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# The Impact Of Alibi Change On Verdict Decision

Kathleen Reynolds  
*Ryerson University*

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THE IMPACT OF ALIBI CHANGE ON VERDICT DECISION

By

Kathleen Reynolds, B. A., Nipissing University, 2007

Master's Thesis

Presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree of

Master of Arts

In the Program of

Psychology

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2010

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## **Abstract**

Kathleen Reynolds

The Impact of Alibi Change on Verdict Decision

M.A. Psychology

Ryerson University

Toronto, 2010

Previous research has demonstrated that a change in one's alibi is perceived as a sign of guilt. The present study aimed to determine the impact of changing one's initial alibi on ratings of guilt. One hundred and seven participants were randomly assigned to read one of four scenarios (self, police, same, and lied) that described a robbery, a suspect's initial alibi and, in all but the 'same' condition, a modified alibi. An explanation for the change was also provided. It was predicted that both alibi change and the explanation for the change would impact verdict choices. Results revealed that 51% of participants believed that the suspect was guilty regardless of condition. Alibi change predicted more guilty verdicts in the self and lied conditions. Surprisingly, participants who were more trusting were also more likely to convict. The current research contributes to the literature on the importance of alibis as it provides a greater understanding of jury decision making.



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## **Literature Review**

In the justice system, alibis have the potential to play a vital role in court proceedings. Previous research has found that people are likely to overestimate memory accuracy and to perceive alibi change as a sign of guilt. The present research provides an explanation of alibis through the discussion of the purpose of alibis and how they are used in the criminal justice system. Although alibi defenses are commonly raised in court, and despite the serious repercussions alibis can have on verdicts, there is little empirical research on the topic. The present research outlines the existing research related to the use of alibi evidence, and extends the research by addressing the effects of changing one's alibi on perception of people in the justice system.

### **What is an Alibi?**

An alibi is a claim that one was in a different location than where the crime was committed making it physically impossible for them to have carried out the crime in question (Burke, Turtle & Olson, 2007). Alibis can be problematic because people often cannot remember, when they are asked, the specific details of their whereabouts (e.g. what they were doing on a specific date and time). There are two types of alibi sources, alibi provider and alibi witness. The person who provides a statement of their whereabouts is known as an alibi provider, whereas the alibi witness refers to someone who confirms or refutes the alibi provider (Culhane & Hosch, 2004). Alibis can have a significant impact in the course of a police investigation and trial. However, as much as a strong alibi can benefit the suspect, a "weak" alibi can be devastating to a defence case (Culhane & Hosch, 2004). A research report published by the National Institute of Justice (Connors, Lundregan, Miller & McEwan, 1996), a research agency of the U.S. Department of Justice, examined how often an alibi was included as one the

contributing factors in wrongful conviction cases. They found that in 8 of 28 cases (28.6%) either no alibi (in 1 case the suspect could not prove an alibi) or a weak alibi (in 7 cases an alibi was corroborated by someone deemed motivated to lie for the suspect) was noted as one of the possible reasons leading to the conviction. The results of this study clearly show that alibis can significantly influence legal proceedings and demonstrate how essential it is, for both the legal system, as well as society, for alibis to be further examined in order to fully understand the complexity of them, including their fallibility.

### **The Problem with Alibis**

Although alibis have the capacity to benefit the accused, there are risks or potential problems with the use of alibis. It can be assumed, based on cognitive research on long term memory and its efficacy that it is likely that a significant number of people could unwittingly provide a false alibi that they later realize is incorrect. Research related to memory will be further addressed in more detail below. There are several types of alibis, including mistaken alibis, fabricated alibis and true alibis. A mistaken alibi is one that turns out to be false, but at the time the alibi was provided, it was considered to be the truth and was simply an error in memory. Contrary to mistaken alibis, some suspects may provide fabricated alibis in which they intentionally provide false alibis. The ideal alibi for a person under suspicion is a true alibi, where the suspect accurately describes their whereabouts at the time in question (Burke, Turtle & Olson, 2007; Olson, 2002).

The purpose of an alibi is not meant to be the single determinant to one's innocence or guilt. However as the term alibi itself can be associated with negative connotations it can become more than just another piece of evidence; it can become something that the suspect must prove as

truth (Burke, Turtle & Olson, 2007). In a 1979 case in Ontario, the Court of Appeal ruled that a false alibi, regardless of whether it is proven in court or not, cannot, on its own, lead to a guilty verdict; rather, it can act as corroborating evidence (Culhane & Hosch, 2004). Although alibis are considered as strong evidence in a case, alibis, regardless of strength are often perceived to be untrue. This may be because it is the individual who is suspected of the crime that is providing the alibi (Burke, Turtle & Olson, 2007). However, in cases where others provide information, such as eyewitness testimony, because it is not the suspect that is providing the information, and rather someone who is seen as having no motivation to lie, the information is more likely to be perceived as being true (Sanders, 1984).

Olson and Wells (2004) developed a taxonomy of alibis where they distinguished between three types of alibi corroborators: a motivated familiar other, a stranger, and a non-motivated familiar other. A motivated familiar other could be a family member or close friend who would less likely be mistaken, but may be more likely to lie. On the other hand, a stranger would be less likely to lie, but would be more likely to be mistaken. Finally a non-motivated familiar other would be someone such as an acquaintance, who would not be likely to be mistaken or lie. Olson and Wells (2004) found that non-motivated familiar others were no more likely to be believed than strangers, but strangers were seen to be more likely to be mistaken than non-motivated familiar others.

In addition, Olson and Wells (2004) investigated the credibility of a suspect's statement by asking participants to take on the role of a detective and evaluate how believable the alibi being presented by the suspect was. Participants were presented with two types of supporting proof for an alibi; physical and person evidence. An example of physical evidence may be a receipt whereas an example of person evidence could be an eyewitness. They found that physical

evidence, including evidence that can easily be fabricated, such as a cash receipt (which cannot be proven to be paid for by the suspect) were usually believed more than person evidence (Olson & Wells, 2004). In their conclusions they note that when an alibi is evaluated negatively by others, the suspect is more likely to be presumed guilty (Olson & Wells, 2004).

Similarly, Culhane and Hosch (2004) conducted a mock-jury study to evaluate how different factors impacted jury verdicts. The first variable was type of alibi testimony, which has three levels; corroborated, non-corroborated and ambiguous. A corroborated alibi would be where someone definitely states that the suspect was with them at the time in question. A non-corroborated alibi is when someone says that the suspect was not with them, and an ambiguous alibi is when they say that they cannot be sure whether or not the suspect was with them. The second variable looked at was relationship of alibi corroborator to the defendant, and the third factor examined was the confidence of the eyewitness. They found that the confidence of the eyewitness led to more guilty verdicts than an eyewitness who was not confident. Having an alibi corroborator resulted in more acquittals, specifically, having a non-motivated alibi corroborator resulted in lower conviction rates, compared to a motivated other, or no alibi condition. Surprisingly, the defendants in the mock crime were no more believed if the alibi corroborator was close to them, such as a mother, or girlfriend than if they provided no alibi at all. It was also reported that when the alibi that was given is not corroborated it was no more damaging than when the suspect had an ambiguous alibi (Culhane & Hosch, 2004). The results of these studies indicate that having an alibi is not always an effective tool for a suspect to use while trying to prove his or her innocence and may not even be helpful as part of his or her overall defense.

## **Authoritarianism and Verdict**

It has been proposed by several researchers (Narby, Cutler & Moran, 1993; Bray & Noble, 1978) that those classified as high in authoritarianism are more likely to provide more guilty verdicts in court cases. Allport (1954) described those classified as high in authoritarianism as people who would likely look to authority for discipline, specifically in the context of rules and laws. People who are more authoritarian are more likely to be conservative, rigid, and pro police and prosecution (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950) and it can therefore be assumed they would likely be harsher towards those who break laws.

Bray and Noble (1978) conducted a study in which participants were asked to listen to a 30 minute audio tape from a murder trial. Participants were instructed to fill out a questionnaire individually, followed by a group deliberation and concluding with another individual questionnaire. In their study participants were asked to provide a verdict of guilty or not guilty, as well as propose a sentence they felt was appropriate. They were asked to do this individually as well as in the group deliberation. The results of their study are consistent with their hypothesis, that those who are high in authoritarianism are more likely to convict than those who were rated as low in authoritarianism. This was found in both the individual conditions, as well as in the group deliberations. Bray and Noble (1978) also found that those high in authoritarianism were more likely to sentence the defendant to death. However, contrary to their hypothesis that high authoritarians would be more resistant to change, they were more likely than those who are low in authoritarianism to reverse their verdict following group deliberations.

Narby, Cutler and Moran (1993) performed a meta analysis using a total of 20 studies to investigate the relationship between authoritarianism and verdict. As predicted, they found that authoritarianism did in fact predict verdict in that those who scored high in authoritarianism were

more likely to provide guilty verdicts. Although they did find that traditional measures of authoritarianism did predict guilty verdicts, they found that measures which specifically measure legal authoritarianism, such as Boehm's (1968) Legal Attitudes Questionnaire (LAQ) or Kassin and Wrightsman's (1983) Juror Bias Scale (JBS) were better predictors overall.

## **Memory Construction**

The construction of memories has been found to be directly related to alibis and the potential reason why someone may unwittingly provide a false alibi. In general, personal memories are relatively accurate; however accuracy decreases as the reliance on schemas increases (Alba & Hasher, 1983; Matlin, 2005). Schemas are basic knowledge or expectations which are stored in memory based on past experiences (Conway, 2005). Schemas summarize a large number of memories and information in an efficient way but can lead to errors because people then tend to make assumptions about things that happen based on schemas, rather than what happened in a specific instance (Alba & Hasher, 1983). This means that people tend to distort memories of the past, to be consistent with what is usually done. When asked to provide an alibi, a person may respond with what they would usually be doing on the day in question rather than thinking about that specific day. For example, someone may automatically respond that three weeks ago on Wednesday at 2:35 they were at work, because that is where they usually would be on a weekday, when in fact they actually had the day off for an appointment. This is called the constructivist approach to memory, which is the view that memories are not retrieved as snapshots of what actually happened; instead they are based on what usually happens (Alba & Hasher, 1983; Matlin, 2005; McDonough & Gallo, 2008). In other words, people will essentially fill in the blanks, or use information that is readily available, when they cannot access a specific instance. In addition, when there is nothing to make a memory stand out it is not encoded in

memory using deep and elaborate processing (Alba & Hasher, 1966; Matlin, 2005), in other words, nothing significant has happened to encourage the memory to be thought about in more complex and meaningful ways and it will therefore be harder to access these memories. Williams and his colleagues (2008) found that only a small number of memories are able to be accurately recalled for one week, even if they are of a distinct day, and furthermore, retention of routine, ordinary events that are over a week old is almost none. Essentially, if time has elapsed between the date in question and when the person is asked to provide an alibi, people may make mistakes because of things that have occurred in between.

Memories can be very rich in detail and people may be very confident in their accuracy, but detail, confidence and accuracy are in fact weakly related. Schemas are used to guide recall but they are not always accurate (Matlin, 2005). In fact, memory schemas actually encourage errors because they are relied on too heavily and they are amalgams of numerous memories and specific events. Conway (2009) conducted a study in which he asked participants to describe events from their lives for the past several days. The results of his study indicated that descriptions for events three days and older become less specific. Instead people will describe more general descriptions which are more based on routine and schemas, rather than specific memories (Conway, 2009).

Furthermore, social pressure has been shown to be associated with memory error. Research has found that people are more likely to make errors when they are faced with social pressure, especially when pressured by an authority figure, when they are tired, distracted, upset, in a negative mood, or when time has passed (Roediger & McDermott, 2000). These findings, specifically those that people make errors when they feel pressure from an authority figure, may

be relevant to the study of alibis because someone may provide an alibi for themselves, even though they are unsure and could be mistaken, because they are feeling pressure by police.

The research presented here is directly related to alibis because people who are asked to provide an alibi are likely to respond using schemas rather than being able to accurately recall specific dates. As a result of this suspects may be providing a false alibi which they later would have to modify.

### **Autobiographical Memory**

Of particular relevance for alibi research is the literature regarding autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory which are memories related to one's self, is thought to be formed by episodic memory (memory for an event that occurred at a specific time and place) (Thompson, Skowronski, Larsen & Betz, 1996; Rubin, 2005). According to Rubin (2005) "the events that are recalled as autobiographical memories are typically multimodal (involving vision, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and body sense or kinesthesia); they vary in spatial, temporal, emotional, and narrative content and context; and they have personal relevance" (p 79). Given that autobiographical memory is so complex and involves the interaction of a number of these systems it is not surprising that autobiographical memory has been shown to be faulty in many studies evaluating how accurate a person is at remembering events in their life (Skowronski, Betz, Thompson & Shannon 1991; Turtle & Burke, 2001; Arbuthnott, Arbuthnott & Ylioja, 2003). A study conducted by Arbuthnott, Arbuthnott and Ylioja (2003) investigated the frequency of memory errors in naturalistic settings using surveys and diaries. Although they found that the frequency of errors was relatively low, they did report that when an error was made it tended to be for forgetting (previously met people, and routine, familiar tasks), switching memories from two events, and for future events (those planned for the future). The finding that

it is relatively common for people to confuse the details of different memories (including who was involved), especially for routine and familiar events is especially important for the study of alibis.

Two types of memory, recall and recognition, are involved in the retrieval of alibis. Recognition memory is determining whether or not the person or item currently being viewed has previously been seen (Strong, 1912). Recognition memory is what is utilized when viewing a lineup. Conversely recall memory is used when one is asked to remember past events without any cues or prompts (Strong, 1912). A study conducted by Tulving and Pearlstone (1966) revealed that participants were able to recall items more accurately when they were provided with cues, than when there were no cues provided. Recall memory is what is used when a person is asked to provide an alibi and unfortunately it is prone to many errors. This is especially true when someone performs routine tasks during the time period in question (Burke & Turtle, 2003). For example, Arbuthott and colleagues (2003) found that a person is better able to recall details from events that deviate from the norm and are unfamiliar experiences. This would seem to indicate that a person, including an alibi provider or corroborator, would conceivably have difficulty recalling a specific day, especially if nothing unfamiliar occurred on the day in question. Burt (1992a) conducted a study where participants were provided with cues to determine if they could provide the date the event occurred. Participants were provided with either *what* they were doing, *who* they were with or *where* an event took place and asked to state *when* the event occurred. In his study eight participants took part and were asked to date events, taken directly from their personal diaries that occurred between 1979 and 1987. The *who*, *what*, *where* and *when* aspects were obtained for a total of 434 events. The results of the study indicated that participants were better at dating the event when provided with the *what* aspect.

The least effective cue was *who*. Wagenaar (1986), who used himself as the subject, had conducted a similar study using the same four cues. His study differed because he was using all four cues to determine if he could recall, given one of the cues, the other three rather than simply trying to determine when the event happened. He recorded events of his life for six years and attempted to later recall them. He later tried to recall the events when given a retrieval cue (for example, given the *when* cue and trying to recall the *who, what and where* aspects of the event). Wagenaar (1986) reported that the best memory retrieval cue is the *what* aspect. When provided with what he was doing, he was more likely to remember the other three aspects. The least efficient memory cue was when provided with the date of an event (the *when* aspect). Based on his results, he concluded that the reason for this is based on the uniqueness of an event. The results of these studies seem to indicate that people would likely have difficulty remembering when something occurred when they are not provided with any prompts. In fact, multiple researchers have argued that date and time information is unlikely to produce accurate recall of memories (Burt, 1992a; Kemp, 1999; Thompson, Skowronski & Betz, 1993). This has important implications for memory regarding alibis, given the date of an event is unlikely to improve memory retrieval and, as a result, could potentially lead to someone unwittingly providing a false alibi which would later have to be changed.

As mentioned previously recall memory relies on one being able to accurately recall information without any cues or prompts to guide them. Without any cues it is very difficult for a person to retrieve the correct information. People have the tendency to organize memories in the form of a schema or mental template, and as a result of this memories are constructed in ways that things fit together based on past experiences (Burke & Turtle, 2003). In a study conducted using undergraduate students Burke and Turtle (2003) found that the students tended to report

their whereabouts based on where they thought they should be at the time in question based on their class schedules. However, when they were asked to prove that this was in fact where they were, they found it very difficult to provide support for their claim of being in class other than displaying their class schedules (Burke & Turtle, 2003).

Brown (1958) posits that recall memory is faulty because of the passage of time between the item being presented and the attempt to recall it. Specifically, the longer the interval between two periods such as days versus weeks, the less likely a person will be able to recall the specific day being asked about, and they will be less likely to be able to provide physical evidence to back up their claim. A study conducted by Skowronski and colleagues (1991) examined one's memory for one's own events, and one's memory for another person's events. The experimenters were attempting to determine if there is a difference in recall between the two. They noted that memory and judgment of the self are similar to that of memory and judgment for others; The ways in which memories are stored and later recalled are similar for both self-memory and other-memory. In their study the participants were to keep a diary of their own events and of a close friend or relative's events on a daily basis. The participants were also asked to rate the typicality of the event in relation to the person, the pleasantness of the event, and how memorable they predicted the event would be. The study lasted 10 weeks, after which the participants were asked to recall one of the events they had previously recorded in their diary and the day it happened. Events deemed to be pleasant were recalled more accurately, but only when they were self relevant. Regardless of whether the event was recorded as positive or negative, it does not appear to significantly increase recall accuracy when it comes to recalling other people's events. However recall for both positive and negative events was significantly better than for neutral events (Skowronski et al., 1991). Their findings support the memory inconsistency effect, in

which memories for events that deviate from the normal behaviour of someone else are better able to be recalled than events that are typical for that person. This indicates that an alibi provider would be more accurate in their recollections of an event if the person in question had done something irregular on the day they are being asked to provide an alibi for. In addition, person expectations affected the recall of both self and other event recall in that event was more likely to be remembered if it deviated from typical behaviour. This reinforces the idea that people would likely use schemas when asked to provide an alibi and unless something unusual occurred during the day in question they would be at risk of providing a false alibi which they later would have to change.

Based on the research related to memory presented above it becomes clear that alibis can be very unreliable and a person is unlikely to be able to accurately recall what they were doing, and where they were, on a specific day and time. As a result of this a suspect is at risk of providing a mistaken alibi which could lead to them having to alter their original statement.

## **Implications**

One of the key questions regarding alibis is their likelihood and prevalence of being incorrect, either purposely or mistakenly. The implications this can have is enormous given the use of alibis in criminal settings, and that a person's freedom can rely on them. Most people tend to overestimate the accuracy of memory and often believe that an alibi shown to be untrue, especially an alibi that has been changed in some way, is due to intentional lying on the alibi providers behalf, this in turn can be seen as a definite sign of guilt in the eyes of the person evaluating it (Burke, Turtle & Olson, 2007). However, as previously mentioned, autobiographical memory is often problematic, and therefore it should be assumed and expected

that one may have to alter their initial statements of their whereabouts. In a meta analysis conducted by DePaulo and colleagues (2003) it was found that truth tellers are, in fact, more likely to correct their initial story than are liars, and they are also more likely to admit when they cannot remember something. This demonstrates that perhaps when a person voluntarily changes their alibi, it may not be because they are lying, but rather that they later recall the truth. This is demonstrated in the case of Ronald Cotton in the United States. Ronald Cotton was convicted in 1984 to life plus 54 years in prison for the rapes and burglaries of two women. He initially made a statement that he was he out with friends on the night the crimes occurred. He later however, remembered that he had instead been at home with his family; he informed the police of this new alibi. The fact that he had provided an initial alibi that was false was used against him in his trial. He spent over ten years in prison before he was exonerated of the crimes.

It is often seen as suspicious that someone has been asked to provide an alibi, and can potentially be seen as an indication of guilt. This is particularly damaging in a court trial, as a jury is being asked to evaluate a person, and might have this viewpoint on the issue (Burke, Turtle & Olson, 2007). Furthermore, as noted above, Culhane and Hosch (2004) found that having a mother or girlfriend corroborate one's alibi was no more helpful than if the defendant had no alibi at all. This is obviously going to be problematic for most alibi providers, as the majority of a person's time is spent with a close family member, significant other, or friends and the mere fact that these people have a relationship with the defendant will hinder one's chances of being believed when the time comes to provide an alibi statement. Furthermore, the study conducted by Culhane and Hosch (2004) revealed that participants deemed the alibi corroborator to be just as important as physical evidence, and eyewitness testimony.

Very little research has been conducted on alibis in general, and even less attention has been given to the effects of changing one's alibi. Based on the previous information one could conclude that it would be possible for someone to forget the exact details of their whereabouts when questioned by police and thus may subsequently have to change their original statement. Because of the possibility of such an event, it is important to determine the impact this would have on someone providing an alibi in terms of how believable the statement appears to others, and how this might relate to jury verdicts.

### **Current Research**

The current research investigates how changing one's alibi affects how a person is perceived by others. Several hypotheses were made:

1. People who change their initial alibi will be perceived more negatively than those who do not.
2. The reason or cause of the change will have an effect on how believable and truthful that person comes across to others with changes made voluntarily resulting in less guilty verdicts than those made following police questioning. It is expected that participants will be more likely to provide a verdict of guilty for the scenario in which a suspect only changes his alibi once confronted by police with evidence that contradicts his original alibi.
3. There will be less guilty verdicts in the scenario in which the suspect voluntarily changes his statement.

4. It was thought that people who are more trusting of others will be more likely to give the suspect the benefit of doubt and therefore it is expected that participants who score low on the Self Report Trust Scale will be more likely to give guilty verdicts than those who are more trusting of others.
  
5. Research has shown that people who score high on authoritarianism are more likely to be pro prosecution and more likely to vote guilty and it was therefore predicted that participants who score high on the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale will be more likely to convict than those who are less authoritarian.



## **Method**

### **Participants**

One hundred and seven Ryerson University undergraduate psychology students aged 18 to 39 ( $M=20.67$ ,  $SD=4.28$ ) were recruited to complete the study in turn for partial course credit. Eleven participants did not indicate their age. The participants were recruited through the Sona participant pool sign up system. There were 17 male and 87 female participants (three participants did not provide their gender).

### **Materials**

Multiple crime scenarios were used, each having the same original alibi and altered alibi, however each of the four scenarios depicted different circumstances for the change. The type of alibis used in the scenarios was based on the research regarding the different types of alibis (mistaken, fabricated and true). The first scenario was an error or mistaken scenario (the person voluntarily changes their alibi after realizing they were mistaken in their first statement), a change that resulted after questioning by police, as well as a scenario where the suspect voluntarily admits to lying because they were too embarrassed to admit what it was they were actually doing at the time of the crime. There is also a control condition where the alibi remains the same. It was believed that these situations were realistic of what could happen in real investigations involving the use of alibis. Each of the scenarios was exactly the same with the exception of the reason for the change in the alibi. The four scenarios can be found in Appendix A. Upon reading the scenario, participants were asked to provide basic demographic information and fill out a crime scene questionnaire related to the scenario they had read. In addition, participants were asked to answer two questionnaires, the Self Report Trust Scale (MacDonald,

Kessel, & Fuller, 1972), and the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 1981). All of the questionnaires can be found in Appendix B.

## **Measures**

*Self Report Trust Scale (MacDonald, Kessel, & Fuller, 1972).* Participants completed a 10 item scale measuring their level of trust in others. Sample questions include “I expect other people to be honest and open” and “I am less trusting than the average person” (the entire questionnaire can be found in Appendix B).

*Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 1981).* Participants completed a 30 item scale measuring authoritarianism. Sample items include, “Our country needs free thinkers who will have the courage to defy traditional ways, even if this upsets many people” and “Our country will be destroyed someday if we do not smash the perversions eating away at our moral fibre and traditional beliefs” (the scale can be found in Appendix B). Participants responded to questions on a scale of -4 (very strongly disagree) to +4 (very strongly agree).

## **Procedure**

Before reading one of the four crime scenarios participants completed a consent form and were informed of what they were being asked to do. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of four crime conditions and asked to read a crime scenario. Each scenario depicted a different series of events. All of the scenarios describe a man, David Weber, who is accused of robbery and is being asked to provide an alibi for himself. In condition one (self), when questioned by police, David Weber states that he was at work. After speaking with Mr. Weber’s boss who states he may not have been at work, police ask Mr. Weber to come in for some additional questioning. Upon arriving at the police station David Weber immediately informs the police, before police can confront him with the statement provided by his boss that he had made

mistake in his initial alibi and had actually had the day in question off from work. In scenario two (police), David Weber provides the same alibi that he was at work, but when questioned a second time by police, who have spoken to his boss and determined he may not have been at work, he changes his initial story and states that he had the day off. In scenario three (same), David Weber provides the same initial alibi, but when faced with the evidence he may not have been at work, denies taking the day off, and is adamant that he was at work. Scenario four (lied) is similar, in that when he goes to the police station the second time he changes his alibi. In this scenario he states that he lied when he said he was at work because he was too embarrassed to admit that he had been at a clinic seeking treatment for erectile dysfunction at the time the crime was committed.

Following the scenario, participants were provided with a post questionnaire which consisted of questions regarding demographic information and questions related to the crime. They also filled out a trust scale and a scale which measured authoritarianism. After reading the assigned scenario participants were asked to rate how truthful they believed Mr. Weber had been in his initial alibi, as well as his follow-up alibi. In addition, participants were asked to provide one piece of evidence that they believed suggested Mr. Weber's guilt as well as one piece of evidence indicating his innocence. They were also asked to rate how likely they believed Mr. Weber had committed the crime and to provide a verdict of guilty or not guilty. Furthermore, participants were given the opportunity to provide an explanation for their verdict. Finally, each participant was fully debriefed and informed of the purpose of the study and given the opportunity to ask any questions they had.



## Results

### Verdict

The purpose of the present study was to determine the effect of alibis, specifically a change in alibi on verdict decision. Participants were asked to vote either guilty (coded as 1) or not guilty (coded as 2). In total 106 participants provided verdicts, of which 52 were not guilty, and 54 were guilty. A breakdown of verdict by scenario can be found in Table 1. To test the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference in guilty verdicts based on scenario a Chi Square Analysis was performed. Results indicate that, contrary to the hypothesis, there were no significant differences in guilty and not guilty verdicts between the four scenarios,  $\chi^2(3) = 2.90$ ,  $p = .407$ .

### Truthfulness

Participants were asked to rate how truthful Mr. Weber was being in his first and his second alibi statement. To determine whether there were any significant differences, based on scenario, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed for each of these questions. As can be seen in Figure 1 results indicate that there was a significant difference in ratings of truthfulness of initial statement,  $F(3, 103) = 4.481$ ,  $p = .005$ . Post hoc comparisons performed using LSD revealed significant differences between the lied ( $M = 1.77$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ,) and police ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) conditions as well as the same ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ) and lied conditions and the self ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) and lied conditions. As would be expected, participants in the lied condition found Mr. Weber less truthful in his initial statement. Although the ANOVA was not significant for the truthfulness of follow-up alibi,  $F(3, 103) = 1.846$ ,  $p = .144$ , post hoc comparisons using LSD indicated a significant difference between the police ( $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=1.35$ )

and same ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) conditions which would indicate, contrary to what would be expected, that participants found Mr. Weber's change in alibi as more truthful when the police confronted him with evidence contrary to his initial alibi than when his alibi remained the same. Specific results can be seen in figure 2.

### **Strength of Evidence**

Participants were asked to rate how strong they felt the evidence against Mr. Weber was. To determine whether there were any significant differences, based on scenario, an ANOVA was performed. The ANOVA revealed differences in the strength of evidence,  $F(3, 103) = 2.984$ ,  $p = .035$ . Post hoc comparisons using LSD indicate significant differences between the police ( $M = 2.82$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) and the self ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = .95$ ), same ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) and lied ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) conditions (see Figure 3). In other words, participants found that there was less evidence suggesting guilt in the police condition than the other three conditions.

### **Evidence For and Against Guilt**

Participants were asked what they felt was the strongest piece of evidence indicating guilt, as well as the strongest piece of evidence for innocence. As these were open ended question, responses were coded based on the participants response into one of several categories. The most commonly given answer in the self, police and same conditions for the strongest piece of evidence suggesting guilt, was the necklace that was found at the suspect's home. However, in the lied condition, 34.6% of participants cited the fact that he changed his alibi as an indication of guilt over 23.1% who stated that it was the necklace. This suggests that participants do not believe that Mr. Weber was too embarrassed to tell the police what he had actually been doing at the time the crime was committed. When asked what the strongest piece of evidence suggesting

innocence, the most common reason for the self, police and lied conditions was the mistaken license plate. However, in the same condition, where Mr. Weber remained adamant about his whereabouts, the fact that he had an alibi was cited by 42.9% of participants as the main factor signifying innocence. Second only to the license plate, the change in alibi was cited by 19.2% of participants in the lied condition indicating that almost 20% of participants appear to have believed him when he said he was too embarrassed to tell the truth.

### **Explanation of Verdict Decision**

Finally, participants were asked to explain why they chose the verdict that they did. This question allowed participants to provide as many pieces of evidence as they wanted to explain their verdict choice. In this case, the most commonly cited variables were chosen and it was coded, either yes (1) or no (2), if the participant mentioned it in their response. As we were interested in determining if the alibi specifically had an effect on verdict those were the only variables that were examined further. It was revealed that there was a difference in guilty versus not guilty verdicts in the self condition ( $p=.005$ , Fisher's Exact test), as well as in the lied condition ( $p=.041$ , fisher's exact test) when there is a change in alibi mentioned as reason for verdict. A correlation conducted on the whole sample revealed that there is a correlation between alibi change and verdict, in that participants voted guilty more often when there was a change in alibi ( $r=.326$ ). When split by scenario, alibi change is positively correlated with guilty verdicts in the self ( $r=.599$ ) and lied ( $r=.458$ ) conditions. The fact that there is no alibi corroborator is only shown to affect the verdict in the police condition ( $p=.03$ , fisher's exact test). A correlation confirmed that no alibi corroborator, in the police condition, is correlated with guilty verdicts ( $r=.465$ ).

## Self Report Measures

In addition to the crime story questionnaire, participants were asked to complete the Self Report Trust Scale (MacDonald, Kessel, & Fuller, 1972), and the Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale (Altemeyer, 1981). The Self Report Trust Scale ranges from 10 to 40, with a score of 40 being more trusting. Overall participants had a mean score of 26.01 (SD=4.02). The scores for each scenario can be found in Table 2. This questionnaire was found to have good reliability,  $\alpha = .758$ . The Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale has a range of -120 to +120. Positive scores, specifically those 60 and higher, indicate authoritarianism. Participants had a mean score of -38.03 (SD=38.12). The scores broken down into each scenario can be found in Table 3. This scale was shown to have very good reliability,  $\alpha = .93$ .

Prior to conducting regression analyses to determine how these scales predict verdict, correlations were performed to see how correlated these scales were to each other, as well as to verdict. Authoritarianism was not significantly correlated with verdict, however there was a significant negative correlation between the trust scale and verdict ( $r = -.244$ ). Surprisingly, it appears that the more trusting a person is, the more likely they are to vote guilty. There was not a significant correlation between authoritarianism and trust. Correlations were also performed between verdict and likelihood of guilt, truthfulness of initial and follow-up alibi, strength of evidence against Mr. Weber and the honesty ratings of Mr. Weber. All of these variables were shown to be strongly correlated with verdict. Specific results can be found in Table 4.

A stepwise regression analysis was conducted on the complete sample. Verdict was used as the dependent variable and the total authoritarianism score, trust scale score, likelihood of guilt, truthfulness of initial and follow-up alibi, likelihood of guilt and ratings of honesty of Mr. Weber were all used as predictor variables. Authoritarianism score and trust scale score were

force entered into one block, and the remaining variables were entered into a second block. By doing this it became possible to determine how well verdict can be predicted by these variables. Table 5 shows that when the trust scale score and authoritarian score were entered in the first model (step 1) only the trust scale contributed to the model such that greater trust predicted more guilty verdicts. When the remaining variables were entered into the model (step 2) the strength of evidence and likelihood of guilt variables contributed uniquely to the model. Not surprisingly stronger evidence ratings and higher likelihood of guilty led to more guilty verdicts. The trust score was still significant when it was entered in step 2 with the other predictor variables. The question related to the honesty of Mr. Weber is nearing significance. Regressions were also conducted for each scenario independently using the same procedure. In the self condition, Table 6 reveals that neither the trust scale nor authoritarianism predicted verdict when entered in the first block. However, the trust scale appears to be nearing significance. None of the remaining variables entered in the second block revealed any significance. In the police condition, Table 7 indicates that, similar to the self condition, the trust and authoritarian scores were not significant predictors of verdict. Step 2 reveals that only the strength of evidence for guilt variable was significant indicating that it made a unique contribution to the model in that the stronger the evidence was rated the more guilty verdicts there were. Similar to the self condition, the same condition (Table 8) does not show any significance for any of the variables entered. Finally, in the lied condition, Table 9 reveals that the only variable that added a unique contribution to the model was the strength of evidence against Mr. Weber variable when it was entered in step 2. As expected, stronger evidence led to more guilty verdicts. A further regression was conducted with alibi change, no alibi corroborator, and alibi entered simultaneously in one block and verdict entered as the dependent variable. The results (Table 10) demonstrate that alibi change

contributed uniquely to the model such that if the alibi change was mentioned as a reason for verdict choice the more guilty verdicts were given. In addition the existence of an alibi also contributed uniquely to the model. The presence of an alibi resulted in more guilty verdicts.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to investigate the impact changing one's alibi has on verdict. The data collected in the present research supported only one of the five hypotheses that were put forward prior to beginning the study. As expected, the results demonstrated a relationship between a change in alibi and verdict in the lied and self conditions. The difference shown is in the direction that was expected; a change in alibi resulted in more guilty verdicts than if there is no alibi change. It was shown that this correlation exists specifically in the self and lied conditions. A regression also demonstrated that alibi change is predictive of verdict in the same direction. It is not surprising that the change in alibi resulted in more guilty verdicts and is consistent with previous research (Burke, Turtle & Olson, 2007) that has found that people perceive those who change an alibi as suspicious and that it is a sign of guilt.

The trust scale was shown to be correlated with verdict, as well as a predictor of guilt. However, contrary to the hypothesis that there would be fewer guilty verdicts among those who scored high on trust in others, those who were more trusting actually convicted the suspect more than those who were less trusting. It is thought that perhaps the reason why those who were rated as more trusting may have been more trusting in the opposite way than predicted; they may be more trusting of the legal system. In addition it did not appear to make a difference how authoritarian the participants were as there was no correlation with verdict.

Verdict choice did not significantly differ between the four scenarios indicating that, contrary to what was expected, the reason for the change in alibi did not have an effect on guilty verdicts. However, the results regarding the police condition were surprising. Common sense would seem to indicate that it would be seen as more suspicious if a suspect changes his alibi

only *after* being confronted by police with evidence contrary to his initial statement. However, the results indicate that participants found the suspect more believable and trustworthy in this condition compared to the others. Perhaps this occurred because participants believed that Mr. Weber felt pressured or intimidated by the police or that the police convinced him or coerced him into changing his alibi. In a study conducted by DePaulo and colleagues (2003) it was found that truth tellers were more likely to correct their initial story and admit that they could not remember something than those who are lying. This could be useful in explaining why participants believe Mr. Weber in this condition; they could believe that the fact that he is willing to change his alibi is indicative of innocence rather than guilt. On the other hand, participants also rated this scenario as having the most evidence suggesting guilt.

It was initially thought that there would be fewer guilty verdicts in the lied condition, because participants may have found his embarrassment to be believable. Although it was not significantly different than the other the scenarios, a large percentage of participants (19.2%) did cite a change in alibi as suggestive of innocence. One possible reason that participants may not have believed him is because of the use of the word *lied*. Perhaps, when it was stated that he admits to *lying* he lost some of his credibility. A follow-up study using a different word or simply stating that he was not truthful because he was too embarrassed may present different results. In addition, approximately 35% of participants in the lied condition cited the change in alibi as being indicative of guilt. Again, he may be seen as less credible, and more likely to be convicted because of the word lie. Participants may be focusing on the fact that he lied, rather than on the reason for the lie.

One limitation of the current research is that participants were verbally asked if they had noticed the alibi, and if they had taken it into account in their verdict choice, however, this was

not asked in a post questionnaire, and the answers were not recorded so it cannot be known for sure whether or not participants noticed the change in alibi or not. In a follow-up study it would be helpful, as a manipulation check, to add in a post questionnaire asking participants if it was noticed and taken into account or not. In addition, it was not possible to examine any gender differences, as there were not enough males that participated in the study. However, of those that did, it appeared that they were voting not guilty more often than the female participants.

Although it had no significance in the present study, several participants noted that as a result of Mr. Weber's job as an accountant, they did not believe he would have committed the crime because he would make enough money and would not have to steal. It would be interesting in a follow-up study to have the suspect employed in a job that is not perceived as being as lucrative to determine if there is a significant impact on number of guilty verdicts and believability.

Research is lacking in the area of alibis in general, and virtually no research has been conducted on the effect a change in alibi has on guilty and not guilty verdicts. Given the enormous impact alibis can have in criminal settings and on people's freedom, this is an important topic of research, especially as it relates to verdict outcomes.



## Tables

Table 1  
*Verdicts by Scenario for Total Sample (N = 106)*

Scenario	Guilty	Not Guilty	Total
Self	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25
Police	10 (35.7%)	18 (54.3%)	28
Same	16 (57.1%)	12 (42.9%)	28
Lied	13 (52%)	12 (48%)	25
Total	52	54	106

Table 2  
*Mean Authoritarian Scores (N=102)*

Scenario	Guilty		Not Guilty	
	M	SD	M	SD
Self	-43.33	32.13	-30.36	53.55
Police	-29.25	36.07	-40.44	40.68
Same	-29.25	33.49	-46.00	33.14
Lied	-34.31	34.15	-43.92	41.43
Total	-34.04	33.19	-40.39	41.46

Table 3  
*Mean Trust Scale Scores (N=104)*

Scenario	Guilty		Not Guilty	
	M	SD	M	SD
Self	27.46	2.88	25.09	3.08
Police	26.60	3.41	25.78	4.74
Same	27.50	4.07	25.25	4.33
Lied	26.17	4.63	23.67	3.75
Total	27.00	3.75	25.04	4.09

Table 4  
*Correlations Among Predictor Variables and Guilt (N=106)*

	Self	Police	Same	Lied	Total
Truthfulness of Initial Alibi	.666**	.603**	.570**	.279	.497**
Truthfulness of Follow-up Alibi	.508**	.750**	.535**	.423*	.577**
Strength of Evidence for Guilt	-.230	-.759**	-.576**	-.847**	-.633**
Likelihood of Guilt	-.637**	-.774**	-.676**	-.787**	-.727**
Honesty Rating	-.430*	-.744**	-.710**	-.628**	-.651**

*Note.* \* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .$

Table 5  
*Total Sample Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Guilt (N = 106)*

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	P
Step 1				.061*		
Authoritarianism Score	-.001	.001	-.065			.520
Trust Scale Score	-.028	.012	-.229			.024*
Step 2				.620**	.559**	
Authoritarianism Score	-.001	.001	-.043			.515
Trust Scale Score	-.019	.008	-.160			.019*
Honesty	-.190	.103	-.188			.068
Strength of Evidence	-.084	.035	-.216			.017*
Truthfulness of Initial Alibi	.033	.035	.083			.347
Truthfulness of Follow-up	.019	.040	.048			.641
Likelihood of Guilt	-.156	.051	-.351			.003*

*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Table 6  
*Self: Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Guilt (N = 28)*

Variable	B	SE B	B	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	P
Step 1				.151		
Authoritarianism Score	-.001	.003	.069			.750
Trust Scale Score	-.058	.033	-.373			.097
Step 2				.533	.382	
Authoritarianism Score	-.001	.002	.023			.904
Trust Scale Score	-.012	.038	-.080			.750
Honesty	.066	.288	.064			.821
Strength of Evidence	.054	.116	.100			.650
Truthfulness of Initial Alibi	.334	.249	.800			.201
Truthfulness of Follow-up	-.106	.173	-.258			.551
Likelihood of Guilt	-.091	.163	-.187			.583

Table 7  
*Police: Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Guilt (N = 25)*

Variable	B	SE B	B	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	P
Step 1				.029		
Authoritarianism Score	-.002	.002	-.136			.516
Trust Scale Score	-.011	.022	-.104			.619
Step 2				.764*	.735*	
Authoritarianism Score	.001	.002	.027			.833
Trust Scale Score	-.013	.012	-.118			.328
Honesty	-.253	.211	-.261			.246
Strength of Evidence	-.147	.068	-.407			.044*
Truthfulness of Initial Alibi	-.012	.071	-.028			.870
Truthfulness of Follow-up	.093	.078	.258			.247
Likelihood of Guilt	-.050	.108	-.102			.651

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$

Table 8

Same: Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Guilt (N = 25)

Variable	B	SE B	B	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	P
Step 1				.094		
Authoritarianism Score	-.002	.003	-.167			.435
Trust Scale Score	-.023	.025	-.196			.361
Step 2				.623*	.529*	
Authoritarianism Score	-.022	.002	-.121			.445
Trust Scale Score	-.005	.021	-.045			.797
Honesty	-.409	.244	-.396			.109
Strength of Evidence	-.083	.070	-.225			.253
Truthfulness of Initial Alibi	.076	.179	.180			.676
Truthfulness of Follow-up	-.059	.169	-.145			.729
Likelihood of Guilt	-.098	.123	-.214			.435

Note. \*p<.05

Table 9

*Lied: Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Guilt (N = 28)*

Variable	B	SE B	B	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> Change	P
Step 1				.087		
Authoritarianism Score	-.001	.003	-.086			.705
Trust Scale Score	-.030	.026	-.258			.262
Step 2				.817**	.730**	
Authoritarianism Score	-.002	.002	-.144			.315
Trust Scale Score	-.008	.015	-.066			.609
Honesty	-.019	.214	-.017			.929
Strength of Evidence	-.248	.079	-.618			.007*
Truthfulness of Initial Alibi	.012	.055	.026			.834
Truthfulness of Follow-up	-.054	.076	-.125			.490
Likelihood of Guilt	-.145	.086	-.362			.113

*Note.* \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01

Table 10  
*Total Sample Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Guilt (N = 106)*

Variable	B	SE B	B	R <sup>2</sup>	P
Step 1				.169**	
Alibi Change	.451	.112	.378		.001**
No Alibi Corroborator	.062	.124	.046		.616
Alibi	.355	.129	.254		.007*

*Note.* \*p<.05, \*\* p<.01

## Figures

Figure 1. Truthfulness of Initial and Follow-Up Alibi

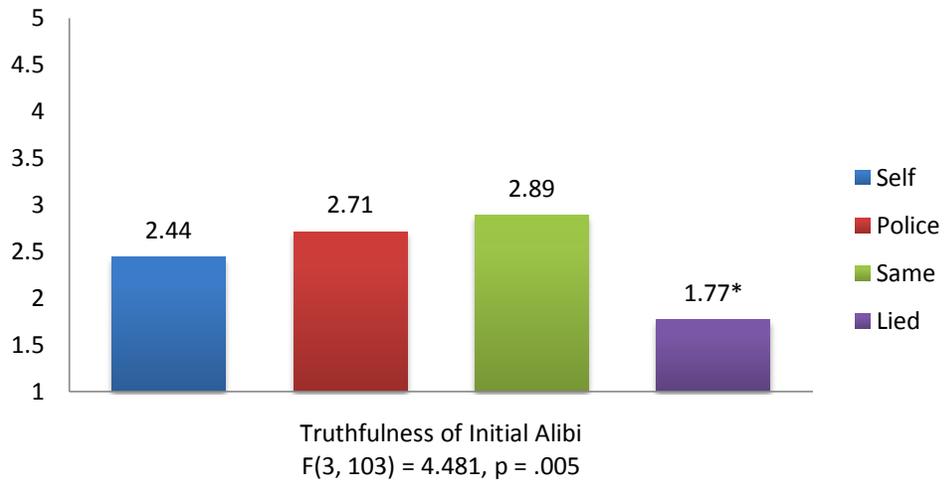


Figure 2. Truthfulness of Follow-Up Alibi

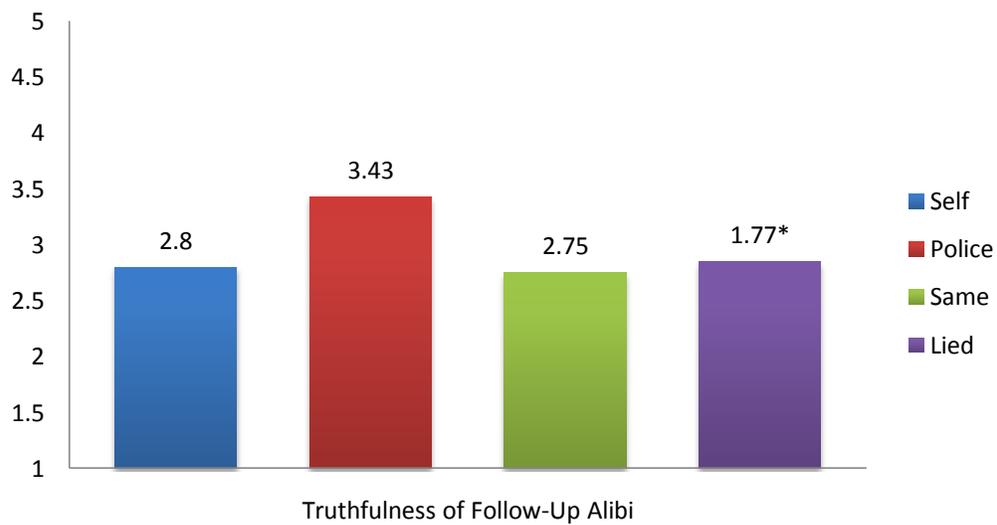
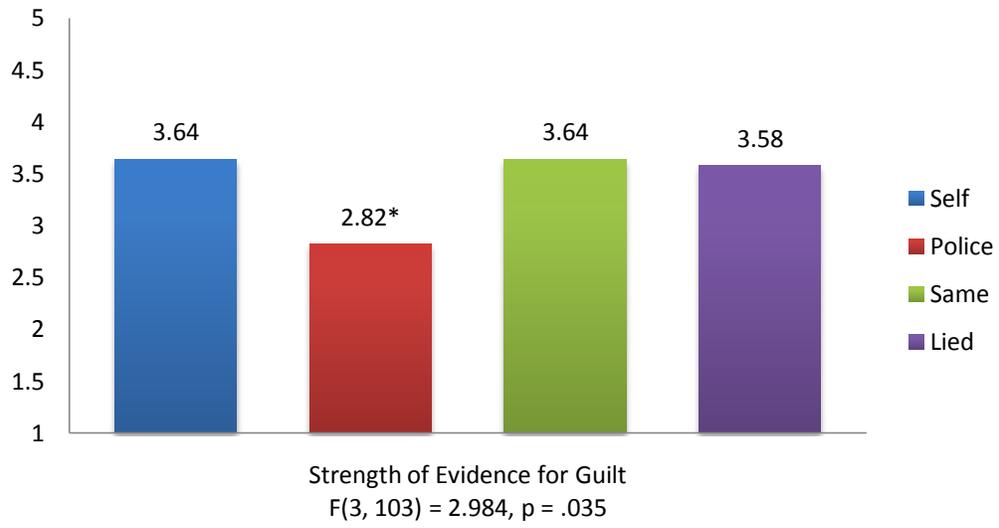


Figure 3. Strength of Evidence for Guilt



## Appendix A

### Scenarios

#### Self

You are being asked to provide some feedback on a fictional police investigation. Please read the description below and answer the questions that follow.

At approximately 1:31 in the afternoon on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> a house on Main St. in a small town in Ontario was broken into. The residents of the home were not present at the time the robbery occurred. A neighbour heard the home alarm sound and saw someone running down the street and getting into a black Honda Civic. The neighbour was only able to see the first two letters, AW, on the license plate. The neighbour described the assailant as a white male, approximately 5'8"-5'10", with a slim build. According to the witness, the robber was wearing black jeans, a red Nike polo shirt and a black baseball cap. The home owners reported that the only thing missing was a gold diamond necklace.

A few weeks later the police received a tip about David Weber. Mr. Weber fits the description given to police; he is 5'8", weighs 155 pounds and works as an accountant. However, the license plate number on his black Honda Civic is AVX 285. The neighbour was shown a picture line-up and identified Mr. Weber as the culprit. The police obtained a warrant and went to Mr. Weber's house to search the premises. While there they found a gold diamond necklace amongst his wife's jewelry. They also found clothing that fit the description given by the neighbour. The police took Mr. Weber to the police station for questioning. During the questioning when asked where he was at 1:30pm on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> Mr. Weber responded by saying he was at

work where he always is on Fridays. Once the questioning was completed the police let him go telling him they would be in touch if they had any more questions for him.

The following day police contact Mr. Weber for further questioning. Upon arriving at the police station Mr. Weber immediately informs the police, before questioning begins, that once he looked at his calendar he realized that he had made a mistake as he had actually taken that particular afternoon off work to rest at home as he wasn't feeling well.

In sum the neighbour identified Mr. Weber from the photo line-up, and police found a necklace that resembles the one that was stolen from the homeowners during the robbery, and clothes that match those worn by the robber. Mr. Weber originally stated that he was at work on the day in question but upon further reflection realized that he had instead taken the afternoon off work that day and changed his initial statement. There are no witnesses who can either corroborate or deny Mr. Weber's statements to police.

## **Police**

You are being asked to provide some feedback on a fictional police investigation. Please read the description below and answer the questions that follow.

At approximately 1:32 in the afternoon on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> a house on Main St. in a small town in Ontario was broken into. The residents of the home were not present at the time the robbery occurred. A neighbour heard the home alarm sound and saw someone running down the street and getting into a black Honda Civic. The neighbour was only able to see the first two letters, AW, on the license plate. The neighbour described the assailant as a white male, approximately 5'8"-5'10", with a slim build. According to the witness, the robber was wearing

black jeans, a red Nike polo shirt and a black baseball cap. The home owners reported that the only thing missing was a gold diamond necklace.

A few weeks later the police received a tip about David Weber. Mr. Weber fits the description given to police; he is 5'8", weighs 155 pounds and works as an accountant. However, the license plate number on his black Honda Civic is AVX 285. The neighbour was shown a picture line-up and identified Mr. Weber as the culprit. The police obtained a warrant and went to Mr. Weber's house to search the premises. While there they found a gold diamond necklace amongst his wife's jewelry. They also found clothing that fit the description given by the neighbour. The police took Mr. Weber to the police station for questioning. During the questioning when asked where he was at 1:30pm on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> Mr. Weber responded by saying he was at work where he always is on Fridays. Once the questioning was completed the police let him go telling him they would be in touch if they had any more questions for him.

The police go to Mr. Weber's workplace where they are told by his boss that he doesn't think Mr. Weber was at work on the afternoon of the day in question, but cannot be positive as there are a lot of people who work at the office. Police contact Mr. Weber for further questioning.

When he arrives at the police station the police inform Mr. Weber of the information provided by his boss and ask him again where he was on the day in question. They police provide him with a calendar at which point he realizes that he had made a mistake and states that he had actually taken that particular afternoon off work to rest at home as he wasn't feeling well

In sum the neighbour identified Mr. Weber from the photo line-up, and police found a necklace that resembles the one that was stolen from the homeowners during the robbery, and clothes that match those worn by the robber. Mr. Weber originally stated that he was at work on the day in

question but upon further questioning he realized that he had taken that particular afternoon off work that day and changed his initial statement. There are no witnesses who can either corroborate or deny Mr. Weber's statements to police.

## **Same**

You are being asked to provide some feedback on a fictional police investigation. Please read the description below and answer the questions that follow.

At approximately 1:33 in the afternoon on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> a house on Main St. in a small town in Ontario was broken into. The residents of the home were not present at the time the robbery occurred. A neighbour heard the home alarm sound and saw someone running down the street and getting into a black Honda Civic. The neighbour was only able to see the first two letters, AW, on the license plate. The neighbour described the assailant as a white male, approximately 5'8"-5'10", with a slim build. According to the witness, the robber was wearing black jeans, a red Nike polo shirt and a black baseball cap. The home owners reported that the only thing missing was a gold diamond necklace.

A few weeks later the police received a tip about David Weber. Mr. Weber fits the description given to police; he is 5'8", weighs 155 pounds and works as an accountant. However, the license plate number on his black Honda Civic is AVX 285. The neighbour was shown a picture line-up and identified Mr. Weber as the culprit. The police obtained a warrant and went to Mr. Weber's house to search the premises. While there they found a gold diamond necklace amongst his wife's jewelry. They also found clothing that fit the description given by the neighbour. The police took Mr. Weber to the police station for questioning. During the questioning when asked where he was at 1:30pm on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> Mr. Weber responded by saying he was at

work where he always is on Fridays. Once the questioning was completed the police let him go telling him they would be in touch if they had any more questions for him.

The police go to Mr. Weber's workplace where they are told by his boss that he doesn't think Mr. Weber was at work at that specific time on the day in question, but can't say either way because he was in a meeting. The police request the Mr. Weber come in for further questioning and ask him again about his whereabouts. Mr. Weber re-states his original alibi and is adamant that he was at work that day.

In sum the neighbour identified Mr. Weber from the photo line-up, and police found a necklace that resembles the one that was stolen from the homeowners during the robbery, and clothes that match those worn by the robber. Mr. Weber originally stated that he was at work and is adamant that he was at work that particular afternoon. There are no witnesses who can either corroborate or deny Mr. Weber's statements to police.

## **Lied**

You are being asked to provide some feedback on a fictional police investigation. Please read the description below and answer the questions that follow.

At approximately 1:34 in the afternoon on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> a house on Main St. in a small town in Ontario was broken into. The residents of the home were not present at the time the robbery occurred. A neighbour heard the home alarm sound and saw someone running down the street and getting into a black Honda Civic. The neighbour was only able to see the first two letters, AW, on the license plate. The neighbour described the assailant as a white male, approximately 5'8"-5'10", with a slim build. According to the witness, the robber was wearing

black jeans, a red Nike polo shirt and a black baseball cap. The home owners reported that the only thing missing was a gold diamond necklace.

A few weeks later the police received a tip about David Weber. Mr. Weber fits the description given to police; he is 5'8", weighs 155 pounds and works as an accountant. However, the license plate number on his black Honda Civic is AVX 285. The neighbour was shown a picture line-up and identified Mr. Weber as the culprit. The police obtained a warrant and went to Mr. Weber's house to search the premises. While there they found a gold diamond necklace amongst his wife's jewelry. They also found clothing that fit the description given by the neighbour. The police took Mr. Weber to the police station for questioning. During the questioning when asked where he was at 1:30pm on Friday September 24<sup>th</sup> Mr. Weber responded by saying he was at work where he always is on Fridays. Once the questioning was completed the police let him go telling him they would be in touch if they had any more questions for him.

The following day police contact Mr. Weber for further questioning. Upon arriving at the police station for further questioning he tells them that he was not at work on the day in question, and had lied about being there because he was embarrassed about what he was actually doing on that particular afternoon. He, in fact, had gone to an appointment at a clinic to seek treatment for erectile dysfunction.

In sum the neighbour identified Mr. Weber from the photo line-up, and police found a necklace that resembles the one that was stolen from the homeowners during the robbery, and clothes that match those worn by the robber. Mr. Weber originally stated that he was at work that particular afternoon but upon further questioning admits that he had lied in order to avoid the embarrassment of admitting where he was on the day in question and changed his initial

statement. There are no witnesses who can either corroborate or deny Mr. Weber's statements to police.





**7) Do you believe Mr. Weber is being honest at this point?**

Yes

No

**8) If you had to make a choice based on the evidence available, would you say that Mr. Weber is:**

**Guilty** \_\_\_\_\_

**Not Guilty** \_\_\_\_\_

**9) Please explain why you chose the verdict you did?**

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**10) Additional Comments**

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### **Self Report Trust Scale (MacDonald, Kessel, & Fuller, 1972)**

Please complete the following brief scale, by indicating either your agreement or disagreement with each statement, circling the response which best corresponds to the way you feel. Please note that the type of appropriate response varies with each statement.

- 1) I expect other people to be honest and open
  1. Strongly Agree
  2. Agree
  3. Disagree
  4. Strongly Disagree
  
- 2) I am less trusting than the average person.
  1. Strongly Disagree
  2. Disagree
  3. Agree
  4. Strongly Agree
  
- 3) I am more trusting than the average university student.
  1. Strongly Disagree
  2. Disagree
  3. Agree
  4. Strongly Agree
  
- 4) I am suspicious of other people's intentions.
  1. Often
  2. Sometimes
  3. Seldom
  4. Never
  
- 5) I am less trusting than the average student in my major area.
  1. Strongly Disagree
  2. Disagree
  3. Agree
  4. Strongly Agree

- 6) I have faith in human nature.
1. Strongly Disagree
  2. Disagree
  3. Agree
  4. Strongly Agree
- 7) I feel that other people can be relied upon to do what they say they will do.
1. Nobody
  2. A Few People
  3. Some People
  4. Most People
- 8) I feel that other people are out to get as much as they can for themselves.
1. Most People
  2. Some People
  3. A Few People
  4. Nobody
- 9) I have faith in the promises or statements of other people.
1. Very Much
  2. Much
  3. Little
  4. Very Little
- 10) I am cynical (pessimistic).
1. Strongly Agree
  2. Agree
  3. Disagree
  4. Strongly Disagree









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