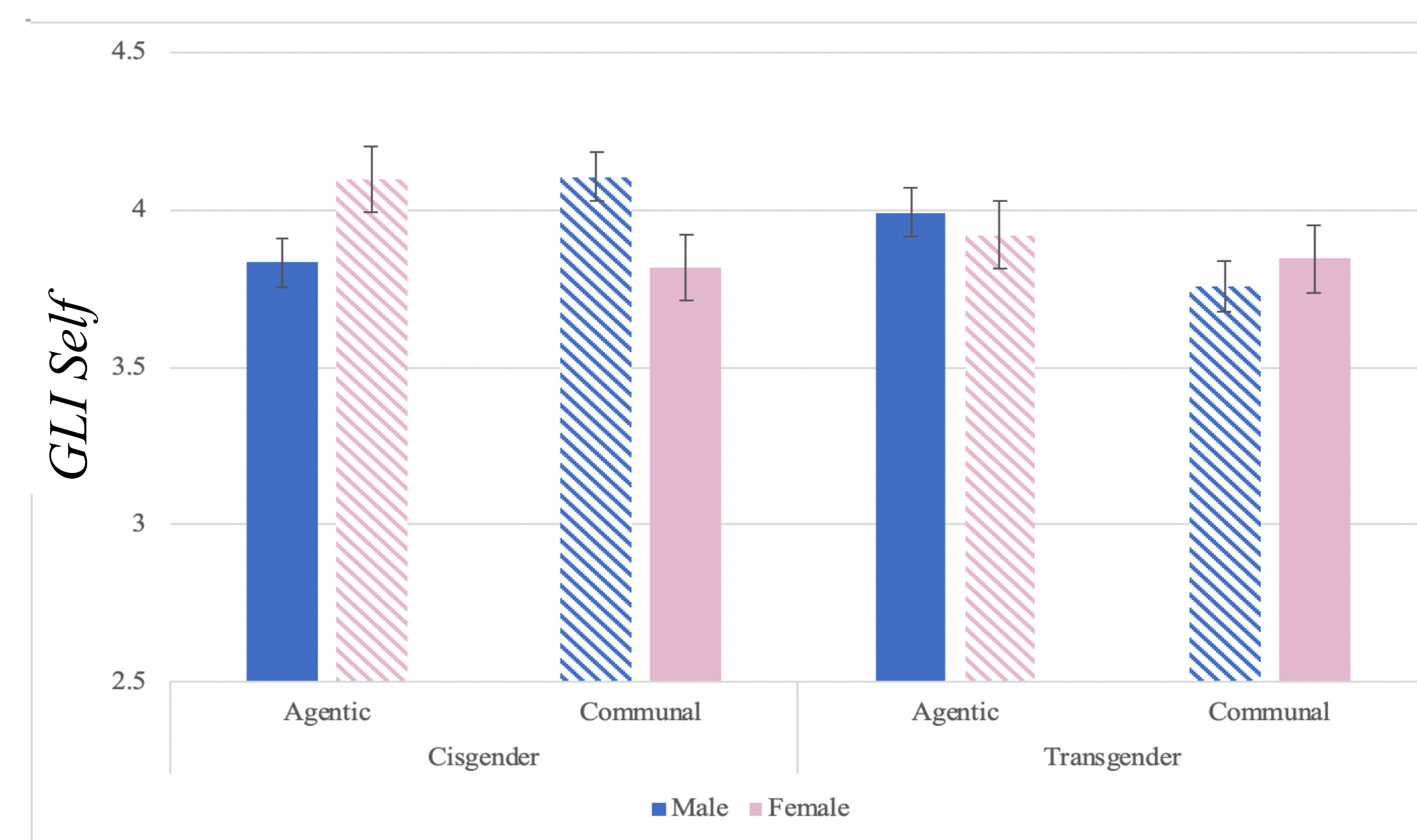
Note: Dashed lines indicate gender role violating behaviors

Results

Effects of Manipulations on GLI (Society) and Gli (Self)

			GLI Society (M = 3.27, SD = .97)		GLI Self (M = 3.91, SD = .80)	
	Means	*SD*	*F*	η_p^2	*F*	η_p^2
Pro-trait Dominance	2.78	1.86	16.38***	.05	3.39	.01
Con-trait Dominance	2.27	1.28	6.05**	.02	39.66***	.11
Religion	2.38	.98	12.16**	.04	11.65**	.04
ATTI	2.25	1.06	8.69**	.03	31.47***	.09
Age	36.54	10.83	12.18**	.04	1.08	.00
Transgender	.50	.50	77.38***	.20	1.24	.00
Female	.51	.50	7.37**	.02	.00	.00
Agentic Behavior	.50	.50	22.01***	.07	1.16	.00
Transgender X Female	--	--	.54	.00	.02	.00
Transgender X Female X Agentic Behavior	--	--	.30	.00	5.66*	.02

Note: GLI = general leadership impressions; F = F-ratio; p = significance level; η_p^2 = partial eta-square; M = mean; SD = standard deviation.
*** $p \leq .001$; ** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$.

Discussion

- Suggested there may be differences in individuals' personal reactions vs. expectations of society's reactions to trans leaders.

- Expected society to view transgender, communal, and female leaders more negatively than cisgender, agentic, and male leaders respectively—reflecting the male, agentic, cis leader prototype.

- Personal reactions depended on a confluence of characteristics with communal transgender men rated the lowest as leaders.

- Limitations include that only gendered leadership behaviors were utilized in the vignette, and that participants viewed "paper" leaders.

- This study informs practical social issues as well as serves as a critical first step for advancing the science of transgender leadership.

*References available upon request from authors.