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Sarah, E. Saint-Michel

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Abstract. This research aims to understand how leaders' self-perception of their gender role identity, described as agentic or communal, influences their followers' perception of transformational leadership. Agentic attributes are stereotypically masculine while communal attributes are stereotypically feminine. Drawing on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and leadership prototype theory (Lord & Maher, 1993), we propose a theoretical model to investigate the influence of leader sex and stereotypical gendered perception of leaders on perceptions of transformational leadership among their followers. Using a sample of 260 employees and their 65 immediate supervisors from French organizations, the results of multilevel structural equation modeling suggest that female leaders who self-describe as highly communal are perceived by followers as more transformational than male leaders. Contrary to our hypothesis, the results reveal an unexpected positive relationship between women's agentic attributes and follower perceptions of transformational leadership. Our findings develop role congruity theory by demonstrating the influence of gendered stereotypes not only for female but also male leaders.

Keywords: transformational leadership, leader gender, gender role theory, role congruity theory, gender stereotype, multilevel structural equation modeling.

Sarah E. Saint-Michel
EDHEC
Open Leadership for Diversity and Inclusion Management Science Department Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
sarah.saint-michel@univ-paris1.fr

INTRODUCTION

A large body of research has emerged on gender and leadership, especially on the influence of leaders' sex on perceptions of their leadership style, yet one variable often neglected is the leader's gender role identity (Hoobler, Masterson, Nkomo & Michel, 2016). Gender role identity defines a stereotypical individual self-perception as masculine or feminine and encompasses qualities that are regarded as ideal for each sex in society (Wood & Eagly, 2009). In this model, gender identity content is framed in terms of agency and communion. Men are expected to display agentic characteristics, such as assertiveness, striving for achievement and competitiveness. In contrast, women are expected to display communal characteristics, including nurture, benevolence and personal caring for the individualized concerns of others (Diekman & Eagly, 2000). Some individuals do not fit the traditional distinction: despite being female, they display stereotypical agentic or masculine traits—or, conversely,

despite being male, they display stereotypical communal or feminine characteristics (Kark, Waismel-Manor & Shamir, 2012; Larsen & Long, 1988). According to role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), a mismatch—or role incongruity—between female leaders and the perceived demands of leadership is the basis for biased evaluations of women as leaders. While there has been progress, suggesting a rising acceptance of androgynous leadership, researchers stress that the stereotype of the "successful leader" is still defined in masculine terms (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011)—highlighted by the aphorism "Think male – Think leader" (Schein, 1973, 1975). Role congruity theory posits that a double bind against female leadership could appear: (a) less favorable evaluations of women's leadership potential; and (b) less favorable evaluations of women's actual leadership behaviors (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt & van Engen, 2003). While social scientists have often emphasized the disadvantages that women face when exercising leadership functions (Rudman & Glick, 1999), recent studies suggest a paradigm shift. A growing body of literature argues that a specific form of leadership—transformational leadership—is becoming more "feminine" (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Fletcher, 2004). Such leadership involves transforming the values and goals of followers by raising their level of awareness (Bass & Avolio, 1994). By communicating a vision and providing symbols and emotional appeals to increase their followers' awareness, transformational leaders encourage them to envisage new ways of thinking and treat them differently but equitably on a one-to-one basis (Antonakis, Avolio & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Kark, et al., 2012). Transformational leadership emerged at the same time as changes in organizations characterized by a less hierarchical and more flexible organizational structure, leading to more collaboration and empowerment for employees (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Fletcher, 2004). For example, Eagly & Carli (2003) argue that a change in the leadership context causes people to rethink the nature of leadership, suggesting that the qualities necessary to display transformational behaviors are characterized by collaboration, interpersonal interactions and power-sharing, characteristics stereotyped as reflecting feminine or communal attributes (Eagly, 2007; Fletcher, 2004; Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011).

Research on gender and leadership has neglected the influence of the relationships between leader gender role identity and leader sex on perceptions of leadership style, with few studies looking at how leader sex and leader gender role identity influence followers' perceptions of leadership. In particular, we attempt to extend role congruity theory by drawing on leadership prototype theory (Lord & Maher, 1993) to offer a more comprehensive framework for explaining how the interaction between leader gender identity and leader sex affects perceptions of transformational behaviors. Leadership prototype theory (Lord, Foti & De Vader, 1984) suggests that followers hold a mental representation of what constitutes a prototype of ideal leaders. As a result, researchers have argued that when leaders do not fit with this prototype, subordinates form less favorable evaluations of their leadership (Johnson, Murphy, Zewdie & Reichard, 2008). Thus, the core question is to understand whether the mismatch between leaders' sex and their perception of their gender identity influences perceptions of their transformational leadership behaviors. We focus on followers' perceptions of leadership, because their attribution of transformational leadership is the key to understanding bias and stereotypes, which can influence the leadership process. As research on gender and leadership suggests that transformational leadership is more

congenial to female leaders (Eagly, et al., 2003), we argue that such leadership behaviors constitute a prototype of ideal leaders.

This study contributes to the leadership and gender literature in two ways. First, we propose a theoretical model to understand the relationship between male and female leaders' gender role identity and their followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. Specifically, by including gender role theory (Eagly, 1987), our theoretical framework is designed to examine the effects of potential incongruity between leaders' sex and gender role identity on followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. Second, based on multi-source survey data, we examine how leaders' perceptions of gender role may be linked to followers' perceptions of transformational leadership, and how leaders' sex may moderate the relationship between their gender role identity and their followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. Drawing on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), we argue that when there is a mismatch between leader gender identity and leader sex, perceptions of transformational leadership among followers could be influenced, for both male and female leaders.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

LEADER GENDER ROLE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A review of the literature provides strong support for the relationship between communal orientation and transformational leadership (Kark, et al., 2012). Transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the sake of the team (Burns, 1978). On the basis of gender role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002), we expected leaders who scored higher on communal orientation to display more transformational behavior, because they are inclined to highlight the importance of cooperation and interdependence (considered as feminine qualities) between group members in order to attain team goals. Park (1996) investigated the relationship between leader gender identity and two leadership styles, described as "task-oriented" and "relationship-oriented". The findings suggested a significant positive relationship between communal traits and the "relationship-oriented" leadership style, and between agentic traits and "task-oriented" leadership. Other studies investigated the relationship between gender role characteristics and transformational leadership, using a sample of management students (Hackman, Furniss, Hills & Paterson, 1992). The results suggested a significant positive relationship between communal characteristics and transformational leadership, whereas a significant negative relationship between agentic characteristics and transformational leadership was found. In the same vein, Poddar and Kirshnan (2004) examined the impact of gender roles on transformational leadership. They conclude that communal attributes such as benevolence and caring are positively related to followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. In contrast, agentic attributes such as being assertive, dominant and striving for power are negatively related to followers' perceptions of transformational behaviors; such attributes do not fit with collaboration, emotional appeal and the sense of the collective exhibited by transformational leaders. Finally, through a study conducted in an Israeli bank, Kark, et al. (2012) demonstrated that whatever the leader's sex, their communal attributes are rated as more transformational by their followers.

Specifically, transformational leaders inspire followers to go beyond their personal goals in order to serve a collective interest. Leaders who scored higher on the communal factor tend to be more considerate and benevolent towards their followers and highlight the importance of collective goals, which is in line with the characteristics of transformational leaders (Kark, et al., 2012; Poddar & Kirshnan, 2004). In contrast, leaders who scored higher on the agentic factor tend to be more dominant and goal-oriented, and strive to control their followers, which is not in line with the characteristics of transformational leaders (Hackman, et al., 1992; Kark, et al., 2012; Poddar & Kirshnan, 2004). Thus, we suggest that leaders who self-describe as having communal characteristics, whether male or female, will be perceived as most transformational by their followers. In contrast, leaders who self-describe as having agentic characteristics, whether male or female, will be perceived as less transformational by their followers.

> *Hypothesis 1a:* The stronger the communal orientation of leaders, the higher their followers will rate them as being transformational
>
> *Hypothesis 1b:* The stronger the agentic orientation of leaders, the less their followers will rate them as being transformational.

A key limitation of previous research on leader gender role identity and follower perceptions of leadership is that existing studies do not look at the combined effect of gender role identity and leader sex. It is necessary to address this gap.

THE MODERATING ROLE OF LEADER SEX

Gender stereotypes denote norms about behaviors that are suitable for men and women (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, there is a normative injunction for women to display communal behaviors such as being sensitive and service-oriented, and not to display agentic behaviors such as being assertive and achievement-oriented, which are associated with men. Scholars stress the increased importance of the concept of communal orientation in transformational leadership behaviors (Bosak & Sczesny, 2011; Fondas, 1997; Koenig, et al., 2011). Communal behaviors in particular (e.g. affectionate, sensitive to the needs of others) are associated with transformational behaviors (Kark, et al., 2012; Poddar & Kirshnan, 2004). Drawing on role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which suggests that women are expected to demonstrate communal qualities because such qualities are expected from women consistent with their gender role, we hypothesize that female leaders who self-describe as having communal attributes will be perceived by followers as displaying more transformational behavior than male leaders, because they fulfill social expectations about their gender role. For example, Glick and Fiske (2001) indicate that perceivers tend to form more favorable evaluations of women, especially when they display leadership behaviors congruent with the attributes ascribed to women. Therefore, we hypothesize as follows:

> *Hypothesis 2a*: The sex of leaders moderates the positive relationship between their communal orientation and transformational leadership, such that this relationship is more positive for female than male leaders.

In contrast, agentic characteristics reflect masculine attributes, such as being ambitious, dominant and oriented towards goal attainment (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007; Bakan, 1966). Leaders who score higher on agentic characteristics should be perceived by their followers as primarily assertive, controlling, dominant and prone to act in a way that attains their goals (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Research suggests that agentic traits are associated negatively with transformational behaviors, because such leaders' attributes do not fit with transformational behaviors (Poddar & Kirshnan, 2004). In accordance with social role theory (Eagly, 1987), individuals hold socially shared expectations about the attributes and positions of women and men in society. Because social roles "spill over" into organizational settings, they could have an impact on leaders, especially on female leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In line with role congruity theory, individuals who describe themselves in ways that are incongruent with their sex role tend to be evaluated negatively (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, female leaders who self-describe as having highly agentic characteristics create incongruence because they violate their gender role (displaying communal characteristics) and exercise leadership functions (involving agentic characteristics), which results in unfavorable perceptions among followers (e.g. Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). This phenomenon—called the "backlash effect"—suggests that when women display characteristics that are counter to prescriptive female stereotypes, they may be penalized (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). Such prejudices arise both in the evaluation of their actual leadership behaviors and of their potential for leadership functions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

However, we add a nuance to this view in relation to a specific situation: when followers perceive their female leader as displaying transformational leadership. As noted above, transformational leadership is associated more favorably with stereotyped feminine expectations (Carless, 1998; Vinkenburg, et al., 2011; Wolfram & Gratton, 2014). Scholars distinguish between *descriptive* gender stereotypes that refer to beliefs regarding how women and men *do* behave, and *prescriptive* gender stereotypes that refer to beliefs regarding how they *should* behave (Vinkenburg, et al., 2011). Recent research suggests that this congruity between stereotypical feminine attributes and transformational behaviors is also reflected in *descriptive* and *prescriptive* gender stereotypes about leadership style. For example, the meta-analysis by Eagly, et al. (2003) suggests that female leaders display more transformational behaviors than male leaders. Moreover, Vinkenburg, et al. (2011) suggest that perceivers believe that female leaders display more transformational leadership behaviors than their male counterparts. Therefore, transformational leadership is a specific form of leadership, expected to be displayed by female leaders, allowing them to resolve the incongruity between their leadership role and gender role expectations (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

In line with leadership prototype theory, we contend that transformational leadership constitutes a mental representation, or prototype, among followers for how female leaders *do* and *should* behave as leaders. Because the transformational behaviors exhibited by these leaders epitomize their followers' expectations of stereotypical female attributes, we argue that leader sex can be expected to moderate the negative relationship between agentic characteristics and transformational leadership, especially for female leaders. Therefore, we contend that subordinates should form more unfavorable evaluations about the transformational leadership of males who self-describe as agentic, compared to female leaders who self-describe as highly agentic, because

transformational leadership is more stereotypical of female leaders (Johnson, et al., 2008; Wang, Chiang, Tsai, Lin & Cheng, 2013).

> *Hypothesis 2b:* The sex of leaders moderates the negative relationship between their agentic orientation and their followers' perceptions of transformational leadership, such that this relationship is less negative for female leaders than male leaders.

METHOD

SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

This study was carried out in four French organizations, representing the oil, retail, and financial services industries and the public sector. From each organization, 25–30 leaders from different departments—e.g. human resources (HR), finance, accounting and general management—were selected by the HR department to be asked to participate voluntarily in the study. The sample of this study encompasses data from different organizations in order to obtain a large enough sample to ensure the generalizability of our results. Because we compiled a sample from diverse organizations, it is possible that there are differences in leadership styles that systematically vary with organizational characteristics. To examine this effect, we ran analysis with and without the organization as a control variable, and our results on dependent variable did not differ. We therefore present our results without the organization as a control variable (Becker, Atinc, Breaugh, Carlson, Edwards & Spector, 2016). Data were collected in two steps. First, leaders were invited by email to complete the leader version of the survey. We then asked them to randomly choose at least five followers to complete the subordinate version of the survey. They provided the email addresses of different followers, to whom we then administered the relevant survey by email, enabling respondents to complete the questionnaire at their discretion, before assigning unique individual identification numbers to each leader and subordinate, allowing matching dyads between leaders and their followers. Of the 100 leaders and 550 followers invited to participate in the study, 65 leaders (65%) and 260 followers (47.3%) returned usable responses. The average age of leaders was 45.2, with a standard deviation (SD) of 9.2; mean tenure in their organizations was 11.9 years (SD = 10.5), with an average of 3.71 years of dyadic tenure. The average number of subordinates per leader overall was 20, with 4 subordinates per leader completing the questionnaires. The final sample group comprised 30 female and 35 male leaders, in different managerial positions (ranging from directors to middle managers[1]), and 141 female and 119 male subordinates.

Data were collected with two questionnaires: one for leaders and one for followers. The former questionnaire asked leaders to rate their gender identity and demographic characteristics; the latter asked followers to rate the leadership style of their leader. Participants were told that their responses would be kept confidential and that they could withdraw their participation without penalty at any time. The response scale ranged from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree".

1. We understood director as someone in charge of leading a department or business unit, and middle manager as someone in charge of leading a team with close involvement in their work.

MEASURES

The original questionnaires were prepared in English. However, because the study was conducted in a French organizational context, we translated them into French (Brislin, 1980). The translated versions were pre-tested on 15 leaders and up to two followers per leader, resulting in a total of 30 followers (all in the same organization). They were asked to comment on any item that they found ambiguous or difficult to understand. This process did not lead to major changes in any of the items.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

We used a French version of the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ Form 5X short) in order to measure transformational leadership style (Bass & Avolio, 2000). This scale is one of the most frequently used and best-validated measures of leadership style (Antonakis, et al., 2003; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Followers provided their perceptions of their immediate supervisor, using 20 items reflecting four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealized influence, impressing followers to the extent that they attempt to emulate the leader's behaviors (e.g. "Emphasizes the importance of having a collective sense of mission"), intellectual stimulation, encouraging followers to challenge the status quo through creativity and innovation (e.g. "Seeks differing perspectives when solving problems"), inspirational motivation, enthusiastically presenting a clear vision of what is possible for the members of the collective to accomplish (e.g. "Articulates a compelling vision of the future") and individualized consideration, being attentive to the needs of each individual follower (e.g. "Considers each individual as having different needs, abilities and aspirations from others") (Bass, 1985; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Lowe, Kroeck & Sivasubramaniam, 1996; Ng, 2016). Followers were asked to evaluate the degree to which a particular behavior was typical of their immediate leader. Items for dimensions of transformational leadership were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = never to 5 = always. The overall transformational measure yielded a good reliability score in the current study (α = .84). Results from previous empirical studies have not been consistent with regard to the optimal factor structure of the MLQ.

LEADER SELF-RATINGS OF GENDER IDENTITY

Items for these measures were selected from the Short Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Short BSRI) (Arrindell, et al., 1997; Bem, 1981), which is the most commonly used measure of stereotyped gender perceptions. As suggested by Kark, et al. (2012), different problems could be associated with the Short BSRI. First, some "masculine" items—for example, "Acts as a leader"—refer directly to leadership, which could be confusing. Second, some items are connoted differentially in terms of social desirability between "communion" and "agency", and sometimes the former may be perceived as undesirable, especially in leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, to overcome these potential forms of bias, one item of the "agentic" scale was deleted because it was redundant in leadership. Then, to check the social desirability of the scales, we asked followers to what extent they would like to possess each characteristic. Scores on the "agency" and "communion" scales were averaged and compared, and no difference in desirability was found (means of 2.41 and 2.52 respectively).

Leaders were asked to what extent each of the items described their personality. A principal component factor analysis using a varimax rotation

confirmed that the "communion" and "agency" items belonged to different factors. Hence, leader "communion" was measured by combining the ten "communion" items (α = .94) (e.g. warm and sympathetic), and leader "agency" by combining the nine remaining items (α = .93) (e.g. dominant and independent).

LEADER SEX

Leader sex was dummy-coded: 0 for male leader and 1 for female leader.

CONTROL VARIABLES

We considered several control variables that might bias our findings. First, we assessed the sex of followers (coded as 0 = male, 1 = female), because previous research showed this to be associated with leader ratings (e.g. Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Marsden, Kalleberg & Cook, 1993). Second, we included leader–follower dyadic tenure as a second control variable, because previous research showed this to be related to transformational leadership (Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo & Sutton, 2011). In addition, we employed sex similarity between leaders and each of their followers as a control, because the leader–follower dyads may influence leaders' assessment of their transformational leadership (Eagly, et al., 2003).

ANALYTIC STRATEGY AND MODEL ESTIMATION

Because followers were nested under supervisors (with an average of four subordinates under one supervisor), we employed M-Plus version 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) for multilevel structural equation modeling using a robust maximum likelihood estimation (MLR) with M-Plus (ML-SEM) (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) to accommodate the multilevel nature of the study and the need to model both levels top-down (Mathieu & Taylor, 2007; Preacher, Zyphur & Zhang, 2010). In order to compare different models and test their fit, we used the Akaike information criterion (AIC), with the smallest value overall representing the best fit of the hypothesized model[2] (Byrne, 2012). Moreover, pseudo R^2 was computed with the formulae used by Snijders and Bosker (1999) to indicate the amount of variation in the different levels that were taken into account by our model. Following Hox's recommendations (2010), a series of nested models were tested to determine if the theoretical individual-level model holds at the group level. We first tested a model with no theoretical structure, serving as a baseline to determine the proportion of variance associated with group variation. In total, the proportion of variance explained by our model was 12% for transformational leadership. Therefore, there was substantial variance in the outcome variables at the between level, justifying the use of multilevel modeling to analyze the data.

The second model test included the direct effect of leaders' gender role identity (Level 2) on perceptions of transformational leadership among followers (Level 1). We estimated a multilevel model with random slopes, because we hypothesized that the relationship between leaders' gender role identity and followers' perceptions of leadership style can be different for each group. Therefore, we specified paths between the two at the individual level, allowing slopes to randomly vary across groups. At the

2. There are no overall model indices available to test two-level random slope models, because there is not a single population covariance matrix to test the model fit (Hox, 2010).

group level (Level 2), leaders' gender role identity was specified to have a direct effect on followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. As expected, the AIC value of the alternative model was 6.808, smaller than that of the previous model (6.694).

The third model represents two levels of analysis: an upper level, Level 2 (inter-group), and a lower level, Level 1 (intra-group). In order to estimate our model, we specified paths from leaders' gender role to followers' perceptions of transformational leadership at the individual level, allowing slopes to randomly vary across groups. Moderation was specified from leaders' gender role identity (inter-level) with leader's sex (inter-level) to followers' perceptions of transformational leadership (intra-level). Follower reports at the individual level were used to assess behaviors that leaders tend to exhibit. The model fit the data well; the AIC value of the hypothesized model was 4.519, smaller than the models without moderation, indicating that our hypothesized model provided better model fit. To facilitate the interpretation of the findings, leaders' gender role identity was grand-mean centered (Enders & Tofighi, 2007) and followers' perceptions of transformational leadership was group-mean centered (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998).

RESULTS

CONCEPTUAL MODEL TESTING

Prior to testing our hypotheses, we used confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to verify the measure's convergent and discriminant validity of different constructs. Because our data have a nested structure, we conducted two separate sets of CFAs, because measures were provided by different sets of respondents (followers' perceptions and upper-level managers) to examine the distinctiveness of the constructs (Appendix 1). For follower-rated variables, perceived transformational leadership was assessed by comparing a single-factor model with a hypothesized model including four transformational factors (idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation). For leader-rated variables (communion and agency), we compared the fit of a single-factor model to the hypothesized two-factor model. The CFA results shown in the Appendix provide evidence (based on chi-squared difference tests) for the discriminant validity of measures collected from both team members and at the leader level.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS

Means, standard deviation, reliabilities and zero-order Pearson correlations between the variables in this study are presented in Table 1. Contrary to our hypotheses, leaders' communal orientation is negatively correlated with their sex, suggesting that female leaders score lower on the communal factor than men.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3
Leader level (N = 65)					
1. Leader sex	.45	.50			
2. Agency	2.60	.24	-.02	**(.93)**	
3. Communion	2.81	.31	-.14**	.17*	**(.94)**
Follower level (N = 265)					
1. Follower sex	.50	.50			
2. Dyadic tenure	3.27	2.14	.00		
3. TFL	3.06	.62	.02	–.15**	**(.84)**

[a] Sex was dummy-coded (0 = male, 1= female)
[b] The continuous measures of masculinity and femininity were used here. Sex was dummy-coded (0 = male, 1= female).
[c]TFL Transformational leadership
Estimates of coefficient alpha reliabilities are in parentheses.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, correlations and reliabilities of study variables

TESTS OF HYPOTHESES

Table 2 summarizes the results of multilevel analyses for Hypotheses 1 & 2. Control variables (including follower sex, gender similarity and dyadic tenure) were included in model 1. In model 2 we examined the group-level effect (including leader sex and leader gender role identity) on transformational leadership. Lastly, we examined the interaction between leader sex and leader gender role identity as a predictor of transformational leadership. Hypothesis 1a proposed that the stronger the communal orientation of leaders, the more their followers will rate them as displaying transformational behaviors. The results of model 2 indicated that perceptions of leaders as having communal attributes (b = . 16, p < .05) are positively associated with transformational leadership, supporting Hypothesis 1a. Therefore, the stronger the communal orientation of the leader, the higher the followers' rating of transformational behaviors. Hypothesis 1b proposed that the stronger the agentic orientation of leaders, the less their followers will rate them as displaying transformational leadership. Still, as shown in model 2, leaders' self-perception as masculine is negatively associated with transformational leadership (b = -.08, *ns*). However, the results are not statistically significant and Hypothesis 1b is not supported.

Variables	Transformational leadership		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Level 1			
Follower sex (FS)	.10 (.03)	.10 (.03)	.10 (.03)
Gender similarity	-.01 (.07)	-.01 (.07)	-.01 (.07)
Dyadic tenure	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)	.03 (.00)
Level 2			
Leader sex		.24 (.15)	-1.09 (.23)
Leader communion		.16* (.08)	.32 (.02)
Leader agency		-.08 (.31)	.11 (.43)
Cross level interactions			
Leader sex x leader communion			1.22** (.51)
Leader sex x leader agency			.46* (.14)
Pseudo R^2 Level 1	.07	.07	.07
Pseudo R^2 Level 2		.29	.32

[a] n (level 1) = 260; n (level 2) = 65. Entries corresponding to the predicting variables are estimations with robust standard errors. Leaders' gender role identity was grand-mean centered (Enders & Tofighi, 2007) and followers' perceptions of transformational leadership was group-mean centered (Hofmann & Gavin, 1998). Men are coded 1; women are coded 2.
*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$; two-tailed test.

Table 2. Hierarchical linear modeling results for followers' perceptions of transformational leadership[a]

Hypothesis 2a predicted moderating effects of leaders' sex on the positive relationship between their communal orientation and transformational leadership. As the results show in Table 2 (model 3), the coefficient for the interaction term of leaders' communal orientation and leaders' sex was statistically significant ($\gamma = 1.22$, $p < .01$) for predicting transformational behavior. To illustrate this relationship, following the recommendations of Preacher, Curran and Bauer (2006), we plotted the interaction. Consistent with Hypothesis 2a, the slope for female leaders is positive and significant (.76, p <.05). Figure 1 shows that female leaders who self-describe as having highly communal characteristics are rated by followers as more transformational than male leaders. Contrary to our hypothesis, the slope for male leaders is negative and significant (-.25, p < .05). The association between leaders' communal characteristics and perceptions of transformational leadership is negative for male leaders. This surprising result suggests that male leaders who self-describe as

having highly agentic characteristics are perceived by followers as displaying significantly less transformational leadership than female leaders. Thus, Hypothesis 2a is partially supported (Figure 1).

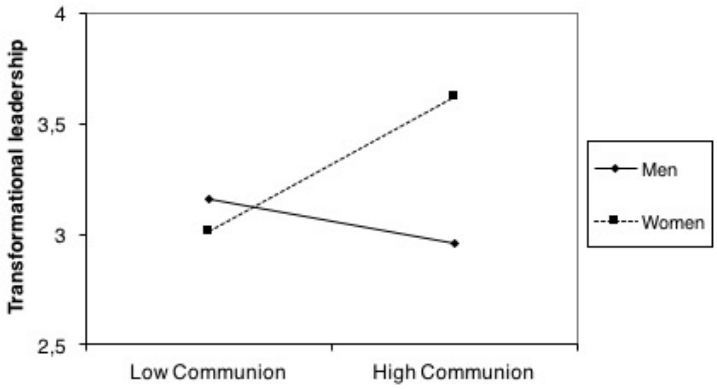


Figure 1. Moderating effect of leader sex on the relationship between communal characteristics and transformational leadership

Hypothesis 2b predicted that leaders' sex moderates the negative relationship between their agentic orientation and transformational leadership, such that this relationship is less negative for female leaders. Table 3 shows that the coefficient for the interaction term of leaders' agentic orientation and leader sex was statistically significant ($\gamma = .46$, $p < .05$) for predicting transformational behavior. As illustrated in Figure 2, female leaders who self-described as having stereotypical masculine attributes are perceived by their followers as displaying more transformational leadership, compared to male leaders who self-described in the same way. Moreover, simple slope tests demonstrate that both slopes are significantly different from zero ($p < .05$). The slope for the male leader is negative and significant (-.13, $p < .05$), and the slope for the female leader is positive and significant (.46, $p < .05$) Thus, Hypothesis 2b is not supported. Contrary to our hypothesis, the association between leaders' agentic characteristics and perceptions of transformational leadership is positive, but only for female leaders.

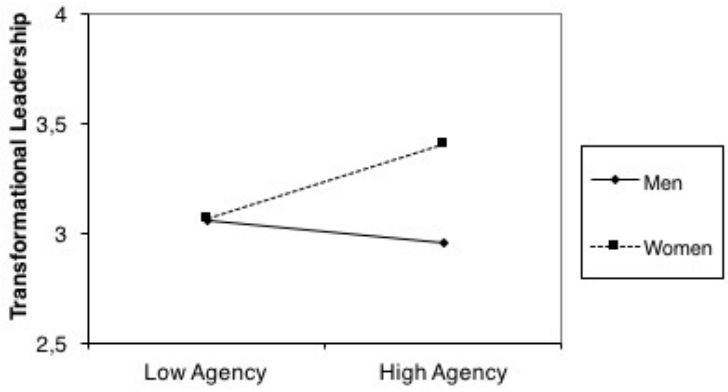
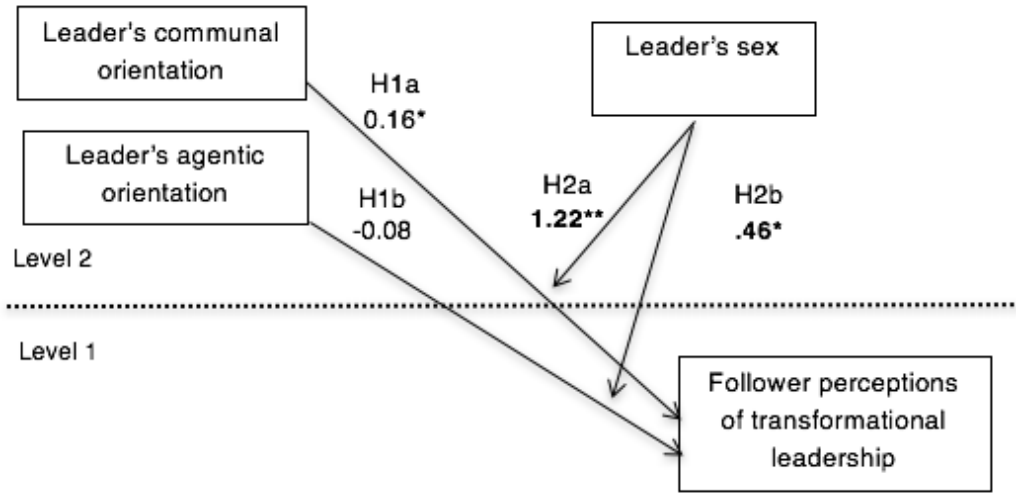


Figure 2. Moderating effect of leader sex on the relationship between agentic characteristics and transformational leadership



Control variables
-follower sex
-gender similarity
-dyadic tenure

Note. Level 1 is the leader level; Level 2 is the individual level

Figure 3. Unstandardized path coefficients for the hypothesized model.
**p < .01; *p < .05

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examine the influence of leader sex and leader gender role identity on followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. While gender and leadership have received much attention from researchers, careful examinations that include leaders' self-perception of their gender role identity and its impact on followers' perceptions of transformational leadership are quite rare. Using leadership prototype theory to supplement role congruity theory, our research demonstrates the moderating role of leader sex on the relationship between leader gender role identity and follower perceptions of transformational leadership. First, our models suggest that leaders who self-described as having highly communal attributes are rated by followers as displaying transformational leadership. Second, as expected, this study also demonstrates the moderating role of leaders' sex on the positive relationship between their communal attributes and their followers' perceptions of transformational behaviors, but only for female leaders. Female leaders who self-describe as having highly communal attributes are perceived as exhibiting more transformational leadership than their male counterparts (Figure 1). In contrast, male leaders who self-describe as having a high level of communion are perceived as less transformational. Third, our model produced one surprising result. Contrary to our hypothesis, we found an unexpected positive relationship between leaders' agentic characteristics and follower perceptions of transformational leadership, but only for female leaders (Figure 2). When female leaders self-describe as having agentic attributes, they are perceived as more transformational compared to male leaders who self-described with the same attributes (Figure 2). The

implications of our findings point to suggestions for future research, discussed below.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our research suggests that leadership prototype theory (Lord & Maher, 1993) and role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between followers' perceptions of leadership, leaders' sex and leaders' gender role. As expected based on role congruity theory, female leaders who self-describe as having stereotypical communal traits are perceived by followers as displaying more transformational leadership than male leaders. Our results confirm the congruence between women's gender role (e.g. communal characteristics) and transformational leadership (e.g. leadership role stereotyped as involving feminine attributes).

Nonetheless, surprisingly and contrary to our hypothesis, when female leaders self-describe as having stereotypical agentic attributes, their followers tend to perceive them as displaying transformational behaviors. This finding has implications for the backlash effect theory (Rudman & Glick, 1999). Backlash is a negative reaction to female leaders whose behaviors violate gender norms. For example, women suffer from the backlash effect when their behavior is seen as "too masculine", such as displaying agentic behaviors, especially when they hold leadership positions. Instead, our results suggest that whatever their gender role identity (communal or agentic characteristics), women's followers still tend to perceive them as displaying transformational behaviors, and they do not suffer from the backlash effect.

One explanation of this finding may be that transformational leadership epitomizes the mental representation of followers' *descriptive* and *prescriptive* expectations of what constitutes a prototype of ideal leadership behaviors, especially for female leaders. The aspects of this leadership meet social expectations for women who hold such positions, allowing them to overcome the incongruity between the leader and gender roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Indeed, transformational leadership involving both stereotypical communal behaviors such as individualized consideration and stereotypical agentic behaviors such as inspirational motivation seems to represent the stereotype of what constitutes a prototype of female leaders (Vinkenburg, et al., 2011). This specific form of leadership seems to trump followers' perceptions of leader gender role identity, suggesting that female leaders do not suffer from the backlash effect, even when they describe themselves as having agentic attributes. This finding can be seen in parallel with Wang, et al. (2013), suggesting that perceptions of incongruence between the leadership role and stereotyped expectations in relation to gender role can be biased, particularly when women adopt "favorable" agentic behaviors (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2013; Lanaj & Hollenbeck, 2014; Wang, et al., 2013). More generally, this finding sheds light on implicit leadership theory, illustrating the influence of the stereotyped expectations of followers on how they assess leadership behaviors within a population segment often overlooked: female leaders in France. Further research should examine the effects of different forms of leadership such as servant leadership or authentic leadership on followers' perceptions of the behaviors expected of female leaders. For example, Eagly (2005) argues that authentic leadership could be particularly challenging to implement for female leaders, because followers have stereotyped expectations when it comes to leaders' attributes. In addition, we recommend that future researchers clarify the

impact for a female leader who displays other forms of leadership, especially those perceived as stereotypically masculine. In the same way, it could be interesting to focus on specific contexts that promote the emergence of other forms of leadership, such as distributed leadership, whereby the leader shares decision-making with others executives or consultants (Allard-Poesi & Giordano, 2015). Understanding the effect of leader sex and gender stereotypes on this specific form of leadership could be useful when it comes to implementing leadership processes without perception bias.

One other explanation could stem from the distinction between self-perception versus performativity. The Butlerian perspective of performativity (Butler, 1997, 2010) studied how social categories and identities held as being given are historically built through the repetition of acts of language and practices that transform the meaning that individuals create with respect to themselves. To explain our result, it is possible that leaders may like to self-perceive as more communal or agentic because it is socially desirable, but somehow do not act out their gender role in those ways. Gender is a social construct which could be perceived as socially or culturally desirable (undesirable) and could result in bias in the way leaders self-perceive. Further research in this direction would be useful to develop more in-depth analysis of processes of subjectification and understand the invisible yet omnipresent mechanisms of preformation that govern individuals' self-perception while remaining unknown to them (Aggeri, 2017). Moreover, researchers should focus on leaders who do not describe a gender role that is congruent with their sex. For example, studies conducted in the field of sexuality suggest that it is important to go beyond traditional identity to explore the deconstruction of gender identity and its negative effect (Lorber, 1996).

At first glance, our results appear to send an optimistic message to female leaders, because, whatever their gender role identity, they are perceived as displaying transformational behaviors. However, this result should be interpreted with caution. Our findings do not take into account how long erroneous follower perceptions of their leader last. Future research should examine under which conditions and for how long this misperception can be observed. Second, it must not be overlooked that this finding, albeit intriguing, relates to a particular leadership model that confines female leaders to pre-established leadership roles. This study considers just one form of leadership. Future research could usefully address other forms with a view to determining the replicability of this study. More generally, this finding is an illustration of the glass-ceiling phenomenon. Some of the discrimination from which women suffer stems from the fact that they remain confined to specific leadership roles that emphasize their stereotypical feminine qualities. Research suggests that when it comes to other forms of leadership considered more masculine, women remain victims of perception bias (Wang, et al., 2013). Our results reveal this state of confinement, since follower perceptions remain biased when it comes to stereotyped gendered leadership expectations.

Moreover, our research extends role incongruity theory to male leaders and follows on from recent research examining the weight of stereotyped expectations on male leaders (Heilman & Wallen, 2010; Rosette, Mueller & Lebel, 2015). Whereas role congruity theory primarily focuses on female leaders, our results suggest that male leaders could suffer from prejudice when they are rated on transformational leadership. Contrary to our hypotheses, male leaders who self-described as having highly agentic or communal characteristics are perceived by followers as significantly less transformational compared to female leaders. Our results

highlight the weight of gendered stereotypes, which trump followers' perceptions of leader gender role identity, suggesting that male leaders could also suffer from the backlash effect. Whereas a large body of literature points to a backlash effect when women display incongruent gender role behaviors (agentic behaviors) (Rudman & Glick, 1999), our results extend this theory to male leaders, especially when they are rated on their transformational behaviors. Our findings suggest that transformational leadership is not a prototype that is congruent with the behavior expected of male leaders. Yet a large number of studies highlight the freedom given to male leaders, without fear of perception bias in evaluations of their leadership behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Our research points to limitations in this alleged freedom since transformational leadership appears to be proscribed, particularly for male leaders. Specifically, our results suggest that when male leaders are perceived as displaying transformational leadership behaviors, followers tend to have biased perceptions of their gender role identity. To explain this finding, it appears that in this study transformational leadership crystallizes the stereotyped expectations of followers as communal more than agentic.

Our results suggest that role congruity theory is not sufficient to understand the complex relationship between leaders' sex, gender role identity and followers' perceptions of leadership behaviors. Thus, future research must be cautious about following prior research that argues that male and female leadership are perceived in the same way (Eagly, Karau & Makhijani, 1995) because no-one can eradicate gender stereotyping (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998). Leaders' sex, as a natural background for followers' perceptions of leadership behaviors, can alter the association between sex and gender role identity in these perceptions (Wang, et al., 2013: 111). Role congruity theory needs to be further developed for several reasons. First, it does not take into account the context in which prejudice appears. Empirical evidence on whether incongruent behaviors help or hinder women is mixed, suggesting that the context in which these behaviors are enacted matters. For example, some studies show that women do not suffer from backlash when only adopting "favorable" agentic behaviors, such as decisiveness and boldness (Anderson, Lievens, van Dam & Born, 2006; Johnson, et al., 2008). Future research should probe this important finding to specify the conditions of countervailing bias against female leaders. Our finding confirms that the leadership role has shifted toward more stereotypical communal characteristics, such as mentoring, cooperation and collaboration (Eagly, 2007; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014), and followers seem to value this characteristic more readily for female than for male leaders when it comes to transformational behaviors.

Second, role congruity theory is limited to female leaders and should be extended to male leaders. Our results suggest that atypical male leaders are also penalized when they display incongruent leadership behaviors. In line with the meta-analysis of Eagly, et al. (2003), our results suggest that transformational leadership is not a prototypical form of leadership for male leaders. Because transformational leadership seems to epitomize "feminine leadership" (Carless, 1998), our results suggest that male leaders are penalized when followers assess them on this specific leadership style.

Furthermore, while several studies have questioned the more or less stereotyped nature of transformational leadership (Carless, 1998; Vinkenburg, et al., 2011), our research suggests that in the French context transformational leadership is perceived by followers as a particularly congenial style for female leaders. Thus, the generalizability of our results

for different cultures must be examined. Future research should further clarify whether results similar to ours are also found in non-French contexts. For example, research has suggested that, to the extent that individuals have a traditional gender ideology, they exhibit stronger stereotyped preferences for leader attributes (Eastwick, et al., 2016). Future researchers are therefore urged to empirically investigate the joint effect of cultural values and leaders' sex.

Finally, our findings are particularly meaningful for research on gender and leadership. We have shown that stereotypes associated with leaders' sex are stronger than their self-assessed gender identity, both for women and leaders, especially when followers perceive their leader as displaying transformational leadership. Our findings reinforce recommendations made by Vecchio (2002, 2003) that research on "gender and leadership style" should adopt a "fine-grained" approach by introducing gender identity and leadership style to acknowledge circumstances that may moderate the nature and strength of any existing gender differences. This study is an active response to previous calls for more research on a sex-role paradigm rather than a sex-difference paradigm, in order to better understand the relationship between leaders' sex, gender identity, and leadership style (Korabik, 1990; Rosette & Tost, 2010).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Our research has significant implications for practitioners. Given that the same behaviors displayed by male and female leaders are perceived differently by their followers depending on their sex (Eagly, 1987), it is necessary, in organizational settings, to inform employees and followers about gender stereotypes. Specifically, this study showed the power of gender stereotypes, which introduce bias to self-descriptions of the leader gender role. Male leaders are perceived as less transformational because they violate leadership expectations by demonstrating transformational behaviors (Heilman & Wallen, 2010). Thus, organizations should rethink the old leadership model, "Think leader – Think male" (Koenig, et al., 2011), which devalues male leaders who fail to comply with this aphorism. Research stresses the role played by followers in the attribution process of leadership to act and mobilize followers through the leadership process (Blom & Alvesson, 2015). Therefore, the training of followers about bias in their perception of their leader seems fundamental to avoid prejudice against leaders.

Additionally, our findings suggest that there is still a lot of work to do to eradicate gender stereotypes, so that leaders, whatever their gender role orientation, can be appreciated for their vision and traits beyond what is expected from their sex. Our results suggest that followers have stereotyped expectations which confine both male and female leaders to stereotypical leader roles. It seems necessary to rethink a more inclusive leadership model in order to allow leaders to develop their own leadership style without fear of devaluation due to gender stereotypes (Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart & Singh, 2011). For example, organizations which promote an inclusive culture tend to allow both male and female leaders to display authentic leadership (i.e. true to themselves) without fear of perception bias (Saint-Michel & Petit, 2015). Women still hold the minority of leadership roles in contemporary organizations. To compensate for this, our results suggest that transformational leadership allows them to overcome the incongruity between the leader role and gender role expectations. Moreover, organizations could employ 360-degree feedback programs or "after action review" processes to provide leadership

assessments that may help to overcome subjective biases (DeRue, Nahrgang, Hollenbeck & Workman, 2012; West, Meserve & Stanovich, 2012). Providing leadership ratings with 360-degree feedback may also help decision-makers to overcome subjective biases because bias is very difficult to detect in one's own perceptions but easier to recognize in others (Lanaj & Hollenbeck, 2014).

LIMITATIONS

A number of limitations need to be mentioned. First, the study was carried out in French organizations and does not take account of the broader context, thus limiting the generalizability of our findings to other cultures. Second, our data were obtained through a specific sample, which could contain perception bias. In particular, the leaders who participated in this study did so on a voluntary basis, which could lead to bias in our results. Moreover, the leaders chose followers randomly for participation in the study, which may result in sampling bias and range restriction. Another concern with this research is that we focus only on transformational leadership. A further limitation is that our data were collected from self-report questionnaires, so it is possible that common method variance inflated some of the reported associations, and there is a possibility of social-desirability bias. Common method bias may have inflated the observed relationships, which we tried to minimize by following recommendations from Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podsakoff (2003). First, we assured participants that their answers were anonymous and were neither right nor wrong. We also encouraged them to respond as honestly as possible. Second, we collected data from different sources (leaders and followers), further limiting common method bias concerns.

In addition, the fact that we used cross-sectional data and correlational data constrains our ability to make inferences regarding the causal nature of the findings. Further, the cross-sectional nature of our research design prevents us from drawing conclusions in terms of causality. Although previous research suggests that leader "femininity" is more likely to influence identification with leaders (Kark, et al., 2012), more solid conclusions would be obtained through a longitudinal design. Future studies should also examine contextual moderators that may affect the findings, such as the organization being "female-oriented" or "male-oriented" (Gardiner & Tiggermann, 1999; Maier, 1999).

CONCLUSIONS

Our goal was to examine the role of leader gender identity and leader sex on followers' perceptions of transformational leadership. Gender identity defines a stereotypical individual self-perception as masculine or feminine. Men are expected to display agentic characteristics (e.g. assertiveness and competitiveness), whereas women are expected to display communal characteristics (e.g. benevolence and personal regard for the individualized concerns of others). Our findings suggest that female leaders who self-described as having highly communal or highly agentic attributes are rated by their followers as displaying more transformational leadership compared to male leaders. Contrary to our hypotheses, male leaders who self-described as having highly agentic or communal characteristics are perceived by followers as significantly less transformational compared to female leaders. While many studies focus on prejudice against female leaders, our results suggest that male leaders could also suffer from prejudice when rated on transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership is a specific form of leadership that inspires followers to go beyond their personal goals in order to serve a collective interest. Our results highlight the weight of gendered stereotypes, which trump followers' perceptions of leader gender role identity, suggesting that male leaders could also suffer from the backlash effect. Thus, future research on gender and leadership should introduce the congruence between leaders' sex and gender identity to investigate other effects on leaders, such as leader–member exchange, authentic leadership, and other outcomes of interest to organizations.

APPENDIX

	χ2	*df*	Δ*χ2*	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Leader level						
One-factor model	1143	54		0.92	0.90	0.08
Hypothesized model[a]	96.56	51	1046.44	0.99	0.99	0.05
Follower level						
One-factor model	356.11	120		0.79	0.77	0.15
Hypothesized model[b]	191.10	103	165.01	0.91	0.90	0.08

Note. For leader level, N = 260. For follower level, N = 65. df = degrees of freedom. CFI = comparative fit index. TLI = Tucker-Lewis index. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

[a] Hypothesized model loads on higher model of four order factors (idealized influence, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation).

[b] Hypothesized model loads on two-factor model (10 items for leaders' communion and 9 items for leaders' agency).

Table 3. Results of the confirmatory factor analyses

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Sarah Saint-Michel is Assistant Professor of organizational behavior and human resource management at the University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and Research Associate at Edhec Open leadership for Diversity and Inclusion. She received her PhD in Human Resource Management from University Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Her research interests include gender and leadership, and organizational practices that promote all diversity in organizations.

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