

The Gender Vilification Gap

Chuck Howard (chuck.howard@sauder.ubc.ca), Karl Aquino (UBC), Tyler Okimoto (UQ), Samir Nurmohamed (Penn), Ramona Bobocel (UW)

Research Question

Is moral typecasting biased by gender stereotypes?

Theoretical Framework

The dyadic theory of morality suggests that people evaluate instances of perceived harm by employing a cognitive template in which social actors are assigned to the mutually exclusive roles of intentional agent and suffering patient (Gray, Waytz, & Young, 2012; Gray, Young, & Waytz, 2012).

Research also shows that people have more positive implicit attitudes toward women than men (the “women are wonderful” effect; Eagly & Mladinic, 1994), and perceive men to be “bad but bold” (Glick et al., 2004).

We propose that gender stereotypes such as these make assigning men (vs. women) to the role of agent – the bad actor in a moral dyad where harm is involved – an easier, more automatic cognitive operation.

Accordingly, we predict that third party observers (e.g., managers or colleagues) will render harsher moral judgments and impose more severe punishment upon men who exhibit antisocial behavior (e.g., violating an informal workplace norm, contravening an institutional policy, breaking the law) compared to women who engage in exactly the same behavior.

Study 1

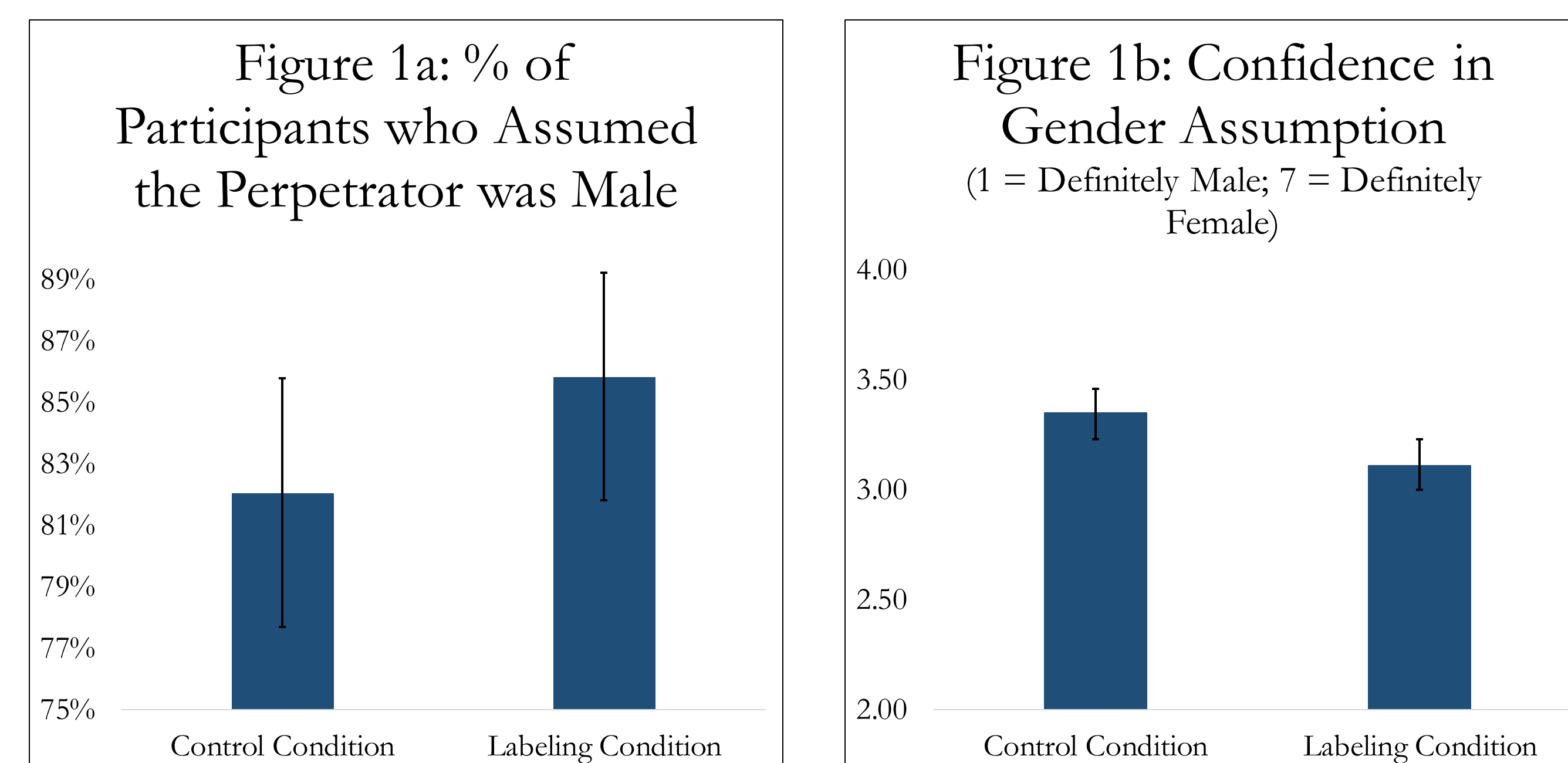
Participants (n = 734) were told that the study investigated reactions to conflict “between two workers” (control condition) or “between a perpetrator and a victim” (labeling condition).

Next, they evaluated one of three cases describing workplace bullying behavior. The cases did not reveal the gender of the perpetrator or victim.

Study 1 (continued)

H1a: In general, significantly more people will assume the perpetrator is male.

H1b: Participants in the labeling condition will express greater confidence in their gender assumption, indicating higher ease of decision-making (Alter and Oppenheimer, 2009), and suggesting that gender assumptions are due at least partly to congruence between gender stereotypes and the dyadic template. (Note: in figure 1b a lower mean represents higher confidence).

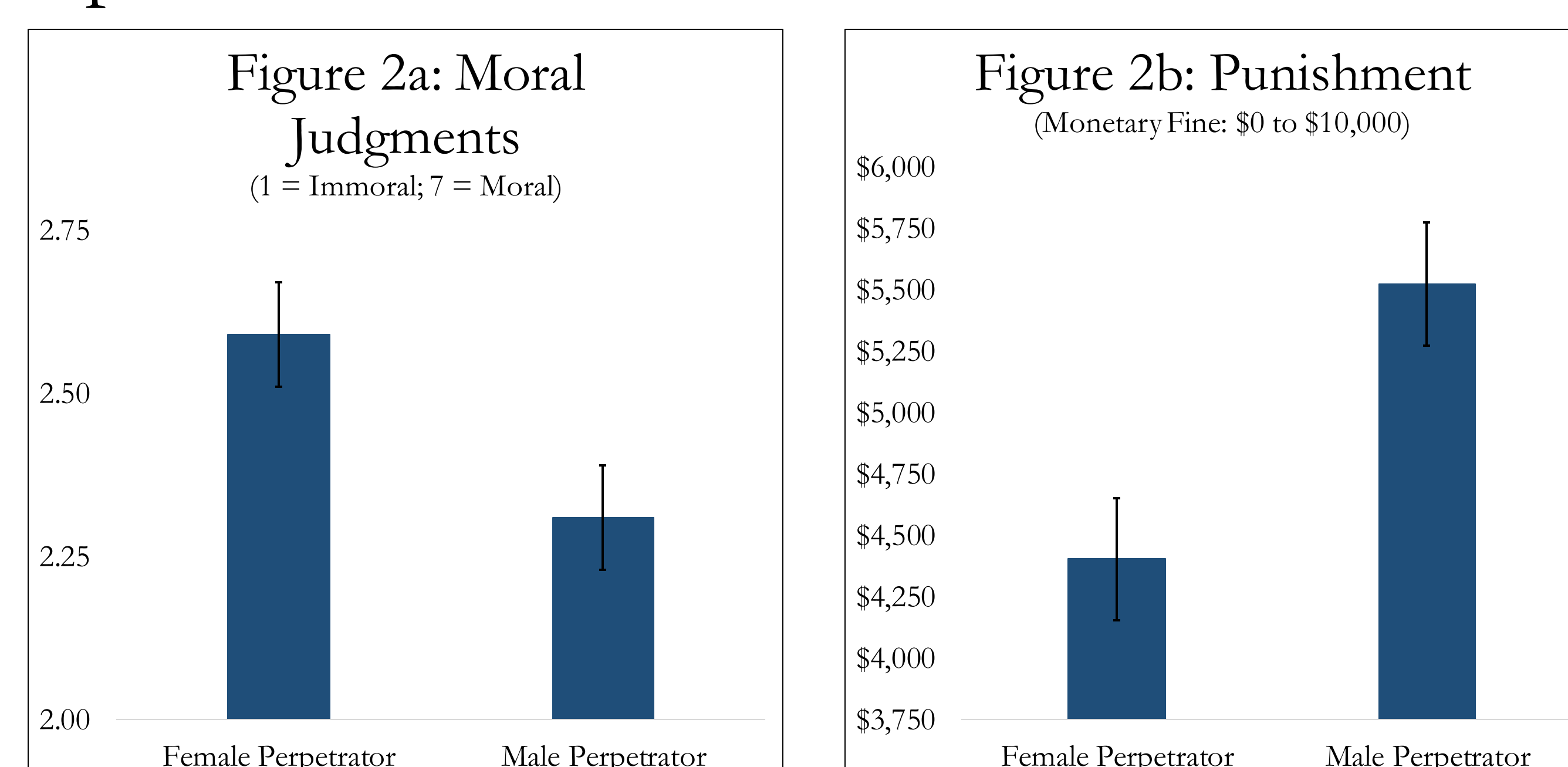


Study 2

Participants (n = 394) evaluated a case in which either a male or female HR Manager refused a job candidate of the opposite sex a second interview because the manager held negative stereotypes about the candidate’s gender.

H2a: People will render harsher moral judgments for a male (vs. female) perpetrator.

H2b: People will more severely punish a male perpetrator.

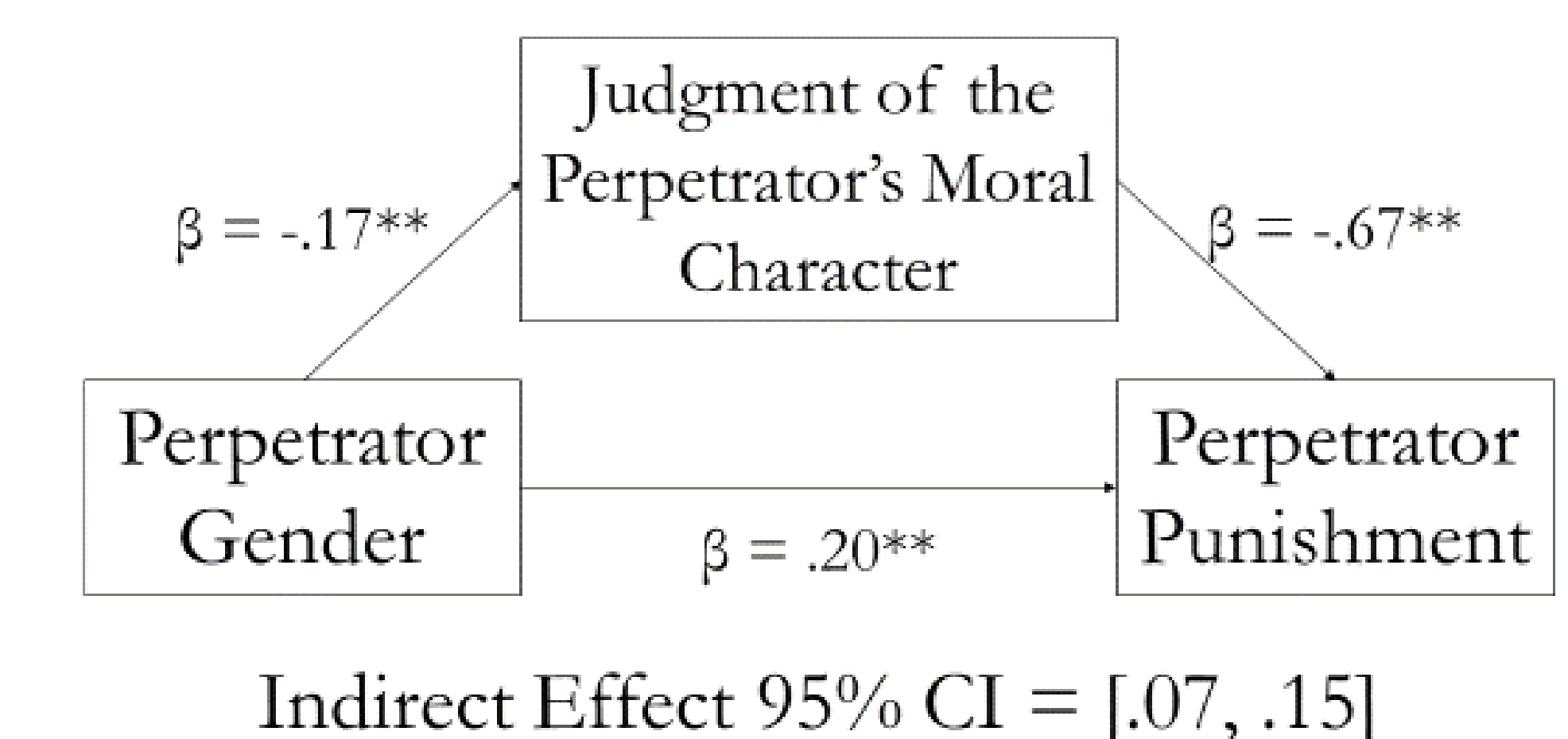
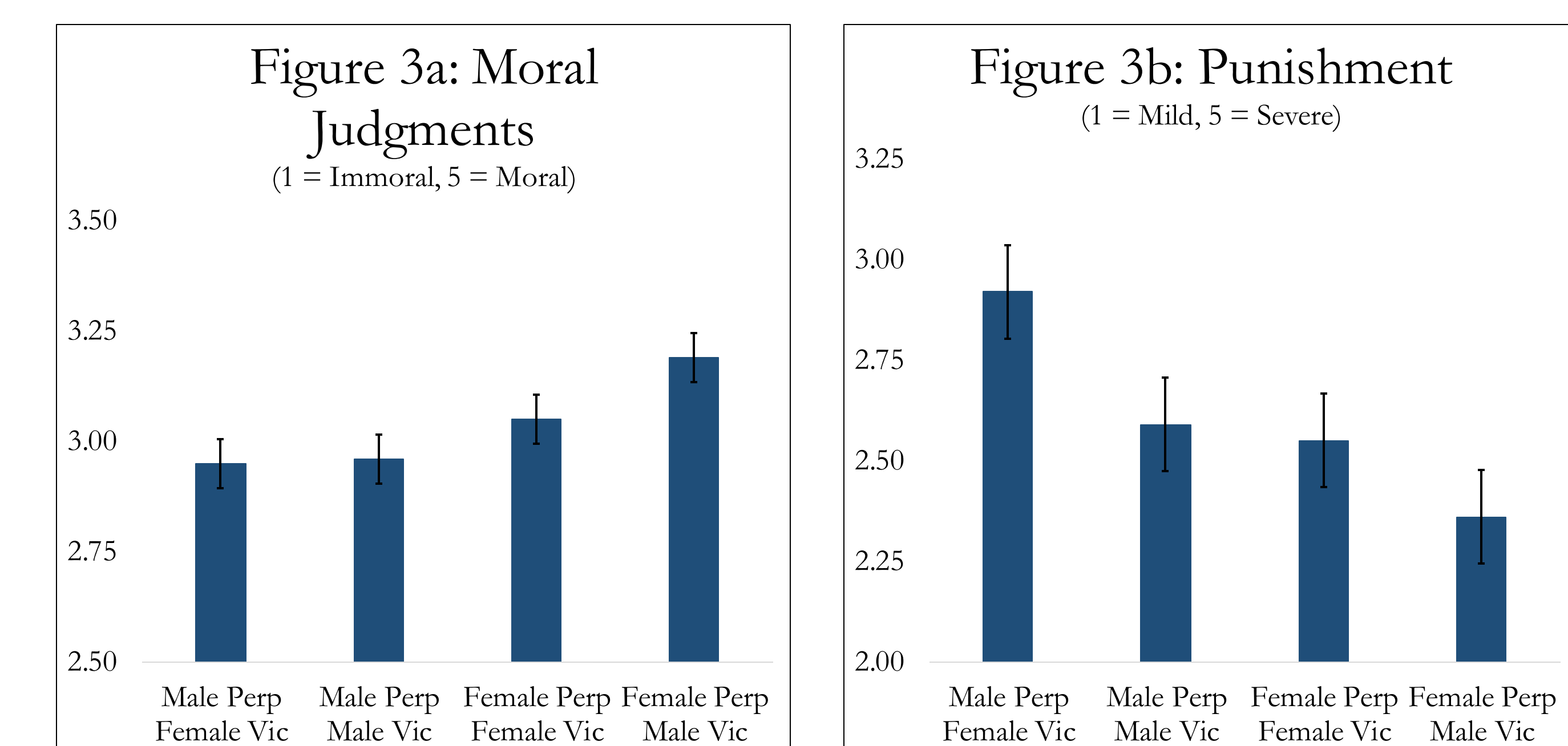


Study 3

Participants (n = 1,913) were presented with a case in which one colleague makes a potentially offensive joke to another, but in which there was no way for them to objectively determine the harm caused to the victim.

Design: 2(perpetrator gender) x 2(victim gender)

H3: Moral character judgments will mediate the relationship between perpetrator gender and punishment.



Discussion

Results support the existence of a gender “vilification gap.”

More generally, the finding that moral typecasting is subject to bias has potentially far reaching implications: members of any group who might be more easily typecast as aggressive or agentic may also be susceptible to biased judgment and harsher punishment.

This bias could also disservice victims who are targeted by people who *do not* easily fit the perpetrator role, given that they are less likely to see their antagonist brought to justice.