

PRONOUNS AND MISGENDERING

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INTRODUCTION

Misgendering: misattributing or miscategorizing a person's gender identity. Damaging to trans people (McLemore 2014)

- **Linguistic misgendering:**
 - Names: 'deadnaming' e.g. using old/dispreferred name (*Bradley Manning, Bruce Jenner*)
 - Nouns: *man, woman, girl*, etc.
 - Terms of address: *sir, ma'am, miss*, etc.
 - **Pronouns: *he, she, they*, etc.**

RESEARCH QUESTION:

- DO PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRANS PEOPLE AFFECT THE RATE AT WHICH THEY MISGENDER TRANS PEOPLE?
- What *kinds* of attitudes are associated with misgendering?

BACKGROUND

Explicit attitudes:

conscious, salient, aware

can ask directly – self-report attitudes

Implicit attitudes:

motivation to control prejudiced reactions (Dunton & Fazio 1997) – individuals vary

different answers to self-reported prejudice vs. instinctive reactions (*ibid*)

METHODS: Set-up

Recruitment:

- Focus on recruiting self-identified trans people first, then partners
- Paired design: strangers (recruited) and acquaintances (brought along)
- Social media, posters, email lists
- 22 participants (11 pairs: 6 acquaintance pairs, 5 stranger pairs)

Order of operations:

1. Pair interview
2. Solo interview (about partner)
3. Film clips (Watch → Talk → Survey)
4. Demographic survey

METHODS: Interviews

Strangers in pair interview:

- **What's your first impression of each other?** Can you describe each other?
- Can you find a topic to disagree about? How would you describe each others' perspective?
- What about something you both agree on? What's something you both have in common?
- Do you remind each other of anyone? Who does X remind you of and why?

Acquaintances in pair interview:

- **How do the two of you know each other?** What was your first meeting like? Is there a story there?
- Can you tell me about a time that the two of you disagreed about something? Do the two of you have any differing opinions?
- Can you tell me about one of your happiest memories together? What about a not-so-happy memory?
- Do you have any mutual friends that know both of you? How did you meet them?

Solo interview:

- **How would you describe X** when you're talking to your other friends? Personality, looks, stories?
- What's one thing you really like or admire about X? What about something about X that irritates you?
- Is there anything like a book or TV show that makes you think of X? Can you talk about why?
- How do you think the first interview went? How were you feeling, and how do you think X was feeling? Is this what you expected?

METHODS: Attitudes

Implicit

Film clips

- Free reactions

How did you feel about this clip?

How did you feel about (Character 1)?

How did you feel about (Character 2)?

- Likert scale questions

I like this clip. (Character) is a **good person, educated, typical woman, typical transgender person, typical man, friendly, intelligent, attractive, offensive, funny. I could be friends with** (Character). The character '(Character)' is **realistic.**

Explicit

Attitudes survey

- Feelings thermometer (Dunton & Fazio 1997)

On a scale from 0 to 100, what are your personal feelings towards the following groups? As you do this task, think of a thermometer: 0 is the 'coldest,' least favorable rating, and 100 is the 'warmest,' most favorable rating.

Men in general? Women in general? Gay men? Lesbians? Bisexual men? Bisexual women? Transgender people in general? Transgender men? Transgender women?

- Likert scale questions (Herek 2009, Norton and Herek 2012)

Sex between two women is wrong.

(Strongly disagree) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 (Strongly agree)

FILM CLIPS

Boy Meets Girl (2013)

Characters: Ricky (trans woman),
Francesca (cis woman), Robbie and
David (cis men)



METHODS: Sample

Age group	Income	Masc-aligned	Fem-aligned	Other	Group totals
Young (18-29)					13
	high (over 90K)	1	3	0	4
	mid (30K to 90K)	2	1	3	6
	low (under 30K)	2	1	0	3
Middle age (30-55)					7
	high (over 90K)	0	3	0	3
	mid (30K to 90K)	0	2	1	3
	low (under 30K)	0	0	1	1
Older (56+)					2
	high (over 90K)	0	0	0	0
	mid (30K to 90K)	0	0	0	0
	low (under 30K)	1	1	0	2
Group totals		6	11	5	n=22

Please fill out each section with how you most closely identify:

Age:

Ethnicity: (17 white/Caucasian, 2 Ashkenazi/Jewish, 1 half Chinese / white, 1 Spanish, 1 “other”)

Gender: ("androgynous," "female," "genderqueer," "male," "non-binary," "none," "queer," "transman," "transmasculine," "transmasculine nonbinary," and "transsexual woman")

Preferred pronouns:

Are there any other pronouns you’re okay with people using?

Have you discussed your pronoun preferences with your partner?

Sexual orientation:

Where are you from?

About how much is your yearly household income?

METHODS: Coding/aggregation of data

Pronouns coded for speaker, referent, number, person, gender, genericity, initiative shifts, and MATCH

Dependent variable: **MATCH**

- **NA:** either not a 3rd singular pronoun, or a 3rd singular pronoun whose referent's gender is unknown to the coder (e.g. absent third parties, animals, etc.)
- **NO:** the gender of the 3rd singular pronoun *did not match* the preferences of the referent (stated on the demographic questionnaire)
- **YES:** it did match the preferences of the referent (stated on the demographic questionnaire, including 2nd choice pronoun)

Demographic data were grouped by gender (3 groups), annual income/socioeconomic status (3), age (3)

Likert items measuring positive and gender-congruent attributes for Ricky were averaged by speaker

Feelings thermometer data were z-scored by speaker

RESULTS

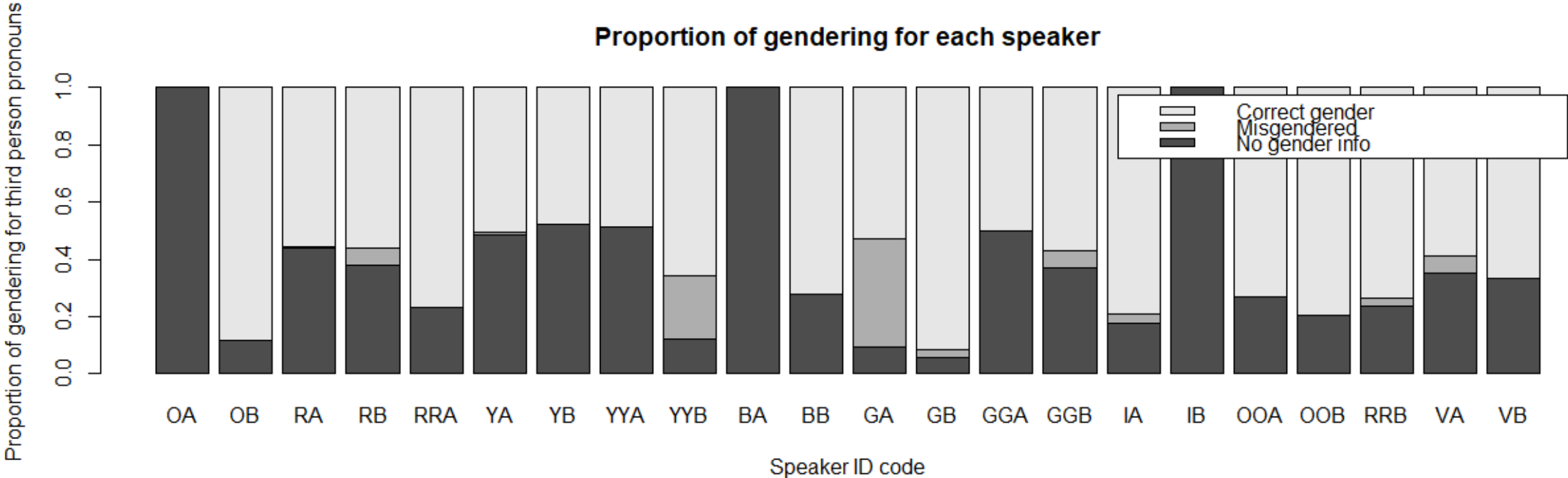
Quantitative overview:

- Demographic variables **were not** predictive of misgendering
- Some attitudinal measures **were** predictive of misgendering

Qualitative overview:

- Types of misgendering: guessing wrong or messing up

Proportion of MISMATCH = dependent variable



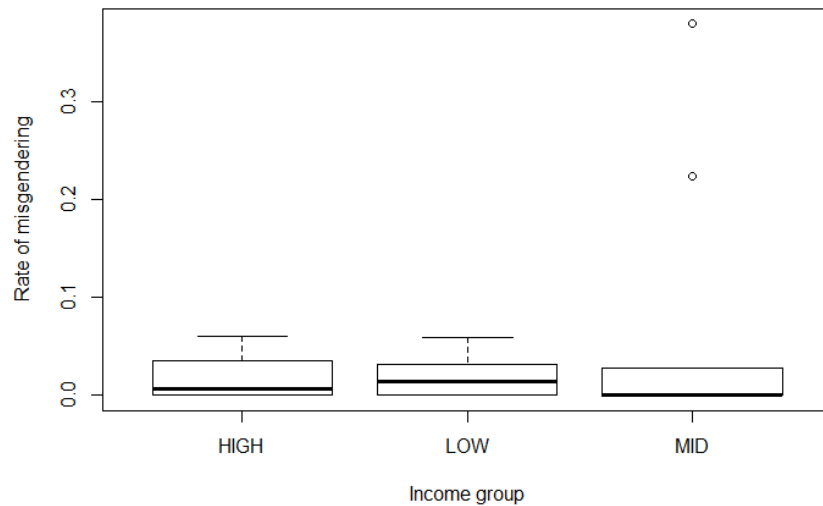
Social Demographic Variables

Age: no significant correlation

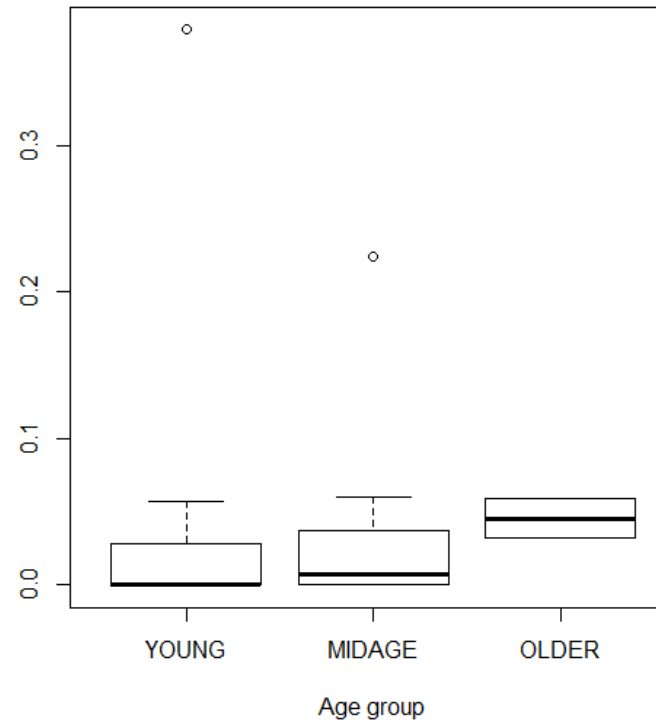
Income: no significant correlation

Gender: no significant correlation

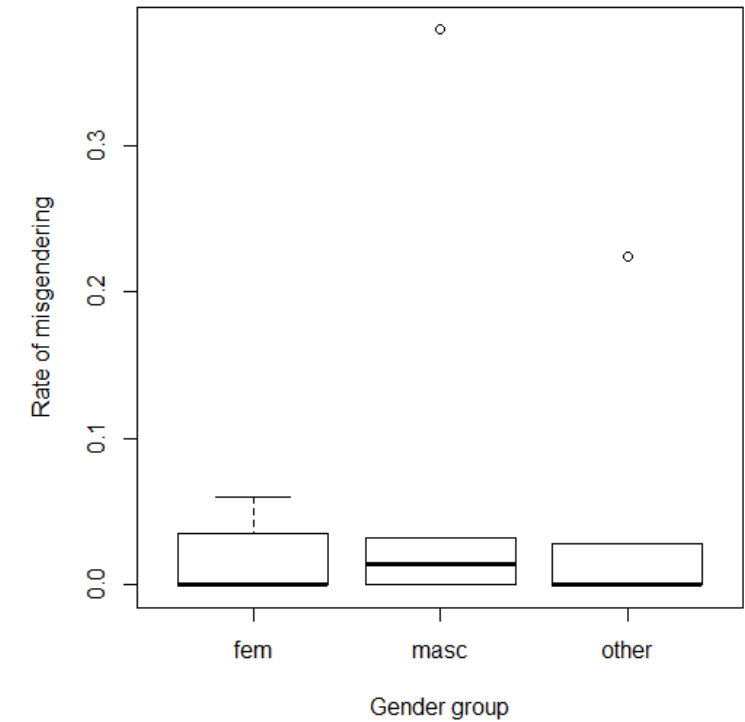
Misgendering by income group



Misgendering by age group

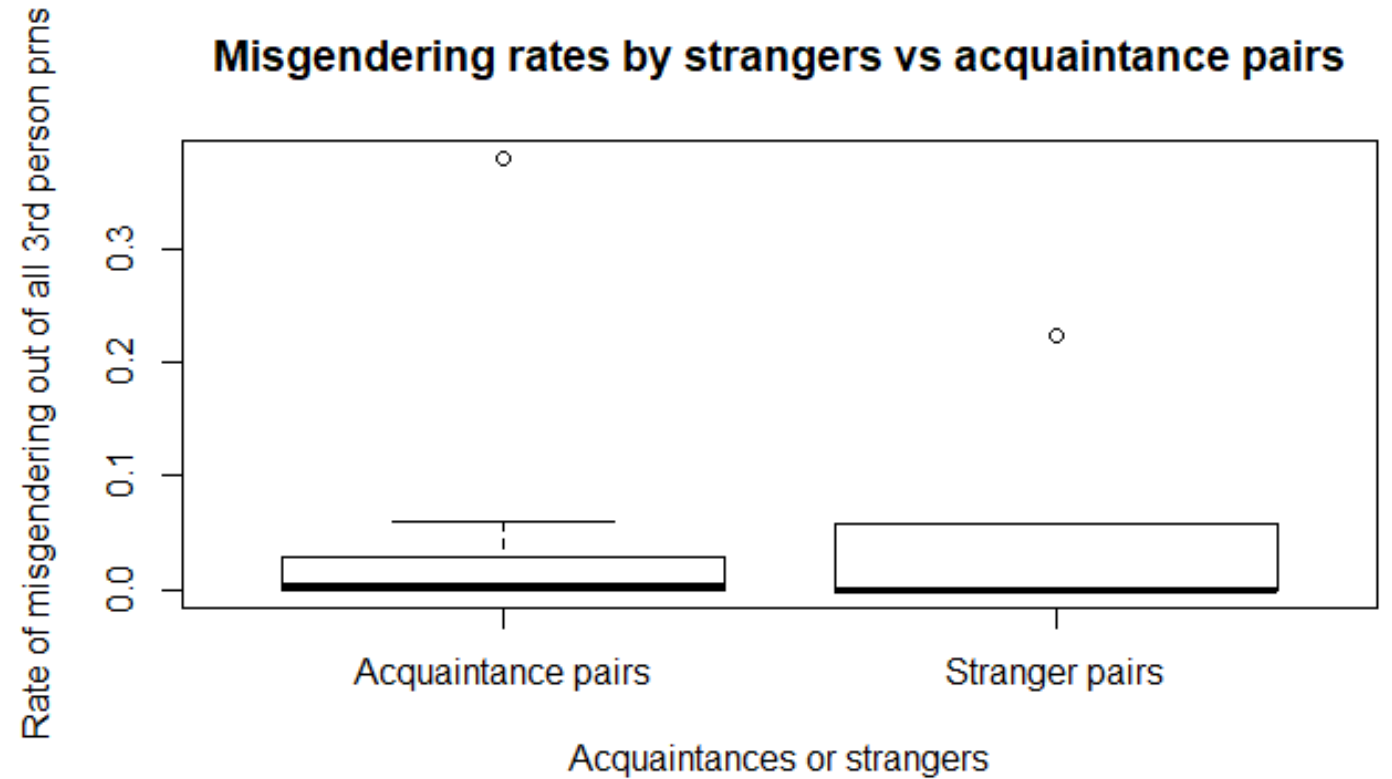


Misgendering by gender group



Strangers vs Acquaintance pairs

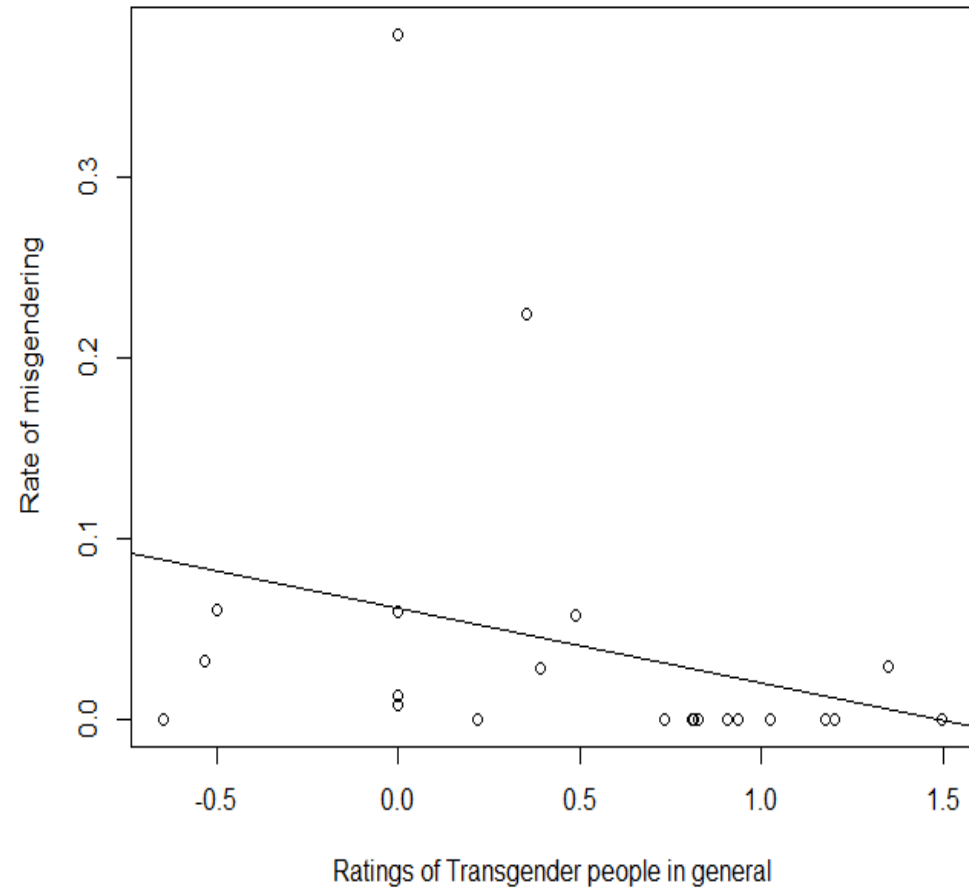
No significant difference in rates of misgendering based on whether pairs were strangers or acquaintances



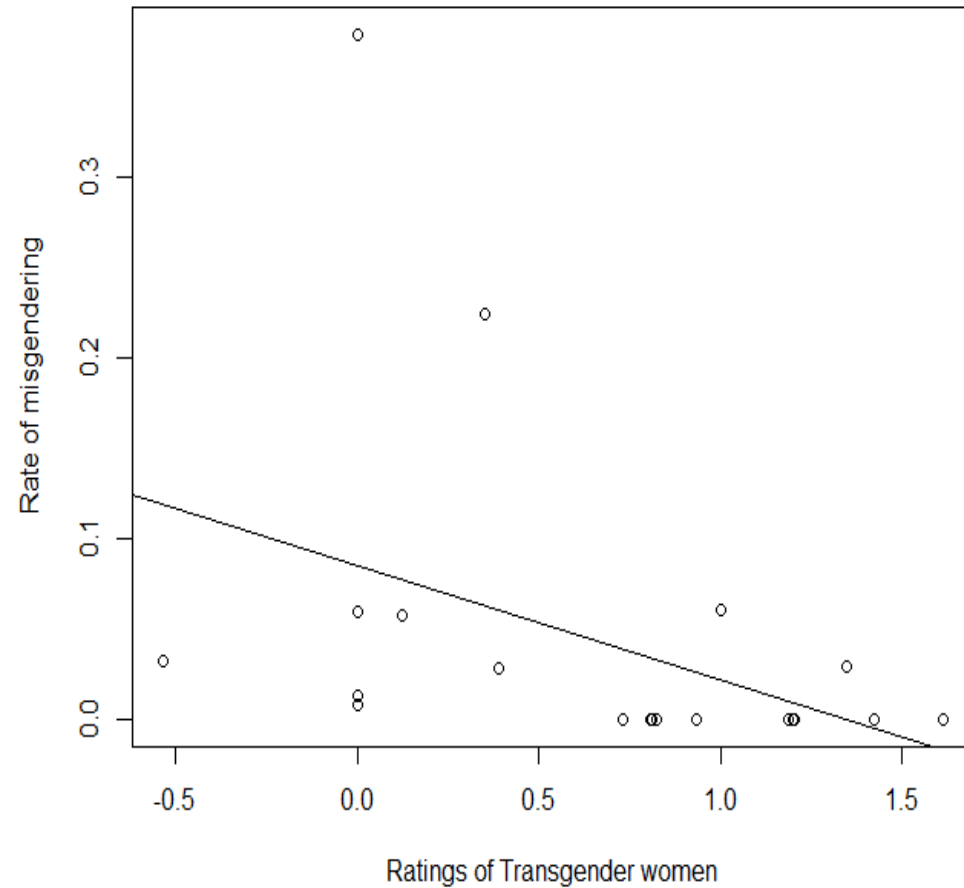
Explicit Attitudinal Measures

Feelings thermometer: no significant correlation

Effect of attitudes about transgender people on rate of misgendering



Effect of attitudes about transgender women on rate of misgendering

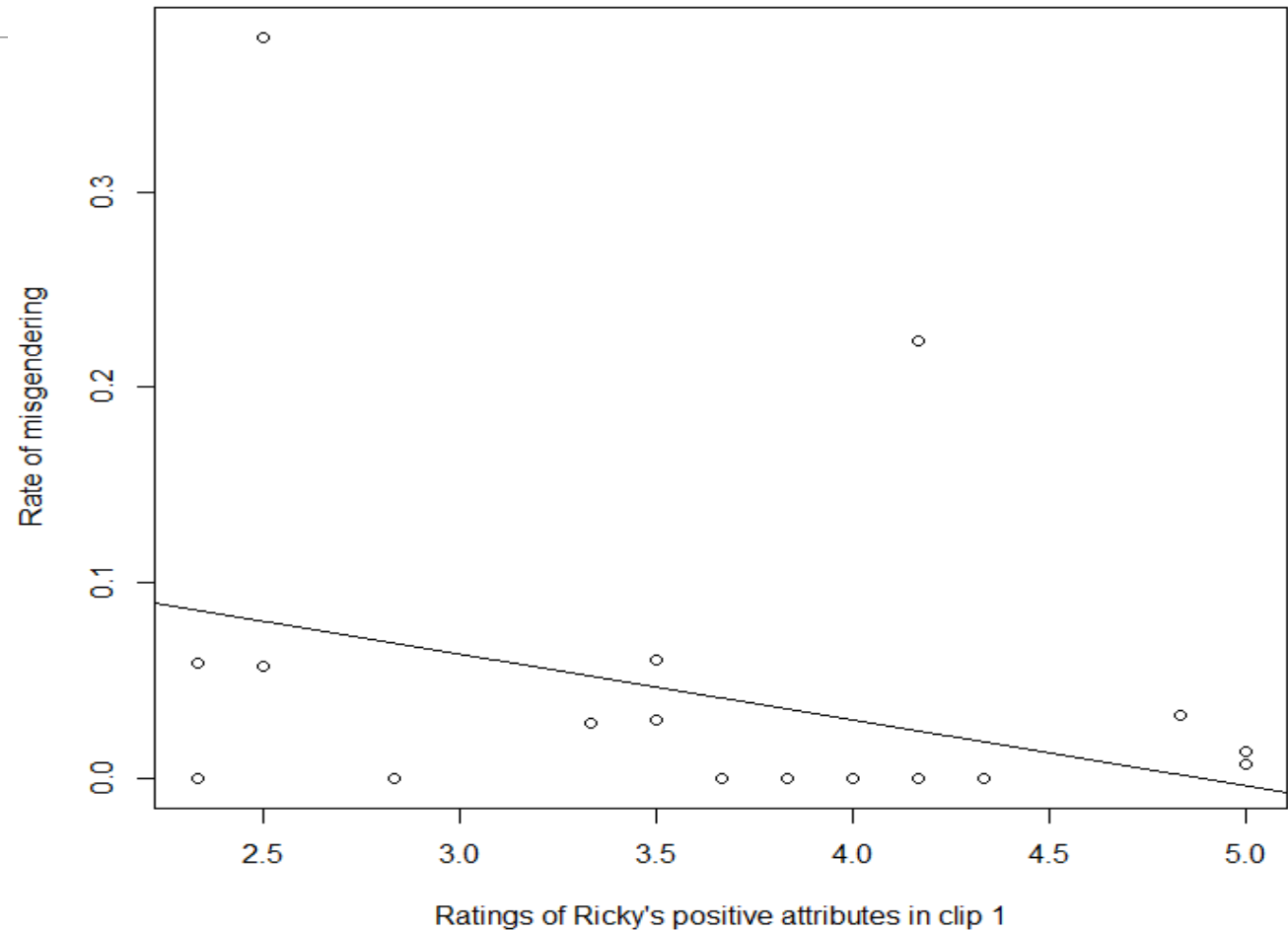


Implicit Attitudinal Measures (1 of 3)

Ratings of Ricky in clips (**1**, 2*, 4*)

Ricky and Francesca meet – Ricky is implied to be trans but doesn't say it outright

Influence of attitudes about transgender character on rate of misgendering

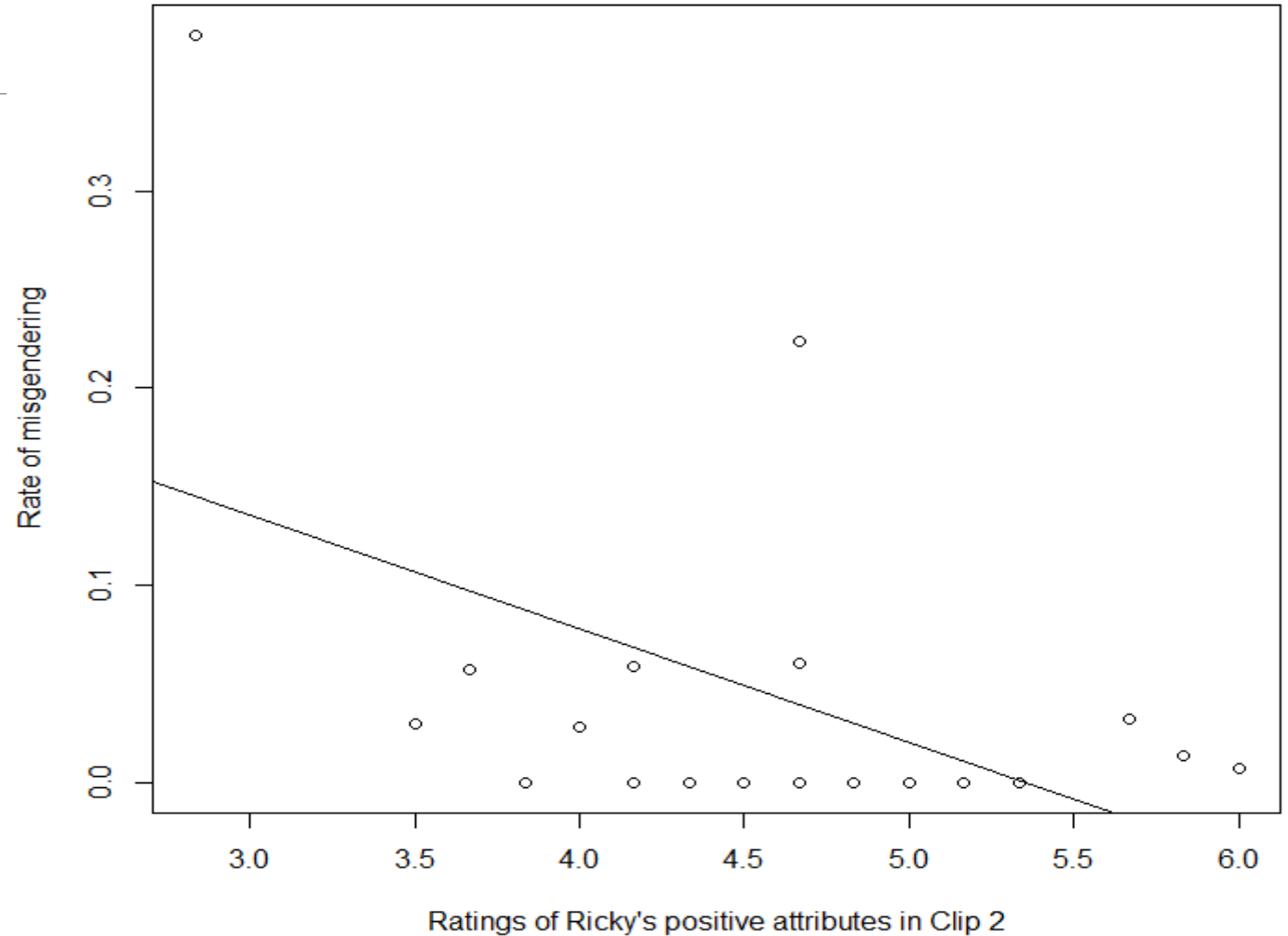


Implicit Attitudinal Measures (2 of 3)

Influence of attitudes about transgender character on rate of misgendering

Ratings of Ricky in clips (1, **2***, 4*)

Significant (lm, $p < 0.05$) in clip 2 (when Ricky comes out to Francesca as a trans woman)



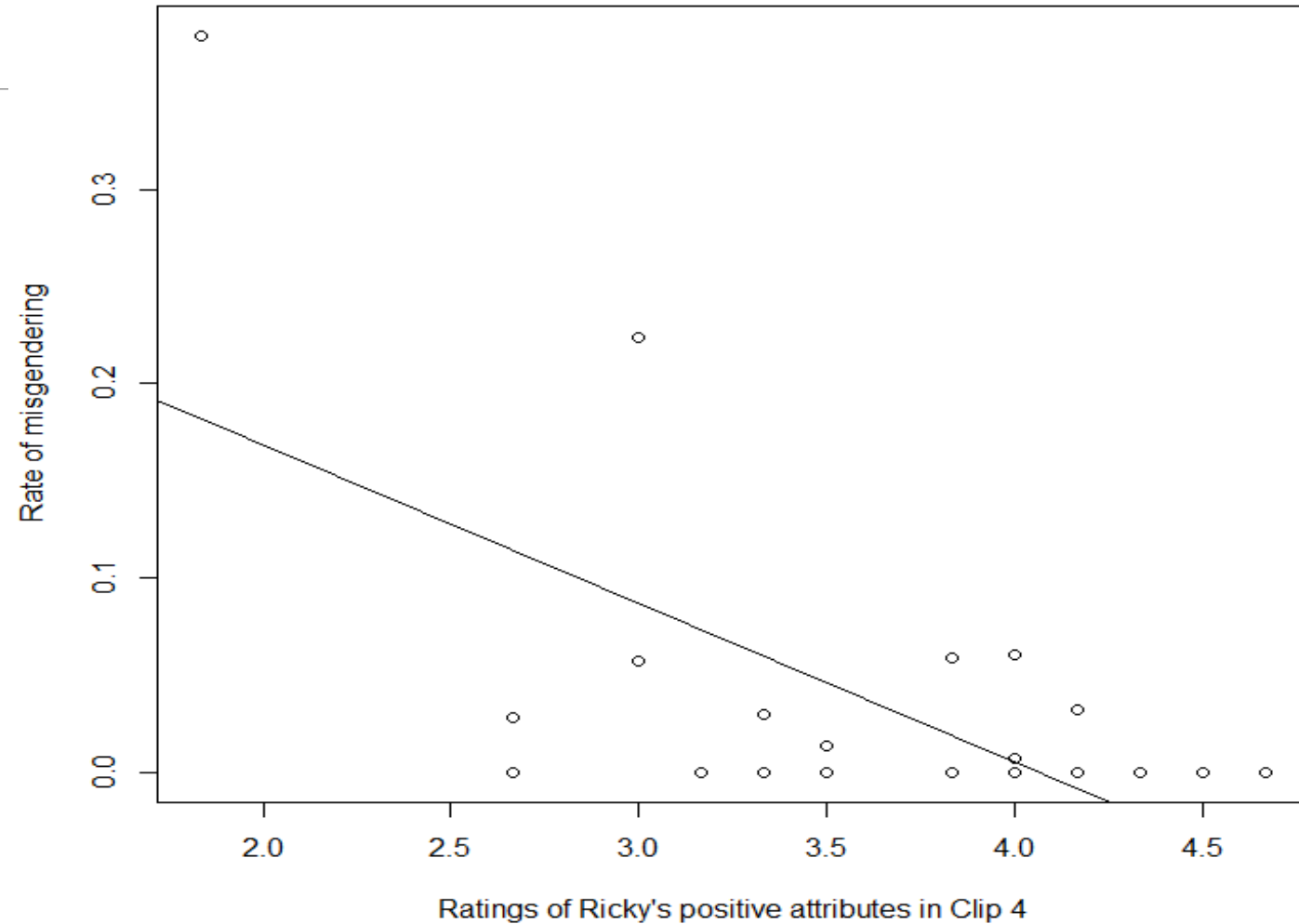
Implicit Attitudinal Measures (3 of 3)

Influence of attitudes about transgender character on rate of misgendering

Ratings of Ricky in clips

(1, 2*, **4***)

Significant (lm, $p < 0.05$) in clip 4
(when Ricky is evaluating her appearance in terms of her gender transition)



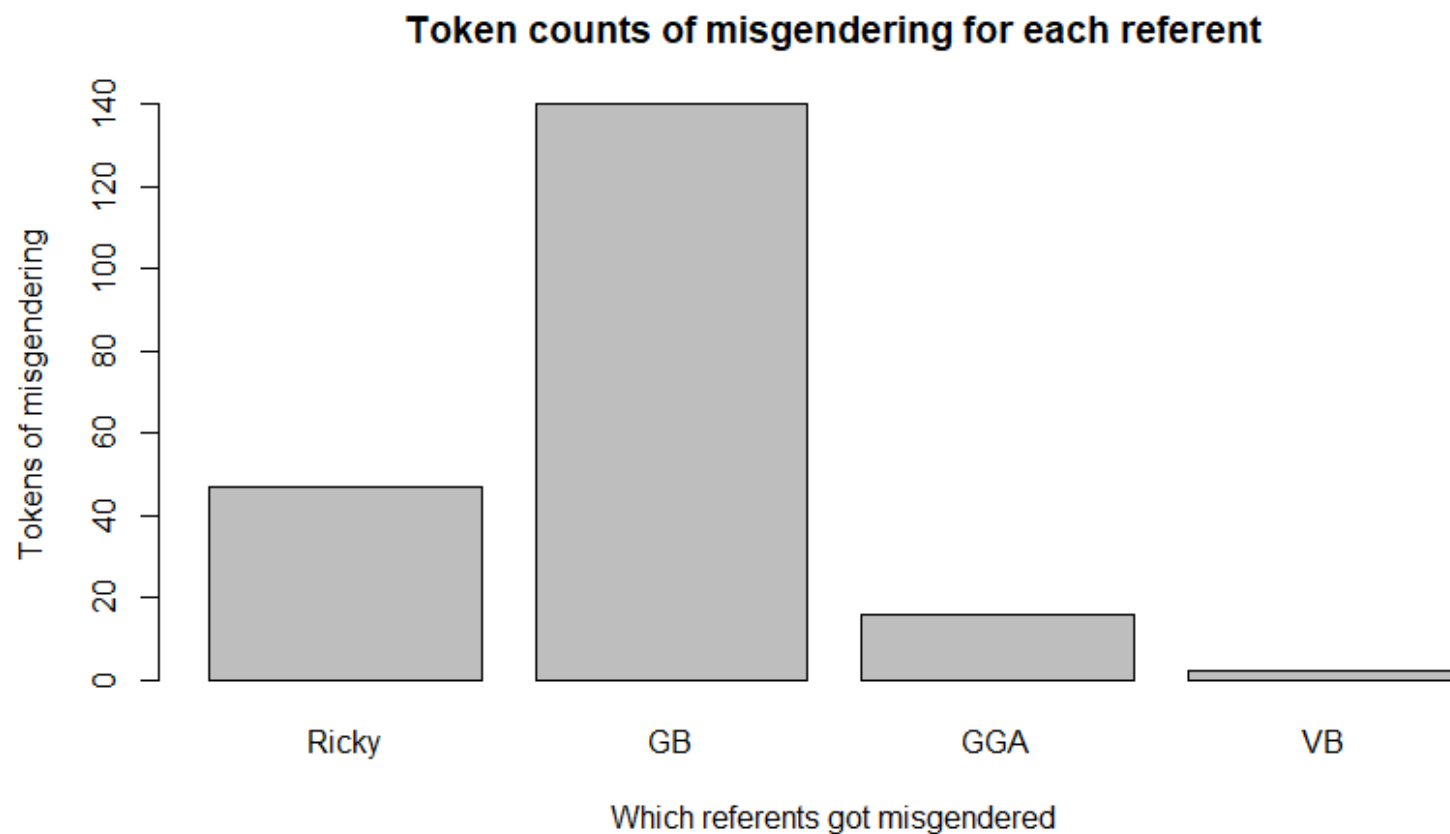
WHO GOT MISGENDERED? (Only trans people)

Ricky: fictional transgender woman from *Boy Meets Girl*, played by trans actress Michelle Hendley

GB: partner of GA, who had the highest rate of misgendering anyone

GGA: prefers *he* but partner GGB (stranger) used *they* throughout

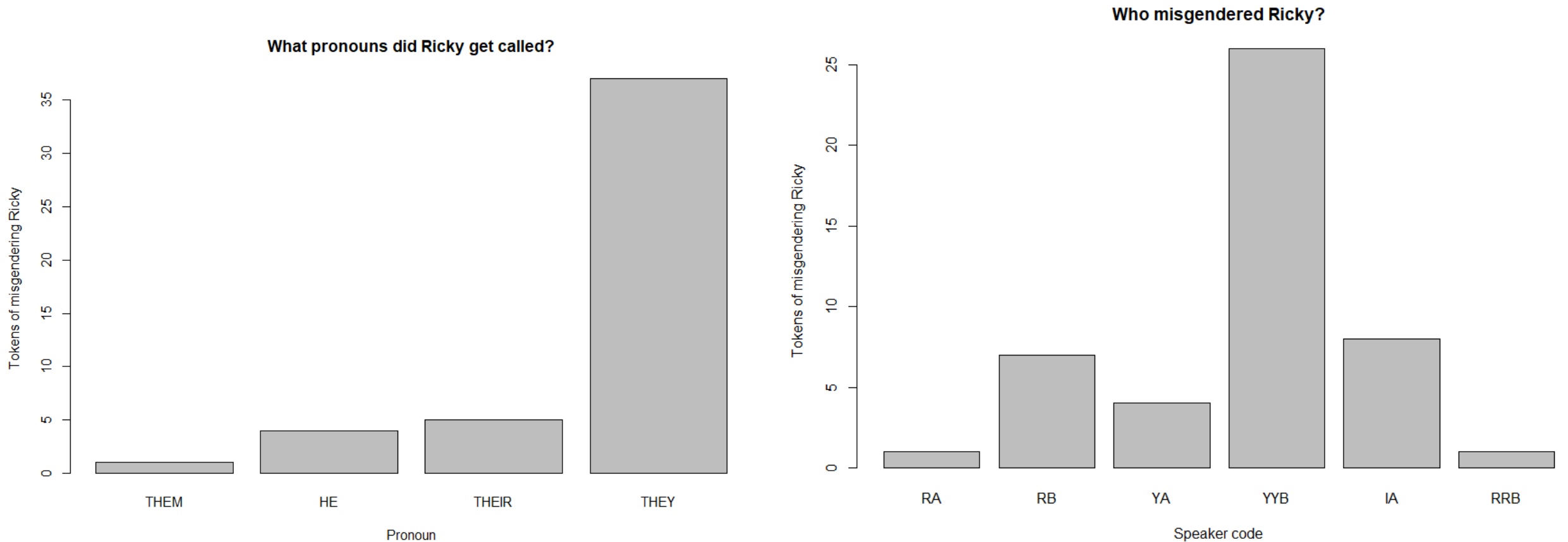
VB: paired with stranger VA who (mostly) avoided pronouns



ABOUT MISGENDERING RICKY (fictional)

Some trans people misgendered Ricky too (RB, YA, YYB, RRB)

It was much more common to call her **“they”** rather than **“he”**



QUALITATIVE RESULTS: Pronoun behaviors

Categorical matching

*BA: And **she** goes by "**she**", right? I'm not incorrect on that?*

K: I have no comment. I did not ask

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: GA and GB

- Youngest participants: both 19 years old
- Romantic partners, moved to the city together
- GB came out as trans after GA&GB had been dating for a while
- GA asks interviewer (me) for permission to use *she* and old name multiple times
- Doesn't say anything overtly prejudiced but questions fictional character's gender validity
- **Implicit attitude:** trans people aren't "really" their gender identity, it's an affectation

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: GA and GB

Categorical mismatching (and comments)

GA: [...] **she's** not able to, so I'm just suggesting paths that are more efficient. It's-

GB: And also **they them**. He always forgets they them, too.

GA: Right, **they**. Um. The pronouns are something I'm trying to get used to. [...]

GB: But then the pronouns one was like I dunno, maybe a little before that, but I didn't really mind it until

GA: Um. **She** didn't really correct me until about summer, I wanna say in the summer.

GB: Probably.

GA: Yeah. Really. Before, **she** didn't mind the **she** does, sometimes **she** doesn't, I

GB: You're still saying **she**!

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: Comments about transgender character

(how did you feel about Ricky in [clip 4]?)

GA: Um, as she was worrying about her breast size, I don't know transitioning from that kind of thing is a very... it's a very confusing spot to be as, like from my perspective it seems like a very confusing place, but. **She's very comfortable with who, um well again with the pronouns**, but she seems very comfortable with who she is. **She wants to be...um, a female, but. I don't know.** Being worried about how you look seems kind of it's a normal thing, and yet. I don't know, it feels like it's over doing it to some point. Like, it's when you're transitioning bodies like that, and like, since birth from the moment you're born you don't really get to choose that kind of thing, and, well, as you grow up in society we have methods for changing the way we look and changing our identification and gender. I don't think body type should really matter that much, in that case, but...Eh. **I just feel she's over worried about breast size**

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: GGA and GGB

- Strangers, met me downtown after 2016 election
- Talked about Women's March going on outside – GGB's discomfort with pink hats as unnecessarily equating gender/genitalia
- Didn't discuss pronouns but GGB did mention that he was trans
- GGA opted for singular *they* throughout solo interview – but GGB prefers *he* (no second choice)
- A trans-aware but **underinformed guess**

QUALITATIVE RESULTS: GGA and GGB

K: And then just last question. How do you think the first interview went? How were you feeling? How do you think [GGB] was feeling?

GGA: Um, I imagine, we were both thoroughly apprehensive about what it would involve. Um, I'd imagine particularly because of, like **some gender issues and some trans issues can be sensitive**. I imagine we were both kind of, a bit.. I don't know not wary. But yeah, apprehensive I think? But um, I enjoyed chatting, it was nice.

DISCUSSION: the Research Question

DO PEOPLE'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS TRANS PEOPLE AFFECT THE RATE AT WHICH THEY MISGENDER TRANS PEOPLE?

Quantitatively: yes, but only with implicit measures

Qualitatively: looks related to guessing and/or disbelieving someone else's gender

DISCUSSION: types of attitudes

- No misgendering looked intentional, malicious, willful, *obviously* prejudiced
- **Types of misgendering:**
 - Guessing wrong (if you don't know each other)
 - Force of habit: accidentally using *old* pronouns (if you've known each other a while)
 - Transgender film character: no one initially guessed wrong, no one knew her previously by other pronouns
- Only trans people got misgendered -- if this is a common misunderstanding, why would it be asymmetrical?
- **Implicit attitudes aren't "*trans people are bad,*" implicit attitudes are "*I know what gender you are, it's this one*"**

DISCUSSION: Future Work and Syntax

Syntax needs to solve:

- Formal gender features encoded in syntax? If so, where?
- Variable grammaticality of singular *they*?

Other future work:

- More diverse, bigger sample
- Control for gender of the referent: are transfeminine people misgendered more than transmasculine? Or nonbinary?

CONCLUSION

SUPPORT for original hypothesis

METHOD for eliciting reference such as pronouns or names, to be used in future studies or replications

MORE QUESTIONS about syntax and social patterns

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