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Alibi Witnesses: Willingness to Provide False Alibis

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Alibi Witnesses:
Opinions of Defendants and Willingness to Provide False Alibis
by
Karen Ryndak

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ALIBI WITNESSES: WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE FALSE ALIBIS

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Abstract

Hamilton's Rule (1964) involves the notion that the likelihood of an altruistic act being performed is predicted by the degree of relatedness between the recipient and the donor. Therefore, the extent to which people would be willing to lie for a defendant is a function of the degree of biological relationship between the defendant and the alibi witness. The researchers of the current study presented participants with one murder and one burglary packet containing a police report summary and a hypothetical scenario. The summary police report detailed case facts, evidence collected, and witness statements. Following their reading of the police report summary participants made judgments on witness' credibility, defendant's guilt and types of evidence. In the hypothetical scenarios, participants were asked to imagine their father or male friend is pleading with them to act as an alibi witness. Participants then agreed or disagreed to serve as an alibi witness. Overall, the researchers found participants were unwilling to provide false alibis, however, when they were, participants gave false alibis for their father more often than for their friend. Limitations may be a restricted sample, evidence certainty, and the yes or no decision to providing a false alibi. Future research should include an examination of individual differences and moral development.

Alibi Witnesses: Opinions of Defendants and Willingness to Provide False Alibis

What is an alibi? One can refer to an alibi in two contexts, the colloquial and the legal. In the colloquial context, an alibi can be defined as a story offered by a suspect in a criminal investigation (Olson & Wells, 2004). In the colloquial context, the term “no alibi” is usually referring to a defendant’s story that has no proof. For example, many people consider the phrase “I was at home alone” not to be an alibi (Olson & Wells, 2004). The colloquial definition is slightly different from that used in the legal context. The legal definition of an alibi is “a defense that places the defendant at the relevant time of the crime in a different place than the scene involved and so removed therefrom as to render it impossible for one to be the guilty party” (Nolan, 1990, p.71). From the legal perspective, the claim “I was at home alone” is an alibi because, if it is true, it is a claim that places the person at a time and place that makes it impossible for him or her to have committed the crime. It must be noted that from a legal standpoint an alibi has two components: the alibi claim itself and the evidence offered in support of the claim. The circumstance under which a defendant gives an alibi determines the difference between the legal and colloquial definitions. In the legal sense an alibi is used in a criminal trial, where as in the colloquial sense it is used in a criminal investigation (Olson & Wells, 2004). The legal definition will be used from this point on when referring to an alibi.

A true alibi is one in which an innocent suspect gives an accurate account of his or her whereabouts at the time of the crime. An untrue alibi has two different types, fabricated and mistaken. A fabricated alibi is deliberately false because the suspect is guilty or is unwilling to reveal the truth. A mistaken alibi is one that is given initially as fact because an innocent suspect believes it to be true, but is later proven to be false (Burke, Turtle, & Olson, 2007). In their taxonomy, Olson and Wells (2004) proposed that an alibi can be further classified as either

strong or weak. What distinguishes strong from weak alibis is the level of proof that is offered in support of the alibi. There are two types of evidence that can be presented as corroboration of an alibi. The first type is physical evidence. This type of evidence includes receipts, surveillance videos, and other forms of physical records that indicate that a person was at a certain place at a given time. Physical evidence is usually seen as being more credible than person evidence. The second type is person evidence. This type of evidence includes testimony from family, friends, or strangers that can “confirm” that the person was at a particular place at the time of the crime. Interestingly, Olson and Wells found that juror opinions were influenced more by physical evidence, even when it was easy to fabricate, than by having an alibi witness, even when that witness had no apparent motivation to lie for the suspect. However, a mere claim that a defendant was at a particular location at a given time is likely to be insufficient because there must be evidence to support the claim for an alibi to be considered at all believable.

Olson and Wells (2004) proposed two elements that are present in a good alibi. The first element is believability, which was partially discussed under the types of evidence and alibi corroborators. Believability may be conceived as the strength of the physical or person evidence used to corroborate an alibi. The second element is the perceived ease of fabrication of alibi evidence. Perceived ease of fabrication may be conceived as the evaluator’s perception of how easily the defendant could manufacture evidence in support of his or her alibi. For example, a defendant might claim he or she was watching television at the time of the crime and supports the alibi by describing events of the television show. However, the defendant could have easily taped the show and watched it later or even searched for an episode summary on the Internet. Physical evidence is often viewed as the most credible evidence because it is difficult to manufacture. For example, it would be difficult for a defendant to fabricate a dated and timed

security video placing him or her at a store across town. It is possible that a defendant could tamper with the store's tapes; however the relative complexity of fabricating the video should make the alibi proof very strong. Person evidence can be viewed as having varying degrees of perceived ease of fabrication. In other words, it may be perceived as being easier to organize alibi-corroborating testimony from a relative than from a stranger. This may be because his or her relationship with the defendant could provide motivation to fabricate a story favoring the defendant. There are many factors that evaluators use in the determining what constitutes a good alibi.

Olson and Wells (2004) identified three different types of alibi corroborators or witnesses. The first are individuals who may be motivated to lie and are familiar with the defendant. These alibi corroborators often have a close relationship with the defendant, are unlikely to mistakenly identify the defendant, and may have motivation to lie in order to protect either the defendant or his or herself. An example of this type of alibi corroborator could be a spouse or child of the defendant. The second type are individuals who are not motivated to lie and are familiar with the defendant. These alibi corroborators are often the most believable because he or she is not motivated to protect or lie for the defendant and would not mistakenly identify the defendant. For instance, this type of alibi corroborator could be a neighbor or friend. The third type is strangers who are not motivated to lie and are not familiar with the defendant. The problem with this type of alibi corroborator is he or she could be mistaken in identifying the defendant. Hosch, Culhane, Jolly, Chavez, and Shaw (2011) further defined these three types of alibi witnesses as being biologically, affinally, or socially related to the defendant. Biological alibi witnesses are related to the defendant by blood, such as a father or daughter. Affinal alibi witnesses are related to the defendant by marriage, such as mother-in-law. Social witnesses are

strangers to or friends of the defendant who are related to the defendant only in social contexts. Social alibi witnesses are perceived by juries as being the most believable alibi corroborators, followed by affinal, and then biological witnesses (Hosch, et. al., 2011). Social alibi witnesses are the most believable because they are seen as the least likely to lie for a defendant. The strength of the testimony given by alibi witnesses is an integral component of establishing a high-quality alibi.

There are two connected concepts that may explain why biological alibi witnesses are perceived poorly: altruism and kinship. An altruistic act is one that benefits the recipient of the act, but may incur some cost to the donor. In this sense, a person who provides an alibi that is untruthful can be seen as performing an altruistic act. Accordingly, the costs to the donor are greater when he or she corroborates an untrue alibi so the act is comparatively more altruistic. When a donor makes a truthful corroboration, little cost is incurred other than the loss of time or the disclosure of personal information and therefore the degree of altruism is less. Hamilton (1964) argued that benefits increase to individuals who aid relatives with whom they share genes. In this way it should be expected that altruistic behavior is more likely to be performed toward a relative who is close kin, such as a child, compared to more distant kin, such as a father-in-law. The combination of these concepts can be summed up using Hamilton's Rule (1964). Hamilton's Rule is stated as $(rB > C)$, where B refers to the benefit to the recipient of an altruistic act, C refers to the cost to the donor of the altruistic act, and r refers to the degree of relatedness between the donor and the recipient of the altruistic act. When the levels of the benefit (B) and the cost (C) are held constant, the likelihood of an altruistic act being performed is predicted by the degree of relatedness (r). So, following this logic, the extent to which people would be willing to lie for a defendant is a function of the degree of biological relationship

between the defendant and the alibi witness (r). An r value is the probability that two individuals carry the same gene that was inherited from a common ancestor. An r value is calculated for a pair of related individuals assuming that an individual receives half of its genes from her or his mother and half from her or his father. For example, full siblings have an r of 0.5, half siblings have an r of 0.25, and first cousins have an r of 0.125, and so on (Hosch, et.al., 2011). As implied earlier, the benefits of lying for a defendant outweigh the costs to the alibi corroborator. Some of these benefits might include financial security, a place to live, or a favor in the future. Overall, biological alibi witnesses are viewed as being the least credible; however, there are different types of biological alibi witnesses (e.g. children).

It is well known that alibi testimony is given during a defendant's trial; however, eyewitness testimonies are usually a part of the trial as well. McAllister and Bregman (1989) demonstrated that the conviction rate was highest when an eyewitness identified the defendant, but an alibi witness did not counter the identification. Culhane and Hosch (2006) demonstrated that corroborating testimony significantly reduces the frequency of convictions when compared with no corroborating evidence or ambiguous testimony was present. An example of ambiguous evidence could be that the witness was asleep while the defendant was at his or her house. Nevertheless, when an eyewitness was present in addition to an alibi witness and was very confident, convictions were more frequent. In other words, when the eyewitness testified that he or she was 100% confident in his identification, the jurors convicted more frequently. Though, Costabile and Klein (2005) demonstrated that the effects of eyewitness testimony on jurors' verdicts may be attributable to a recency effect. It is suggested that incriminating evidence is more likely to lead to a guilty verdict when it is presented late in the trial as opposed to when it is presented early in the trial. This effect may be moderated by the juror's memory of the critical

evidence. That is, evidence presented later was more likely to be remembered by the jurors, and consequently, more likely to influence verdicts.

Researchers have yet to investigate the impact an alibi witness' personality traits have in determining whether participants will provide an alibi for a defendant. One personality trait that may have an impact on willingness to provide a false alibi is need for approval, or socially desirable responding. Crowne and Marlowe (1960) described social desirability as the tendency to respond in a way that one believes will lead to approval from others or avoid their disapproval. Paulhus (1984) further separated socially desirable responding into two different constructs, self deceptive enhancement and impression management. Paulhus defined self-deception as the unconscious tendency to present oneself in a favorable manner while impression management is the conscious tendency to present oneself in a favorable manner. DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, and Epstein (1996) performed a study in which they based their theoretical framework of lying in everyday life from perspectives of impression management in the social psychology literature. They found that participants told far more lies to benefit themselves, however, close to one out of every four lies that participants told were told to benefit other people. The lies told to benefit others were to protect them from embarrassment or worry or from having their feelings hurt. In addition, Kashy and DePaulo (1996) found that people who were higher in impression management not only told significantly more lies for themselves, but also told significantly more lies for others. The lies told for another person included protecting others from physical punishment, protecting their property or assets, or protecting their safety. These researchers demonstrated that people are willing to tell minor lies to benefit others in their every lives, but further research is needed in high stakes situations such as criminal investigations.

The researcher of the current study aims to expand upon methodology in previous research. The current study consisted of two parts. Participants received one murder and one burglary packet containing a police report summary and a hypothetical scenario. The researchers included both murder and burglary crimes in order to gauge if crime severity impacted participants' decisions. The summary police report detailed the case facts, evidence collected, and witness statements. Following the police report summary participants made judgments on witness' credibility, defendant's guilt and types of evidence. In the hypothetical scenarios, participants were asked to imagine their father or male friend is pleading with the participant to act as an alibi witness. Participants then agreed or disagreed to act as an alibi witness for the suspect. Finally, researchers have yet to investigate the impact an alibi witness' personality traits have in determining whether participants will provide an alibi for a defendant. The researcher of this study used the personality trait need for approval to begin to explore the impact of personality traits on willingness to provide a false alibi. Hypotheses for the study are as follows: Participants would rate eyewitnesses (strangers to the defendant) as being more credible than alibi witnesses (friends to the defendant). Next, participants would be more willing to give a false alibi for their father than for a friend. Finally, participants with high levels of impression management would give false alibis less often than participants with high levels.

Method

Participants

A total of 110 students (86 females and 24 males) from the University of North Florida voluntarily participated in this experiment and signed an informed consent form. We recruited participants from Psychology courses through the SONA system in place on the university campus and participants received extra credit for their participation. We found participants' ethnic demographics to be: 61.8% of participants were Caucasian, 12.7% were African

American, 12.7% were Hispanic, and 6.4% were Asian American, and 6.4% were of other ethnicity. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 48 years old, with a mean age of 22.68 years ($SD = 5.35$). We randomly assigned participants to one of four groups, with two of the groups comprising of 27 participants each and two of the groups comprising of 28 participants each. We replaced participants missing scores on the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding with their mean score for the rest of the inventory. In addition, we excluded all other missing data on an analysis by analysis basis.

Research Design

The design of the current study was a combination of repeated measures and between-subjects components. The prediction regarding how much participants rely on different types of evidence in making judgments of guilt was tested with a 2 (murder, burglary) x 3 (physical evidence, alibi witness, eyewitness) design, with participants' ratings of weight on the types of evidence being the dependent variable. The prediction of participants' judgments concerning the different witnesses' was tested with a 2 (murder, burglary) x 2 (eyewitness, alibi witness) design, with participants' credibility ratings being the dependent variable. The judgments of defendants' guilt was tested with a 2 (murder, burglary) x 2 (innocent, guilty) design, with the number of participants providing each of the verdicts being the dependent variable. The prediction regarding relationships' credibility was tested with a 2 (murder, burglary) x 2 (father, friend) mixed design, with participants' ratings of their relationships' credibility being the dependent variable. Participants who received father or friend for both the murder and the burglary hypothetical scenarios were analyzed using a within subjects designs. Participants who received father only for the murder scenario and friend only for the murder scenario were analyzed using a between subjects designs. In addition, participants who received father only for the burglary

scenario and friend only for the burglary scenario were analyzed using a between subjects designs. The prediction regarding willingness to provide a false alibi was tested with a 2 (murder, burglary) x 2 (father, friend) between subjects design, with participants' decisions of whether or not to provide a false alibi being the dependent variable. The prediction regarding participants' levels of impression management was tested using a between subjects design with participants' composite scores on the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding and type of crime as the independent variables and their yes or no decisions as the dependent variable.

Measures

In order to assess levels of need for approval, participants completed Paulhus' Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1991). Paulhus' scale consists of two constructs, self deceptive enhancement and impression management. The Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding consisted of 40 items that participants answered on a seven point scale (one indicating not true and seven indicating very true) assessing their level of agreement with each item. Questions one through twenty measured the self deceptive enhancement construct and questions twenty one through forty assessed the impression management construct. After the 20 negatively keyed items were reverse-scored, one point was added for each extreme response (6 or 7). The extreme scores of the 40 items were summed to give an overall measure of social desirable responding. In addition, a composite score was calculated by summing all of the participants' responses. Low scores on the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding indicate low levels of need for approval and high scores indicate high levels of need for approval. We conducted a reliability analysis on each of the subscales and scale as a whole to assess the internal consistency. The self deceptive enhancement subscale ($\alpha = .71$), impression

management subscale ($\alpha = .76$), and the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding Scale ($\alpha = .81$) all had Cronbach's Alphas of greater than 0.7, indicating good internal consistency.

Procedure

Each participant began by entering the controlled lab setting. Participants completed an informed consent form and a short demographics questionnaire assessing age, sex, and ethnicity. Next, participants received a packet containing two different summaries of a police report and a hypothetical scenario (See Appendix A) detailing the same crime from a different perspective for each. The summary police reports and hypothetical scenarios were created by the researcher with strong evidence in order to imply guilt. The police report summaries detailed the case facts, evidence collected, and witness statements in either a murder or burglary investigation. Participants then answered a series of six questions. In responding to the first question, participants gave a guilty or innocent verdict for the suspect. For questions two and three, participants gave a credibility rating for the alibi witness and eyewitness on a scale of one to five, with one being not credible and five being very credible. For questions four through six, participants gave ratings for how much weight they put on physical evidence, alibi witnesses, and eyewitnesses when judging guilt on a scale of one to five, with one being little weight and five being substantial weight.

Following the summary police reports, participants were asked in the hypothetical scenarios to imagine the suspect from the summary police reports as their father or male friend. Participants envisioned their father or male friend was begging them to serve as a false alibi witness. Participants then answered three questions. For the first question, participants gave a credibility rating for their father or male friend on a scale of one to five, with one being not credible and five being very credible. Next, participants gave a yes or no answer when asked if

they would serve as an alibi witness. Finally, participants gave a rating of their own credibility on a scale of one to five, with one being not credible and five being very credible.

Four sets, two murder and two burglary, of police report summaries and scenarios were created. Participants received one set from the murder and one set from the burglary. The set of summary police report and crime scenario was counterbalanced by randomizing the order in which participants received each. In other words, some participants received the murder set first while others received the burglary set first. Finally, participants completed the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding to assess their levels of need for approval.

Results

We conducted a Pearson chi-square analysis to determine if guilty verdicts differed based on the different types of crime (i.e., murder and burglary). There was no significant difference ($\chi^2 < 1.00$). In other words, there is no significant difference in the proportion of participants who gave guilty verdicts in murder and those who gave guilty verdicts in burglary.

We conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA to determine how credible participants rated witness (i.e., alibi and eyewitnesses) for each type of crime. We found a main effect for type of crime ($F(1,108) = 15.61, p < .001$). Compared to burglary witnesses ($M = 3.26, SD = .084$), participants perceived murder witnesses ($M = 2.94, SD = .08$) as less credible, regardless of witness type. In addition, we found a main effect for witness type ($F(1,108) = 44.59, p < .001$). Participants perceived eyewitnesses ($M = 3.44, SD = .08$) as being more credible than alibi witnesses ($M = 2.76, SD = .09$), regardless of type of crime.

We conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA to determine which types of evidence participants give most weight to when determining guilt or innocence in each type of crime. We found main effects for evidence ($F(2,218) = 74.48, p < .001$) and type of crime ($F(1, 109) =$

135.71, $p < .001$). In addition, we found an interaction between the type of crime and evidence ($F(2,218) = 64.79, p < .001$). Compared to burglary summary police reports ($M = 3.05, SD = .089$), participants gave physical evidence significantly more weight in murder summary police reports ($M = 4.42, SD = .09$). In addition, compared to burglary summary police reports ($M = 3.17, SD = .09$), participants gave eyewitness testimony significantly more weight in murder summary police reports ($M = 4.37, SD = .09$). However, we found no significant difference in weight given to alibi witness testimony between murder summary police reports ($M = 2.79, SD = .09$) and burglary summary police reports ($M = 2.89, SD = .10$).

We conducted a series of t -tests to determine how credible participants rated their father or male friend based on type of crime and type of relationship. First, we conducted a paired samples t -test using participants who received the father relationship on both the murder and burglary scenarios. We found no significant difference in credibility ratings ($t(26) = .66, p = .518$). Next, we conducted a paired samples t -test using participants who received the friend relationship on both the murder and burglary scenarios. We found no significant difference in credibility ratings ($t(27) = .87, p = .390$). Third, we conducted an independent samples t -test between participants who received the father relationship only for the murder scenario and participants who received the friend relationship only for the murder scenario. We found a significant difference in credibility ratings ($t(108) = 2.47, p = .015$). Compared to participants who received the male friend scenario ($M = 2.28, SD = .98$), participants who received the father scenario ($M = 2.80, SD = 1.22$) gave significantly higher credibility ratings. Finally, we conducted an independent samples t -test between participants who received the father relationship only for the burglary scenario and participants who received the friend relationship

only for burglary scenario. We found no significant difference in these credibility ratings ($t(108) = 1.669, p = .098$).

We conducted a Pearson chi-square analysis to determine if willingness to provide a false alibi changed based on different types of crimes. There was no significant difference ($\chi^2 < 1.00$). In other words, there is no significant difference in the proportion of participants who gave false alibis in murder and those who gave false alibis in burglary.

We conducted a set of Pearson chi-square analyses to determine if willingness to provide a false alibi differed with the father relationship versus the friend relationship for each type of crime. First, we analyzed the decision to vouch for father versus friend for murder. We found the results to be significant ($\chi^2 (1, N = 109) = 7.10, p = .008$). For those who received the father relationship, more participants said no (66.0%) compared to those who said yes (34.0%). In addition, for those who received the friend relationship, more participants said no (87.5%) compared to those who said yes (12.5%). Overall, it seems that participants were unwilling to provide a false alibi. However, when they did, participants were more willing to provide a false alibi for their father (34.0%) than for their friend (12.5%). Next, we analyzed the decision to vouch for father versus friend for burglary. Again, we found the results to be significant ($\chi^2 (1, N = 109) = 14.01, p < .001$). For those who received the father relationship, more participants said no (57.4%) compared to those who said yes (42.6%). In addition, for those who received the friend relationship, more participants said no (89.1%) compared to those who said yes (10.9%). Overall, it seems that participants were unwilling to provide a false alibi. However, when they did, participants were more willing to provide a false alibi for their father (42.6%) than for their friend (10.9%). We concluded that overall, regardless of type of crime, participants are more

willing to provide a false alibi for their father than for their friend due to the direction of the significant relationship being the same for both types of crimes.

We conducted a series of binomial logistic regression analyses¹ to predict willingness to provide false alibis using the composite scores² of the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding within each type of crime as a predictor. First, we analyzed participants' composite scores of the overall Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding with each type of crime (i.e. murder and burglary) to predict willingness to provide a false alibi. We tested the null model for burglary and the null model for murder which contained only participants' yes or no decisions against the full model for murder and the full model for burglary which contained scores on the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding as a predictor. We found that the full model was not statistically significant for murder ($b = -.02$, Wald $\chi^2 (1, N = 109) = 2.62$, $p = .106$), indicating that the probability of providing a false alibi did not change for murder scenarios as a function of low or high need for approval. However, we found that the full model was statistically significant for burglary ($b = -.03$, Wald $\chi^2 (1, N = 109) = 6.97$, $p = .008$), indicating that the predictor reliably distinguished between participants who said yes and those who said no.

Next, we analyzed the composite scores of the self-deceptive enhancement subscale with each type of crime. We tested the null model for murder and the null model for burglary which contained only participants' yes or no decisions against the full model for murder and full model for burglary which contained scores on the self-deceptive enhancement subscale as a predictor. We found no significant differences in the probability of providing a false alibi for either murder ($b = -.003$, Wald $\chi^2 < 1.00$) or burglary ($b = -.03$, Wald $\chi^2 (1, N = 109) = 2.75$, $p = .098$). Finally, we analyzed the composite scores of the impression management subscale with each type of crime. We tested the null model for murder and the null model for burglary which contained

only participants' yes or no decisions against the full model for murder and the full model for burglary which contained scores on the impression management subscale as a predictor. We found that the full model was statistically significant for murder ($b = -.04$, Wald $\chi^2(1, N = 109) = 5.38$, $p = .020$), indicating that the predictor reliably distinguished between participants who said yes and those who said no. We found that the full model was also statistically significant for burglary ($b = -.04$, Wald $\chi^2(1, N = 109) = 7.54$, $p = .006$), indicating that the predictor reliably distinguished between participants who said yes and those who said no.

Finally, we conducted an ancillary analysis to determine if participants' initial decisions of guilt or innocence impacted their later decision of whether or not to provide a false alibi. We conducted a chi-square test of independence using murder verdicts and the decisions to provide a false alibi. There was no significant difference ($\chi^2(1, N = 109) = 3.23$, $p = .072$). However, as this chi-square approached traditional levels of significance, we cautiously interpreted a marginal effect to be present. That is, it seems that participants' verdicts about guilt or innocence concerning murder have a slight effect on their later decisions to provide a false alibi. Future researchers should check for independence when using murder scenarios. We also conducted a chi-square test of independence using verdicts about guilt or innocence concerning burglary and the decisions to provide a false alibi. There was no significant difference ($\chi^2 < 1.00$). In other words, the participants' burglary verdicts are independent of their decisions to provide a false alibi.

Discussion

Results of the current study supported the hypotheses presented at the end of the introduction. First, participants rated eyewitnesses as being more credible than alibi witnesses. Next, participants were more willing to give a false alibi for their father than for a friend. The

results we found for the first two hypotheses replicate the results in past research. In addition, the hypothesis that participants with high levels of impression management would give false alibis less often than participants with low levels was supported. In particular, impression management reliably distinguished between participants who said yes and those who said no to provide a false alibi for both murder and burglary. These results support the conceptualization of impression management used in the scale. Paulhus (1984) described impression management as the conscious predisposition to present oneself in a favorable manner. Participants who were higher in impression management were therefore more consciously aware of the social standards of responding to the situation (Zerbe & Paulhus, 1987). In the case of the presented hypothetical situation, refusing to provide a false alibi was the appropriate manner of responding.

Limitations

There are limitations to the present study that impact the generalizability of the results. College students are a unique population in that they are a restricted sample. Sears (1980) detailed a few of these limitations, such as undergraduates usually come from a very narrow age range, are concentrated at the upper levels of educational background. Kashy and DePaulo (1996) found that community members lied less often than college students. In addition, older people lied less frequently than the younger. Finally, they found that college students were more concerned with impression management. In addition, Bottoms, Goodman, Schwartz-Kenney, and Thomas (2002), found that older children concealed the transgression of a parent when asked, while younger children did not. Therefore, future research is needed to determine if there are age differences in providing a false alibi.

In addition, identifying with the defendant may lead people to provide a false alibi. Levine, Prosser, Evans, and Reicher (2005) provide evidence for the relationship between in-

group membership and helping behavior. In their experiment, participants' recognition of the signs of common group membership in a stranger led to an increased likelihood that bystanders would intervene to help those in distress. Following this logic, people may be more willing to provide a false alibi for family members or friends with whom they identify. In addition, people may even be willing to provide false alibis for strangers if they recognize signs of common group membership.

Furthermore, the yes or no approach to asking if participants would provide a false alibi may not provide researchers with a full understanding of their willingness to do so. A combination of the yes or no approach and a focused continuous scale may be more appropriate to gauge how willing participants are to provide a false alibi. Including a continuous scale may also gauge participants' opinions of providing a false alibi. For example, researchers could ask participants how confident they are in their decision to provide a false alibi. However, the yes or no approach would represent the choice to participants as it would be presented to them in a real world situation. In other words, the dichotomous choice would maintain the ecological validity of the study, or whether the causal relationship holds over variations in persons, settings, treatment variables, and measurement variables (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

Finally, the clear evidence of guilt may limit the emergence of individual differences in providing a false alibi. Varying the ambiguity of the evidence in the summary police reports and hypothetical scenarios may allow these individual differences to surface. Furnham and Ribchester (1995) described ambiguity tolerance as the way in which an individual perceives and processes information about ambiguous situations when confronted by unfamiliar evidence. A person with low ambiguity tolerance experiences stress, and avoids ambiguous stimuli, whereas a person with high ambiguity tolerance perceives ambiguous situations as desirable and

interesting. Frenkel-Brunswik (1951) proposed many characteristics of those who are low in ambiguity tolerance. These characteristics include a black-white view of life, inability to allow for the possibility of good and bad traits in the same person, and premature closure. Therefore, those who are low in ambiguity tolerance may be less likely to provide false alibis.

Future Research

Researchers should explore gender differences in willingness to provide a false alibi. DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, and Epstein (1996) found that women lie more frequently than men. They were also more likely to tell lies for others, as opposed to self-centered lies. Eckel and Grossman (1998) also found that women appear to be more altruistic than men. In addition, Guadagno and Cialdini (2007) found gender differences in impression management strategies that are consistent with gender role expectations. In particular, men use more assertive, dominant tactics, while women use more passive and cooperative tactics. Based on these research studies, women may be more willing to provide false alibis than men.

Finally, researchers should consider the effect of participants' moral development. In particular, which stage a person is in their moral development. Kohlberg (1971) presented six stages in which moral development occurs. In stage two, a right action is one that instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and sometimes the needs of others. Actions to satisfy the needs of others depend on reciprocity. While in this stage of moral development, a person may be more likely to provide a false alibi if he or she perceives reciprocity in the future. In stage 3, a right action is one that pleases or helps others. While in this stage, a person may be more likely to provide a false alibi if he or she perceives it will help the defendant. Further exploration is needed to determine the relationship between moral development and willingness to provide a false alibi.

Conclusion

In conclusion, participants rated eyewitnesses as being more credible than alibi witnesses in both murder and burglary scenarios. In addition, participants were more likely to provide a false alibi for their father than for their friend. Finally, the hypothesis that participants with high levels of impression management would give false alibis less often than participants with low levels was supported. In particular, impression management reliably distinguished between participants who said yes and those who said no to provide a false alibi for both murder and burglary. A person's willingness to provide a false alibi has serious implications for the legal system. For example, law enforcement may conduct investigations and interviews of alibi witnesses differently based on the relationship between the witness and the defendant. In addition, the efficiency of the criminal justice system may be improved by being able to decipher between true and false alibis given by witnesses. However, future research is needed to determine who and when a person is most likely to provide a false alibi.

Appendix A
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Scenario 1.1: Murder

Directions: You are participating in a grand jury hearing that is deciding whether to charge a suspect with murder. You are allowed to read this police report.

Case Facts:

- Victim is a male
- Stabbed seven times
- Time of death is around 12:30 am

Evidence collected:

- Bloody hunting knife recovered from suspect's car
- Bloody t-shirt recovered from laundry basket in suspect's house

Witness statements:

- A witness says he remembers seeing the suspect with the victim at a bar around 11:30 pm. He remembers a verbal altercation between the suspect and victim. He does not remember what was said during the altercation but does remember seeing the victim try to punch the suspect before being held back by other friends. He later recalls seeing the victim get into the suspect's car at around 11:45 pm. They seemed to have resolved the conflict that took place earlier and they left together.
- A neighbor of the victim, who is also a family friend of the suspect, recalls that the suspect came over to their house to say hello after dropping off the victim. He recollects that the suspect did not leave their house until sometime after 12:30 am.

Questions:

1. If on a jury, would you rule the suspect innocent or guilty?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the witness who saw the suspect and victim together at the bar?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the victim's neighbor, who is also a family friend of the suspect?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give to physical evidence when considering guilt or innocence?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of eyewitnesses when considering guilt or innocence?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of alibi witnesses when considering guilt or innocence?

Appendix A Continued
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Now imagine the suspect is your father. He has been charged with murder and is preparing for trial. There is a witness who places him at the bar with the victim until 11:45 pm. However, there is no one, such as a friend, to account for his whereabouts during the time of the murder. Imagine this response from him after you have asked what really happened that night.

“The police think I killed him because I was the last one to be seen with him alive. A few friends and I went out to the get a couple of drinks to celebrate his birthday. I was the designated driver so I didn’t drink anything. But you know how hostile the others get when they’ve had a lot to drink. They say things they don’t mean and try to start fights for fun. I wouldn’t be surprised if someone from the bar followed us on the way home and stabbed him after I dropped him off. I’m being charged with his murder. I don’t know how they could think I did this; he was one of my best friends. I own a hunting knife but I keep it locked in my glove box. I only take it out when I go hunting. He was stabbed seven times. I could never do that. They say he was killed just after 12:30 a.m. I know I wasn’t back home then, but can you say that I was? Can you tell them you saw me come back in the house before 12:30 a.m.? Please, I can’t go to jail for murder. You depend on me to pay for school; I couldn’t do that from jail. Please, please tell them I was with you. One of the other guys who was with us has his kid vouching for him. Please do this for me.”

Questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think your father’s story is about the murder?
2. Yes or no: Are you willing to vouch for your father?
3. If yes: On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think you would be in vouching for your father?

Appendix A Continued
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Scenario 1.2: Murder

Directions: You are participating in a grand jury hearing that is deciding whether to charge a suspect with murder. You are allowed to read this police report.

Case Facts:

- Victim is a male
- Stabbed seven times
- Time of death is around 12:30 am

Evidence collected:

- Bloody hunting knife recovered from suspect's car
- Bloody t-shirt recovered from laundry basket in suspect's house

Witness statements:

- A witness says he remembers seeing the suspect with the victim at a bar around 11:30 pm. He remembers a verbal altercation between the suspect and victim. He does not remember what was said during the altercation but does remember seeing the victim try to punch the suspect before being held back by other friends. He later recalls seeing the victim get into the suspect's car at around 11:45 pm. They seemed to have resolved the conflict that took place earlier and they left together.
- A neighbor of the victim, who is also a family friend of the suspect, recalls that the suspect came over to their house to say hello after dropping off the victim. He recollects that the suspect did not leave their house until sometime after 12:30 am.

Questions:

1. If on a jury, would you rule the suspect innocent or guilty?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the witness who saw the suspect and victim together at the bar?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the victim's neighbor, who is also a family friend of the suspect?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give physical evidence when considering guilt or innocence?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of eyewitnesses when considering guilt or innocence?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of alibi witnesses when considering guilt or innocence?

Appendix A Continued
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Now imagine the suspect is your male friend. He has been charged with murder and is preparing for trial. There is a witness who places him at the bar with the victim until 11:45 pm. However, there is no one to account for his whereabouts during the time of the murder. Imagine this response from him after you have asked what really happened that night.

“The police think I killed him because I was the last one to be seen with him alive. A few friends and I went out to the get a couple of drinks to celebrate his birthday. I was the designated driver so I didn’t drink anything. But you know how hostile the others get when they’ve had a lot to drink. They say things they don’t mean and try to start fights for fun. I wouldn’t be surprised if someone from the bar followed us on the way home and stabbed him after I dropped him off. I’m being charged with his murder. I don’t know how they could think I did this; he was one of my best friends. I own a hunting knife but I keep it locked in my glove box. I only take it out when I go hunting. He was stabbed seven times. I could never do that. They say he was killed just after 12:30 a.m. I know I wasn’t back home then, but can you say that I was? Can you tell them you saw me come back in the house before 12:30 a.m.? Please, I can’t go to jail for murder. You depend on me to pay for rent; I couldn’t do that from jail. Please, please tell them I was with you. One of the other guys who was with us has his roommate vouching for him. Please do this for me.”

Questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think your friend’s story is about the murder?
2. Yes or no: Are you willing to vouch for your friend?
3. If yes: On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think you would be in vouching for your friend?

Appendix A Continued
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Scenario 2.1: Burglary

Directions: You are participating in a grand jury hearing that is deciding whether to charge a suspect with burglary. You are allowed to read this police report.

Case Facts:

- Victim is a male
- Property stolen from victim's residence at about 12 am
- Property stolen: \$5,000 Rolex watch, \$250, Apple MacBook Air laptop, and Ipod Shuffle

Evidence Collected:

- \$5,000 Rolex watch recovered at pawn shop near victim's house with records indicating the suspect had pawned the watch
- Apple MacBook Air laptop recovered at the suspect's house

Witness Statements:

- The pawn shop owner remembers seeing a man matching the suspect's description enter his shop at around 12:15 am. The man pawned a "very expensive authentic Rolex watch". He recalls that the man did not leave his shop until about 12:30 am.
- A neighbor of the victim, who is also a family friend of the suspect, remembers seeing the suspect talking to the victim outside the victim's house at about 11:30 pm. He remembers a verbal altercation between the suspect and victim. He could not hear all of what was said during the altercation but remembers hearing the suspect accuse the victim of withholding his bonus. He recalls that the suspect came over to his house to say hello at about 11:45 and did not leave until sometime after 12:00 am.

Questions

1. If on a jury, would you rule the suspect innocent or guilty?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the witness who saw the suspect at his pawn shop?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the victim's neighbor, who is also a family friend of the suspect?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give physical evidence when considering guilt or innocence?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of eyewitnesses when considering guilt or innocence?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of alibi witnesses when considering guilt or innocence?

Appendix A Continued
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Now imagine the suspect is your father. He has been charged with burglary and is preparing for trial. There is a witness who places him outside the victim's house at 11:30 pm. However, there is no one, such as a friend, to account for his whereabouts during the time of the burglary. Imagine this response from him after you have asked what really happened that night.

“The police think I robbed him because he refused to give me my annual bonus check at work. I just went by his house to ask why I wasn't getting my bonus this year. It's not like he needed the money. He wears expensive clothes and drives a Porsche. I would be surprised if someone else in the company robbed him because there were tons of people who were angry. I'm being charged with robbing his house. Yeah I was angry, but I could never do this. He wasn't just my boss, he was also my friend. I can never stay angry at him for long. They say he was robbed at around midnight. I know I wasn't back home then, but can you say that I was? Can you tell them you saw me come back in the house before midnight? Please, I can't go to jail for robbery because they'll make me pay it all back. You depend on me to pay for school; I couldn't do that from jail. Please, please tell them I was with you. One of my coworkers who was angry at our boss has his kid vouching for him. Please do this for me.”

Questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think your father's story is about the burglary?
2. Yes or no: Are you willing to vouch for your father?
3. If yes: On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think you would be in vouching for your father?

Appendix A Continued
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Scenario 2.2: Burglary

Directions: You are participating in a grand jury hearing that is deciding whether to charge a suspect with burglary. You are allowed to read this police report.

Case Facts:

- Victim is a male
- Property stolen from victim's residence at about 12 am
- Property stolen: \$5,000 Rolex watch, \$250, Apple MacBook Air laptop, and Ipod Shuffle

Evidence Collected:

- \$5,000 Rolex watch recovered at pawn shop near victim's house with records indicating the suspect had pawned the watch
- Apple MacBook Air laptop recovered at the suspect's house

Witness Statements:

- The pawn shop owner remembers seeing a man matching the suspect's description enter his shop at around 12:15 am. The man pawned a "very expensive authentic Rolex watch". He recalls that the man did not leave his shop until about 12:30 am.
- A neighbor of the victim, who is also a family friend of the suspect, remembers seeing the suspect talking to the victim outside the victim's house at about 11:30 pm. He remembers a verbal altercation between the suspect and victim. He could not hear all of what was said during the altercation but remembers hearing the suspect accuse the victim of withholding his bonus. He recalls that the suspect came over to his house to say hello at about 11:45 and did not leave until sometime after 12:00 am.

Questions

1. If on a jury, would you rule the suspect innocent or guilty?
2. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the witness who saw the suspect at his pawn shop?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible would you rate the victim's neighbor, who is also a family friend of the suspect?
4. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give physical evidence when considering guilt or innocence?
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of eyewitnesses when considering guilt or innocence?
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating little weight and 5 indicating substantial weight, how much weight do you give testimony of alibi witnesses when considering guilt or innocence?

Appendix A Continued
Summary Police Reports and Scenarios

Now imagine the suspect is your male friend. He has been charged with burglary and is preparing for trial. There is a witness who places him outside the victim's house at 11:30 pm. However, there is no one to account for his whereabouts during the time of the burglary. Imagine this response from him after you have asked what really happened that night.

“The police think I robbed him because he refused to give me my annual bonus check at work. I just went by his house to ask why I wasn't getting my bonus this year. It's not like he needed the money. He wears expensive clothes and drives a Porsche. I would be surprised if someone else in the company robbed him because there were tons of people who were angry. I'm being charged with robbing his house. Yeah I was angry, but I could never do this. He wasn't just my boss, he was also my friend. I can never stay angry at him for long. They say he was robbed at around midnight. I know I wasn't back home then, but can you say that I was? Can you tell them you saw me come back in the house before midnight? Please, I can't go to jail for robbery because they'll make me pay it all back. You depend on me to pay for rent; I couldn't do that from jail. Please, please tell them I was with you. One of the other guys who was mad at our boss has his roommate vouching for him. Please do this for me.”

Questions:

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think your friend's story is about the burglary?
2. Yes or no: Are you willing to vouch for your friend?
3. If yes: On a scale of 1 to 5, 1 indicating not credible and 5 indicating very credible, how credible do you think you would be in vouching for your friend?

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Footnotes

¹Point-biserial correlation analyses were also conducted, yielding the same pattern of results

²Analyses conducted including the extreme scores yielded the same results as the composite scores

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