

ARG! Who Stole Me Music? A Look Into Ratings of Online Theft Behaviors

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Introduction

Piracy is one of the most prevalent issues facing our technology driven world. This growth in illegal action leads to the question: Do people view online theft as actual theft?

According to Hinduja and Higgins (2011) piracy is defined as "the illegal act of duplicating software, digital documents, digital audio, and other digital goods for reasons other than making a backup copy without the explicit permission from the copyright holder."

In 2005, 870 million unauthorized music files were available online. However, it is more than just artists and music labels suffering revenue loss. Investments and sales experience their own loss due to digital piracy (Kennedy, 2005; 2009).

The researchers question what actions people view as acceptable, as well as if gender plays a role in who engages in piracy.

Hypotheses

1: In person theft is perceived as theft in all cases, resulting in online theft occurring more often.

2: Men will record fewer behaviors as actual theft, and indicate a higher chance for illegal behavior.

Interaction: Gender will influence the ratings of what is theft in both scenarios, producing higher likelihood scores for males in all cases.

Method

Participants

The sample of 208 participants included 65 males and 143 females; 117 recruited via email and 91 via Facebook.

Materials

The researchers implemented the study through Qualtrics; providing adequate participant verification and exit points. The questionnaire included either an in person or online theft scenario; followed by Ratings of Theft and Likelihood to Commit an Act of Theft. This measurement occurred through a Likert Scale, and a Like Me, Not Like Me Scale. The questionnaire was used to determine if participants view online and in person theft differently.

Procedure

This study was a 2X2 between subjects design. The quasi-independent variable of gender has two levels, male and female. The true independent variable, theft scenario, has two levels; in person or an act committed online.

A 5-Point Like Me, Not Like Me scale measured participants likelihood to engage in theft, while a 5-Point Likert Scale measured participants views on if an action is considered theft. Responses to 32 statements allowed the researchers to perform proper evaluation of the data.

Students completed the survey on Qualtrics and were then informed about the subject of the study as well as the manipulation which took place. Participants were debriefed, provided proof of participation, and allowed the option to withdraw their responses.

Manipulations

Online Theft Scenario

Chris is a 19-year old college student at a Midwestern university. A couple months ago, Chris heard a song on the radio that he really liked, and found out it was by a group he had never heard of. While searching online to learn more about the band, Chris came across a file containing their CD. Upon this discovery, Chris downloaded the songs to his computer without payment. However, Chris's illegal action of downloading an item that had a copyright, without permission, was noticed by the RIAA. He is now facing the judicial and criminal consequences for his actions.

In Person Theft Scenario

Chris is a 19-year old college student at a Midwestern university. A couple months ago, Chris heard a song on the radio that he really liked, and found out it was by a group he had never heard of. When at a local store, Chris happened to come across a CD of this band, unfortunately he did not have the money to purchase the CD. Instead Chris slipped the CD under his jacket and exited the store without paying. However, the store Chris took the CD from saw his action on their security system. He is now facing the judicial and criminal consequences for his action.

Sample Measurement Statements

1. Downloading of a copyrighted ebooks when there is no permission from the publisher
2. Sharing software files on a server
3. Taking a CD from a store without payment
4. Streaming a movie from unauthorized sites

Results

Statistically significant findings show those who viewed in person theft scenario, rated online behaviors as theft more than participants in the online theft scenario.

Participants rate in person theft as illegal action in all cases, pointing to a higher rate of online theft.

Results did not support an interaction that gender will influence ratings of what theft is in both scenarios.

Discussion

Conclusion

The results correspond with Robertson et al. (2012) that men and women have similar music downloading behaviors; suggesting the gender gap is closing with time.

In person manipulation contributed to heightened feelings of punishment, causing the higher ratings for online theft.

The researchers believe that present day media and recording industry efforts may finally be showing an impact, resulting in fewer illegal online actions.

Limitations

Terms used in the manipulation block (i.e. file sharing and payment deferral) posed confusion to some participants who lacked an understanding the concepts.

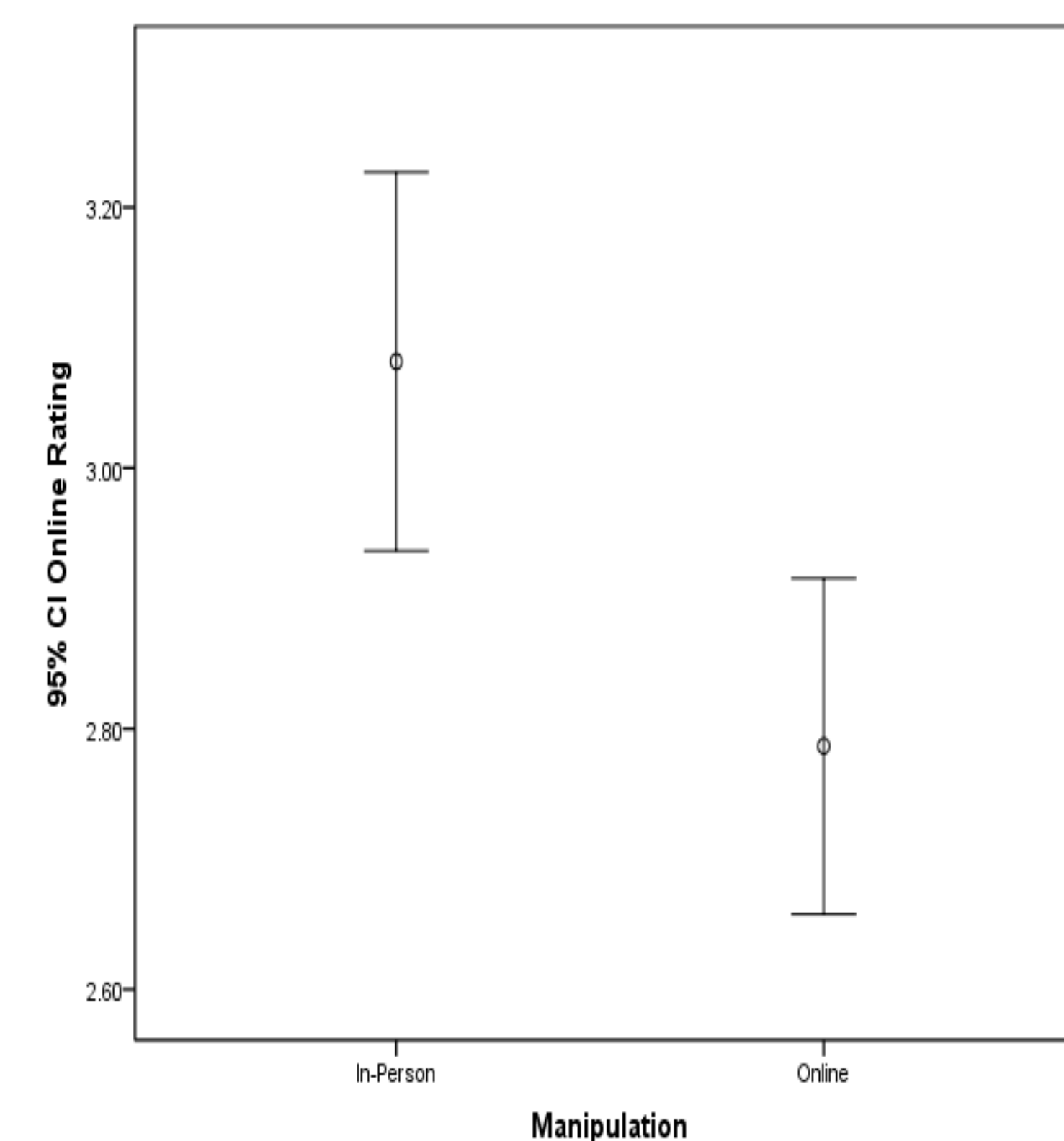
Low power in the analysis limits establishing certain conclusions.

Future Research

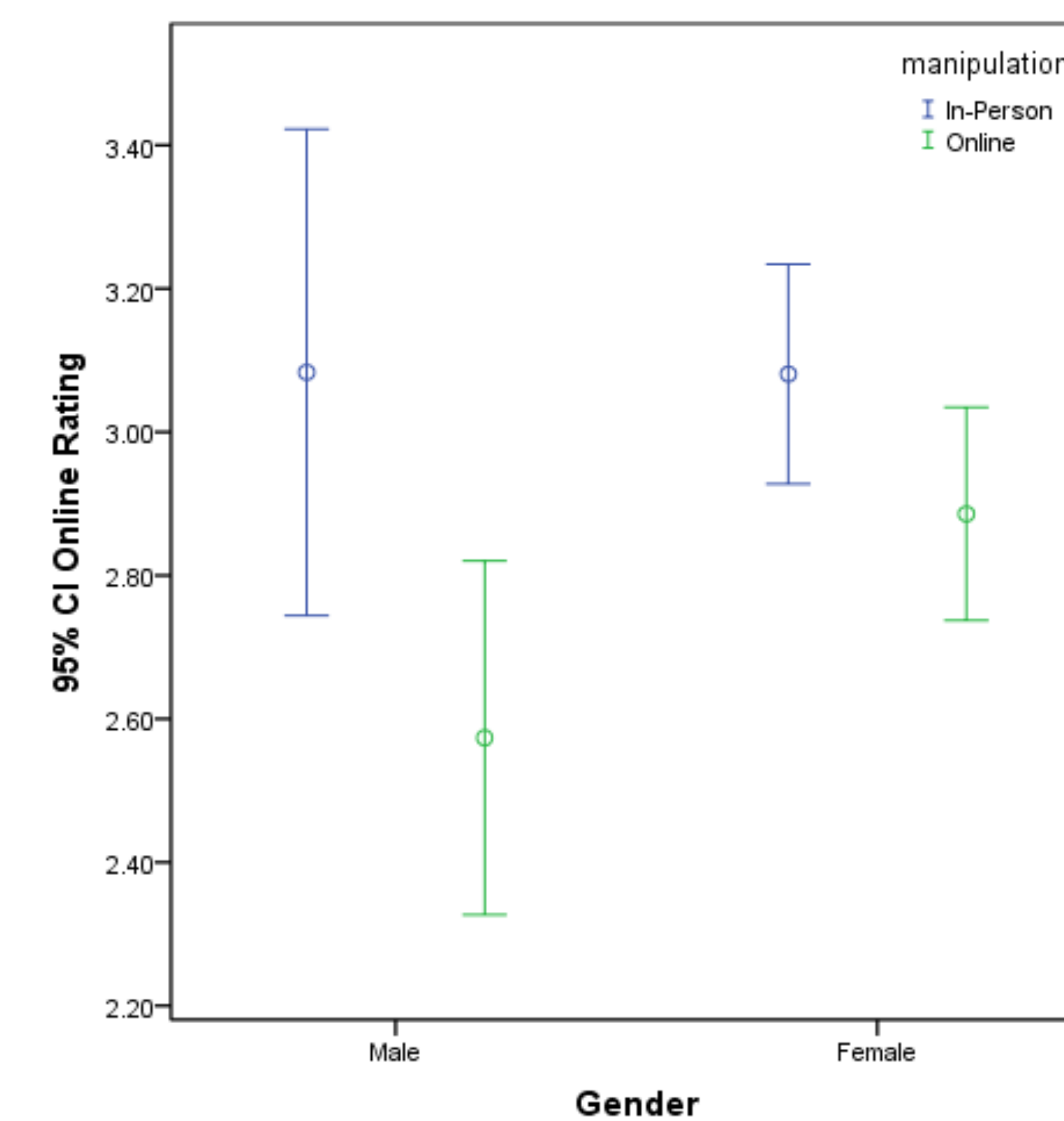
A look into how participants rate actions when risk levels of the independent variable differ offers possible research.

Performing an analysis of participants' moral reasoning prior to the manipulation could provide differing results.

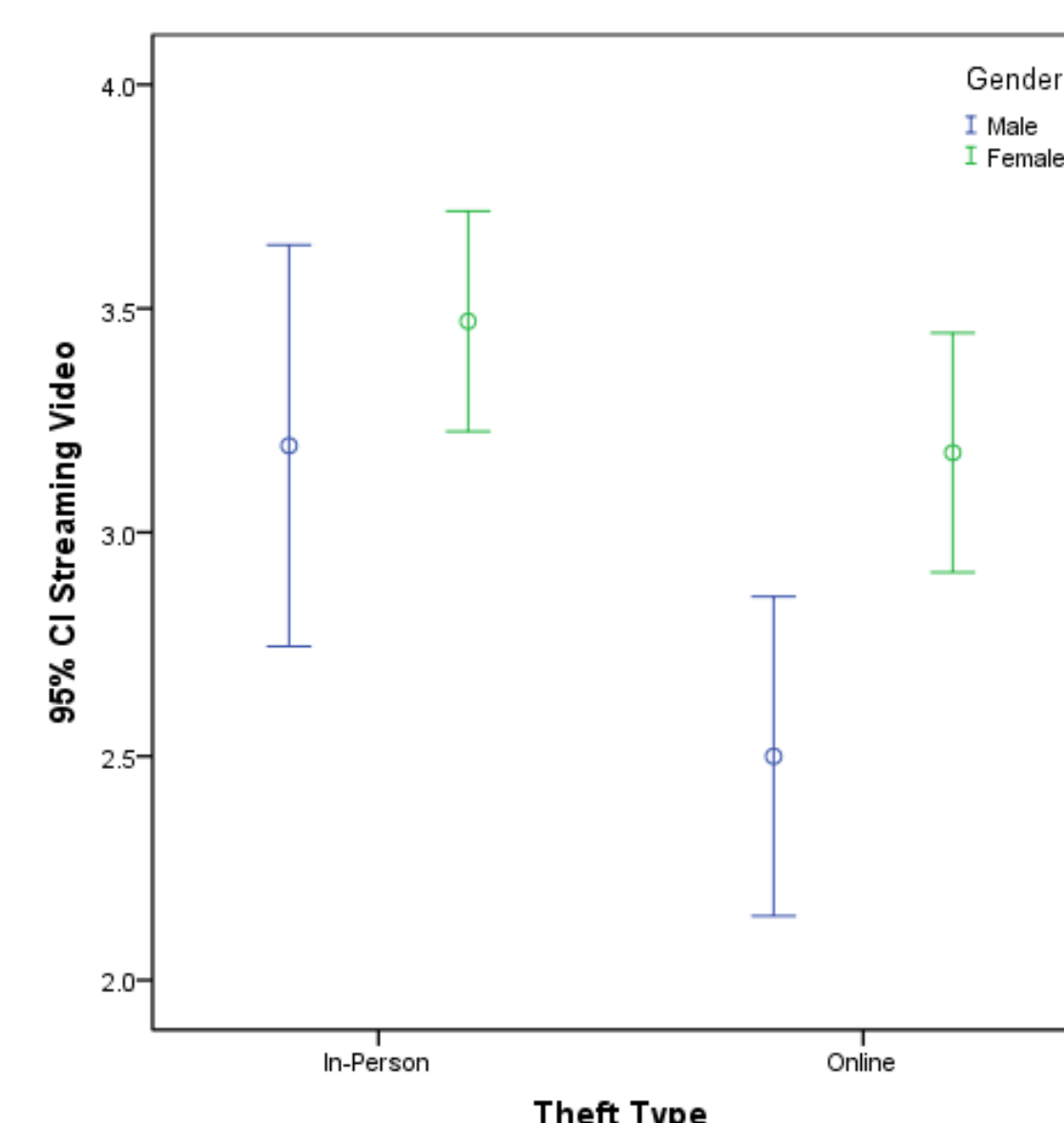
Results



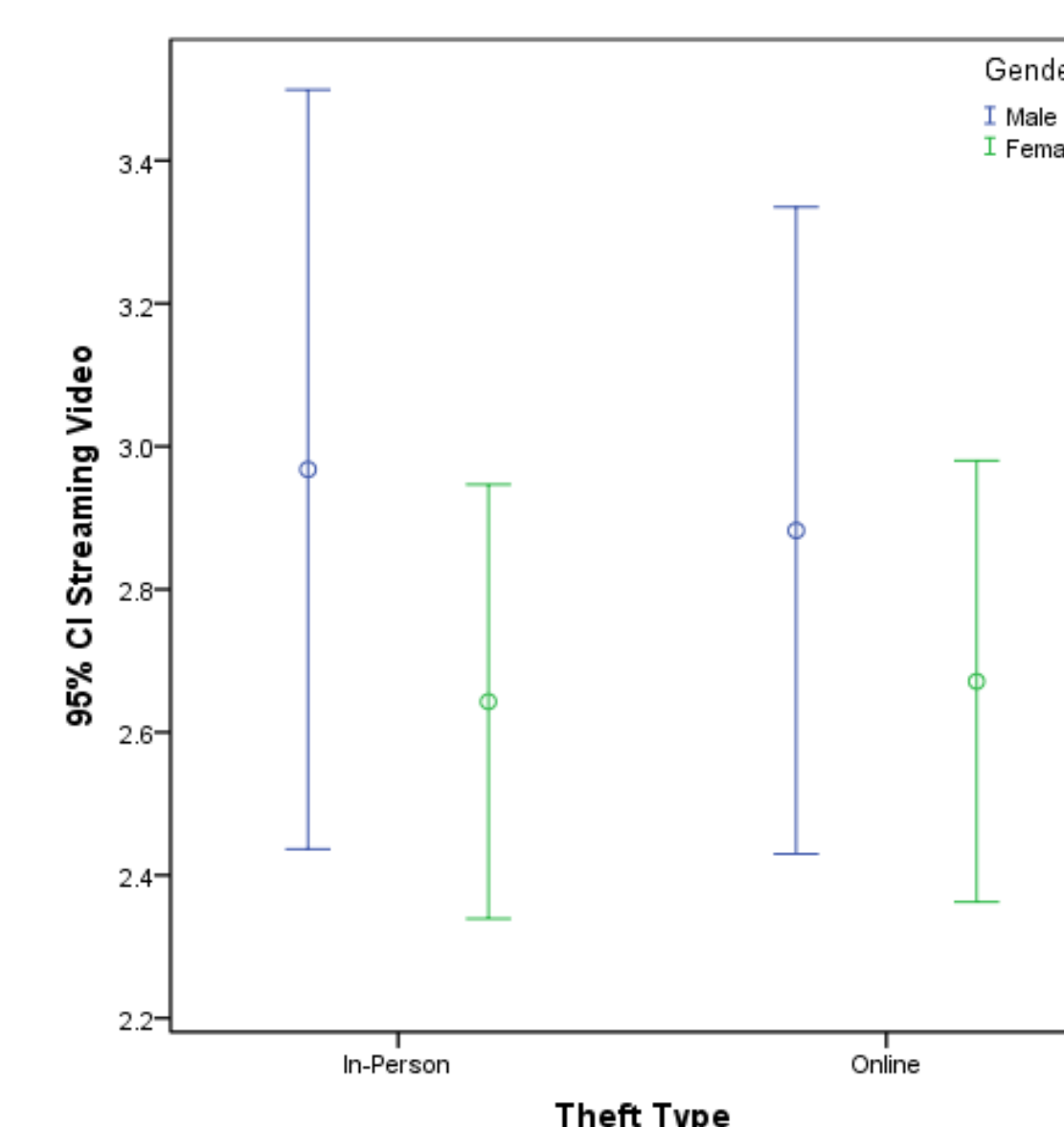
Error bar graph of manipulation and rating of online theft comparison. $F(1, 204) = 11.33$, $MSE = 5.54$, $p < .001$



Error bar graph for interaction of scenario and gender on ratings of online acts of theft. $F(1, 204) = 2.26$, $MSE = 1.11$, $p = .135$



The mean and standard error for 1 of the 16 survey questions asking for a rating of whether an action was theft. Responses ranged from 1-5 (1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree).



The mean and standard error for 1 of the 16 survey questions asking about likeliness to commit an act of theft. Responses ranged from 1-5 (1=Not Like Me at All, 5=Very Much Like Me).

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