

Examining the Effects of Target Race and Sex on Moral Violations in the Workplace

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Introduction

- Moral foundations theory organizes people's intuitions about morality into six non-overlapping categories: care, authority, fairness, liberty, loyalty, and sanctity (Haidt & Joseph, 2004).
- Recent research suggests that the studying of perceived moral violations will be enhanced by the systematic manipulation of target sex and race (Hester & Gray, 2020).
- A study on the perception of leaving children alone found that when a child is left alone by a father, it is seen as safer than when a mother performed the same action (Thomas et. al., 2016).
- Research on the effects of race in the US penal system found that Black defendants are more likely to receive the death penalty when the victim is White than if they were Black (Eberhardt et al., 2006)

Research Question

- How does identity information such as the sex and race of transgressors and those they transgress shape third party judgments of morally questionable behaviors?
- We hypothesized that Black male transgressors would be judged harshest, compared to all other conditions, but especially when the transgressed person is a White woman.

Study 1 Method

- Participants included N=626 US adults (386 females) (115 Black, 63 other) with an average age of 40.22 who were recruited through Cloud Research.
- Participants were asked to read vignettes about morally questionable situations in a workplace environment and rate how wrong the behaviors were on a five-point Likert scale.
- Our vignettes were adapted from previous research, which devised a set of morally wrong vignettes where each violated one of the six moral foundations (Clifford et al., 2015).
- Sex and race information about the targets was evoked through the use of first names, reliably associated with each social category (Gaddis, 2017). Vignettes in the control condition did not use names in order to avoid evoking any social categories. See Table 1.
- The manipulation of sex and race resulted in 16 possible combinations of identity information between the two characters (transgressor and transgressed), which produced a total of 243 vignettes.
- Participants responded only to 44 quasi-random vignettes which included neutral and coded vignettes for each moral foundation.

Table 1

Identity Information	Example Vignette
Neutral Transgressor Neutral Transgressed Moral Foundation: Fairness	You hear that a coworker was promoted shortly after their cousin was appointed to a managerial position in the company.
Black Male Transgressor White Female Transgressed Moral Foundation: Care	You see your colleague Latrell making fun of your colleague Stephanie who was fired earlier that day.
Neutral Transgressor Black Female Transgressed Moral Foundation: Liberty	You recently found out that your coworker Tanisha is not allowed time off for religious holidays.

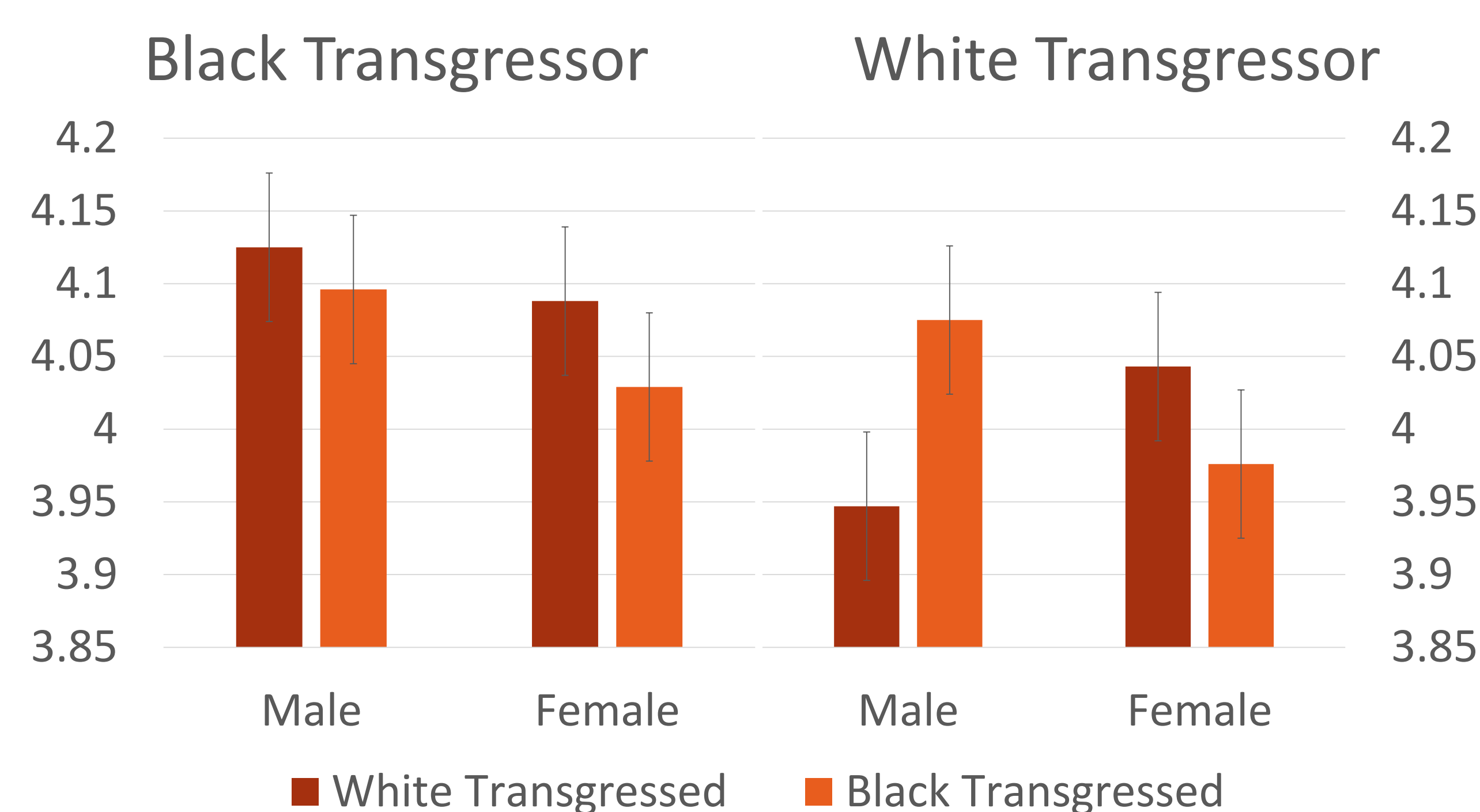
Study 1 Results

- Only effects on the care and authority foundations will be reported. All other foundations failed to produce significant effects due to only providing one character per vignette with identity information whereas care and authority vignettes included two characters with identity information.

Violations of Care

Multivariate tests revealed a number of significant main effects and interactions, the most inclusive of which was the interaction between transgressor race, transgressor sex, and transgressed race.

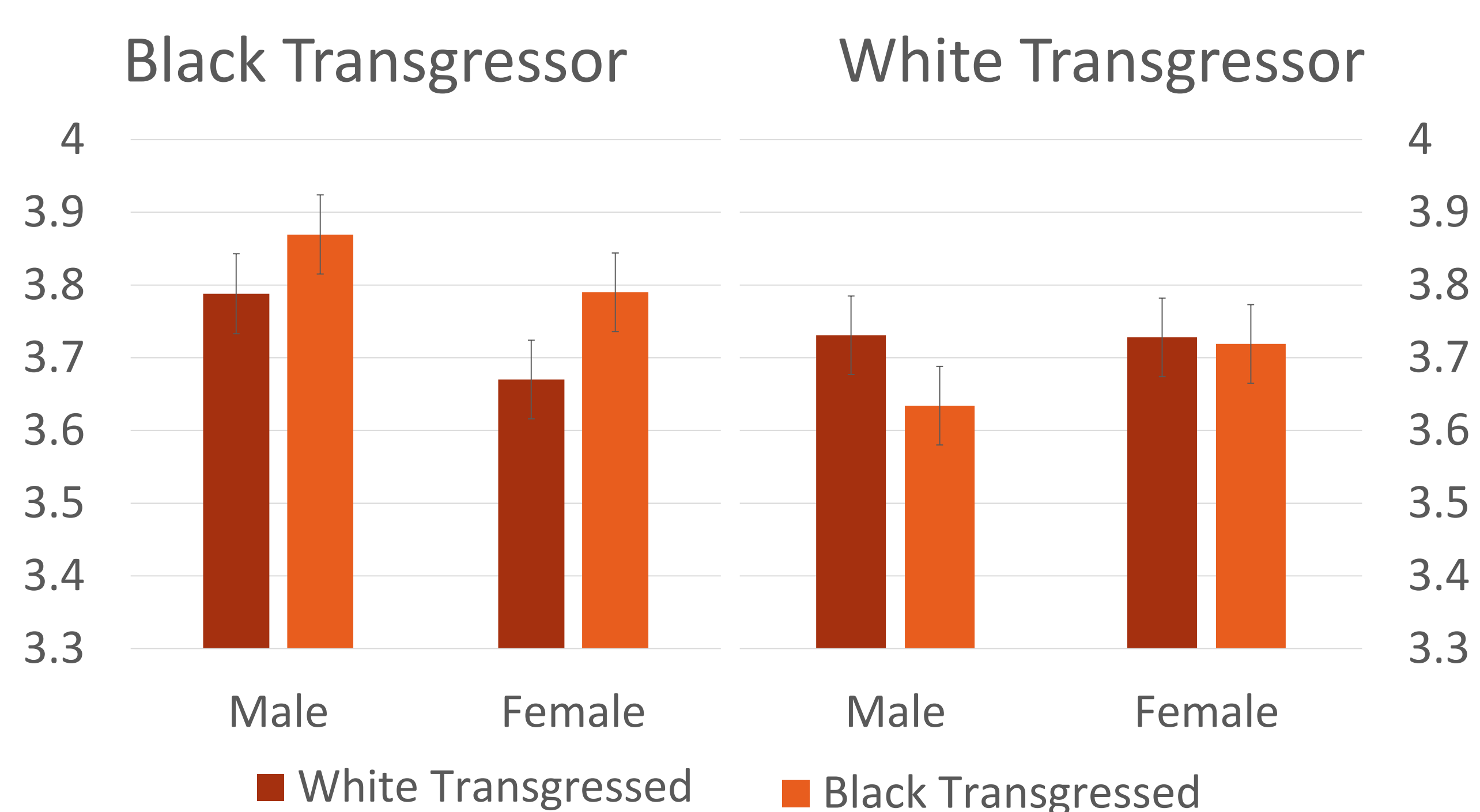
$$F_{(2, 3068)} = 3.388, p = .012, \eta^2 = .003.$$



Violations of Authority

Multivariate tests revealed a number of significant main effects and interactions, the most inclusive of which was the interaction between transgressor race, transgressor sex, and transgressed race.

$$F_{(2, 3068)} = 3.388, p = .012, \eta^2 = .003.$$



Study 1 Discussion

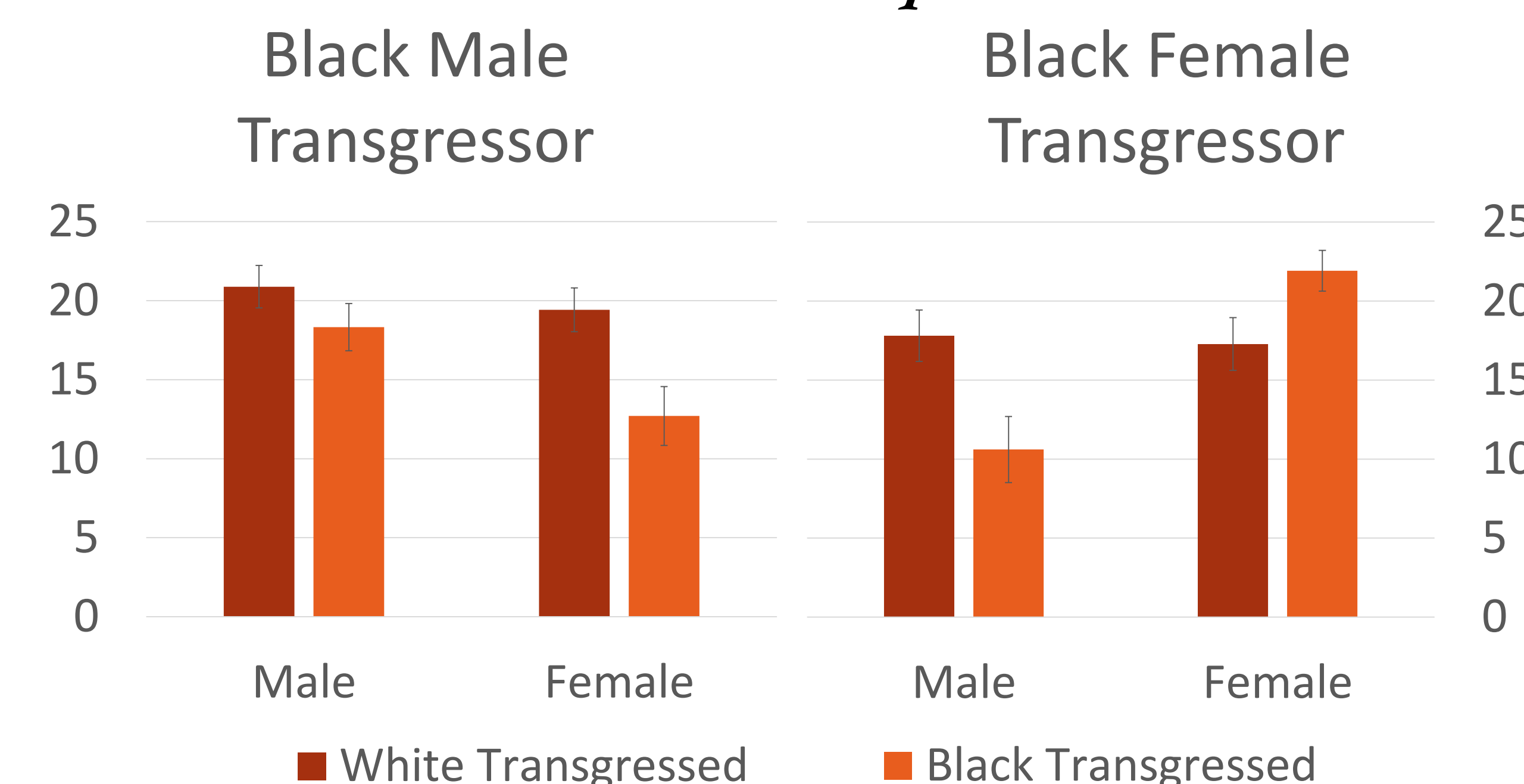
- Participants judged Black male transgressors harshest, especially in the cases where the transgressed person was a White woman.
- Transgressions from Black women were rated as less immoral than transgressions from Black males.
- Participants tended to judge White female transgressors harsher than White male transgressors.
- Limitations to study 1 included having too many vignettes to be judged by every participant.
- The quasi-random selection of vignettes helped with this issue, but this meant that some vignettes were completed under 100 times despite our larger sample size.
- The use of a 5-point scale was changed to a 60-point scale in study 2 to allow for a wider range of responses.

Study 2 Method

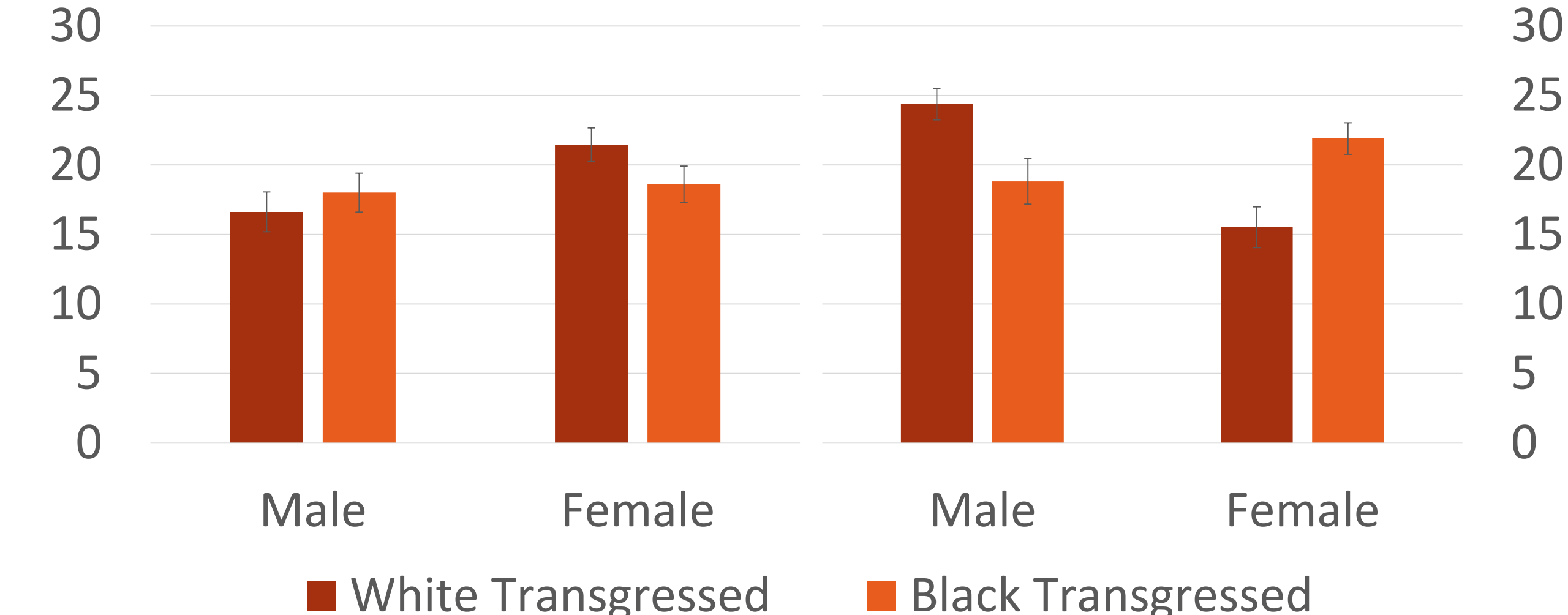
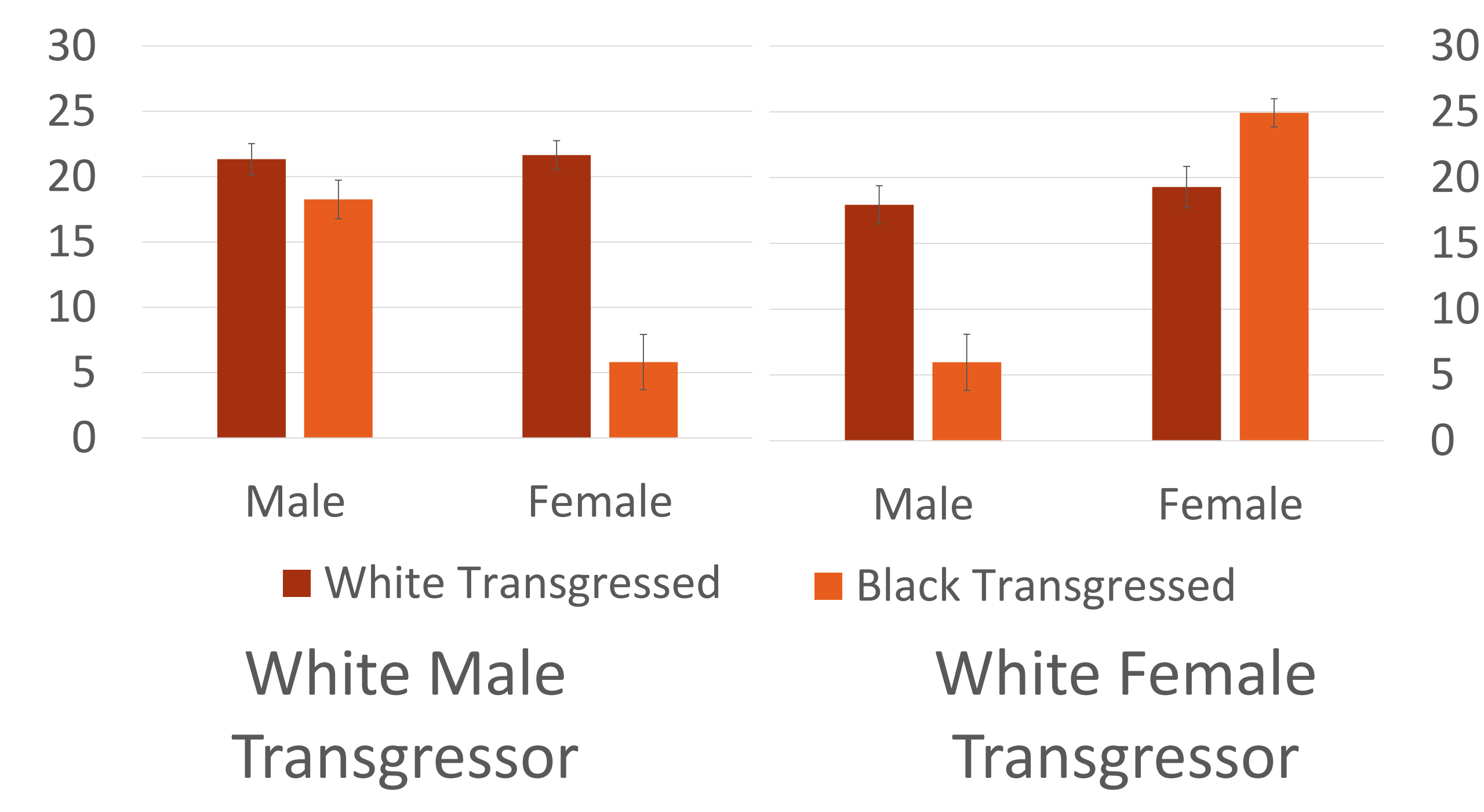
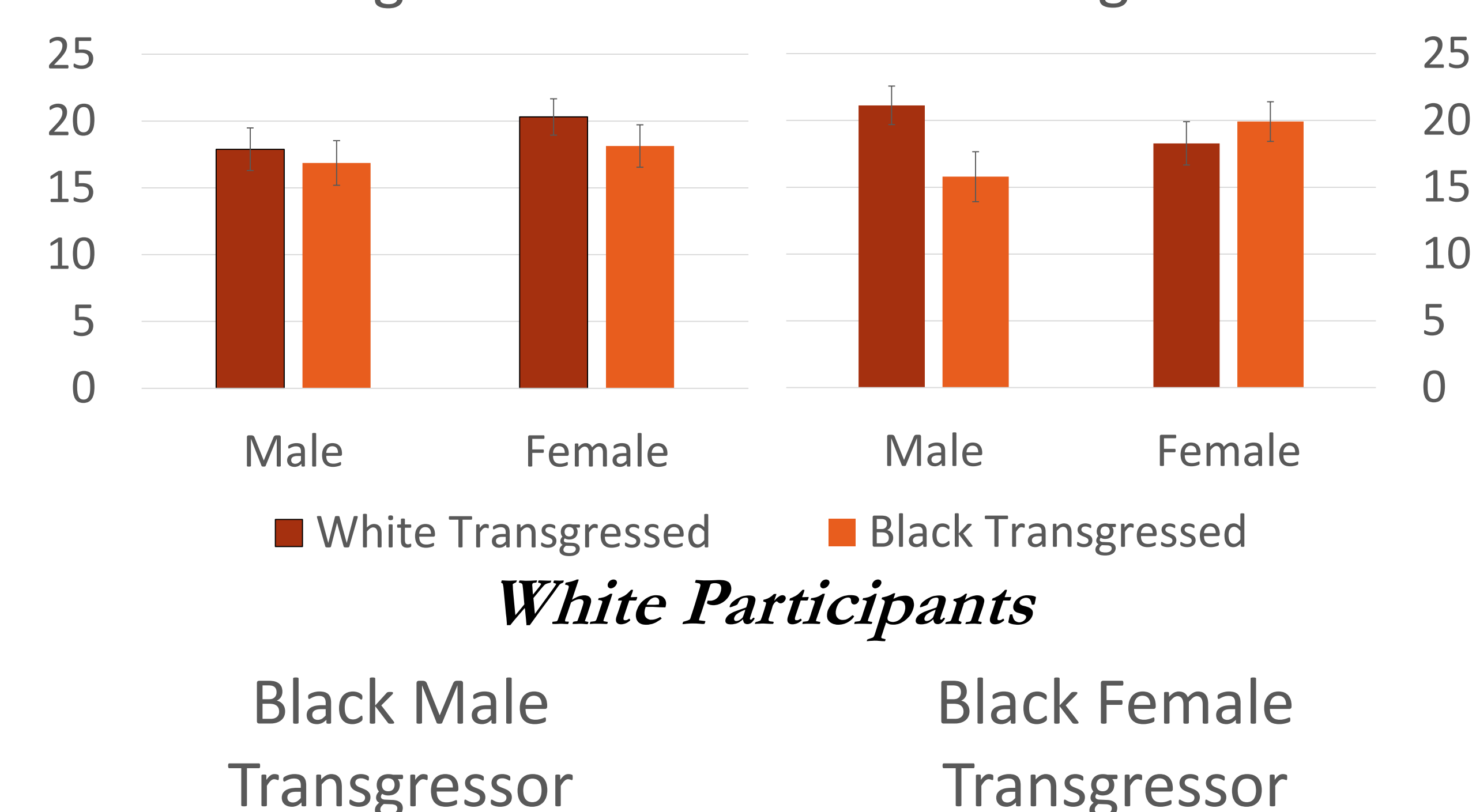
- Participants included N=164 US adults (98 females) who were recruited through Cloud Research.
- Participants were asked to read vignettes about morally wrong situations from the care foundation and rate how wrong the behaviors were on a 60-point scale ranging from "Not at all wrong" (-30) to "Extremely wrong" (+30).
- Targets with coded names that displayed their race and sex were presented to participants (Gaddis, 2017).
- All vignettes were adapted to fit into a workplace environment.
- Participants responded to 24 vignettes consisting of 8 neutral and 16 coded questions, which included manipulated race and sex for the transgressor and the transgressed.

Study 2 Results

Black Participants



White Participants



Study 2 Results Cont.

Black Participants

Tests of within-subjects effects revealed a significant four-way interaction between transgressor race, transgressor sex, transgressed race, and transgressed sex.

$$F_{(1, 70)} = 3.625, p = .061, \eta^2 = .049.$$

White Participants

Tests of within-subjects effects also revealed a significant four-way interaction between transgressor race, transgressor sex, transgressed race, and transgressed sex.

$$F_{(1, 92)} = 19.966, p = .000, \eta^2 = .178$$

Study 2 Discussion

Black Participants

- Participants judged immoral actions harsher when male transgressors of either race transgressed a White person compared to a Black person.
- White female transgressions against White males were judged as most immoral compared to other race and sex combinations.
- In contrast, Black female transgressions against another Black female were judged as most immoral compared to other race and sex combinations.

White Participants

- Participants judged immoral actions harsher when a White transgressor of either sex transgresses a White person of the opposite sex.
- Black males were judged harsher when transgressing a White person compared to a Black person.
- Similar to Black participants, White participants judged Black female transgressions against another Black female as most immoral compared to other race and sex combinations.

All Participants

- Same sex transgressions of Black transgressors were judged as more immoral than transgressions made towards the opposite sex.
- In contrast, opposite sex transgressions of White transgressors were judged as more immoral than transgressions made towards the same sex.

General Discussion

- Identity information influences judgments of morality.
- Target identity information and participants' race interact to jointly shape evaluations of morally questionable behaviors in the workplace.
- The current data indicate that it is important to systematically manipulate identity information in studies utilizing vignette methodology, because judgments (of morality at least) are strongly influenced by the target's social group of belonging.
- The current studies indicate that Black and White perceivers judge morality differently from one another.
- Furthermore, Black and White males and females are judged differently for the same moral transgressions.
- Taken together, these two findings pose serious questions about the additive effect of multiple moral transgressions on impression formation and, consequently, for interpersonal interactions in a diverse workforce.