

LEGAL DECISION-MAKING ON CRIMES INVOLVING AN ALIBI

Sandy Jung
Grant MacEwan University

Meredith Allison
Elon University

Linzy Bohn
University of Alberta

The present study examined the influence of physical evidence in support of an alibi, type of crime, and alibi salaciousness on the verdict, sentencing, and credibility perceptions of 317 undergraduate mock jurors who read fabricated police and court summaries. Alibis substantiated by physical evidence were accompanied by fewer guilty verdicts, higher believability, and more positive character ratings. Although salaciousness did not influence trial outcomes and alibi believability, it interacted with physical evidence to produce less positive character ratings. The results also revealed that the crime type had a main effect on assigning prison sentences with sexual offenses leading to a greater likelihood of assigning a prison sentence. When participants espoused more conservative views, they were more likely to give guilty verdicts and negatively evaluate the defendant. The finding further indicated that those who gave guilty verdict decisions (over not guilty) saw alibis as less believable and perceived the defendant and corroborator more negatively.

Keywords: alibi, salaciousness, physical evidence, type of crime, verdict

Alibis in criminal proceedings can have a significant impact on legal decision-making. Defendants' claims about their actions and whereabouts during the time of the crime often directly influence whether they are found guilty in the court of law. Connors, Lundregan, Miller, and McEwen (1996) examined the first 28 DNA exonerated cases in the United States and found that seven of these cases implicated a "weak alibi" or "no alibi" as a primary factor contributing to the wrongful determination of guilt. Wells et al. (1998) included an additional 12 cases, and their analysis revealed that, following mistaken eyewitness identification, weak alibis were the primary factor contributing to the miscarriage of justice. Despite the apparent impact alibis may have on judicial and jury decision-making, only recently has attention been given to investigating the influence of alibis. The present study examines the influence of alibi evidence, salaciousness of alibis, and the type of

Author Note: Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Sandy Jung, Department of Psychology, Grant MacEwan University, P.O. Box 1796, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 2P2, Canada. E-mail address: sandy.jung@macewan.ca

crime on mock-juror perceptions of the parties involved. Moreover, the decision of imposing a guilty or not-guilty verdict in a case involving alibi evidence is investigated in terms of mock-juror perceptions of the defendant and alibi corroborator and the jurors' individual characteristics.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature has demonstrated that jurors are influenced by alibis and factors that mediate alibis. This empirical work has only begun to emerge in the past two decades. Available empirical studies reveal that judges' instructions, alibi strength, the nature of the relationship between the alibi provider and corroborator, race, and context in which the alibi was used, may influence verdict decisions and the believability of the alibi used. For example, Allison and Brimacombe (2010) found that mock jurors who heard judges' instructions, regarding the use of prior conviction evidence, rated alibis as more believable. Another study, conducted by Sargent and Bradfield (2004), manipulated mock jurors' motivation to provide a correct decision (high vs. low), the strength of the alibi used (strong vs. weak) and the defendant's race (African American vs. Caucasian) and found that, regardless of the defendant's race, participants in the high motivation condition judged the defendant's guilt as more likely when he provided a weak alibi. In contrast, under low motivation, the effect of alibi strength was moderated by the race of the defendant.

The strength of alibis is often varied depending on the presence of evidence, either physical or person evidence. Validating or supporting an alibi with physical evidence is not common in real life criminal cases. For example, Dysart and Strange (2012) found that 24% of suspects provided leads or references to physical alibi evidence but physical evidence that was difficult to fabricate, such as a videotape, was rare in actual cases. Despite the rarity of physical evidence, it is known that when alibi-supporting physical evidence is present in a case, it is influential on decisions made in the courtroom. Olson and Wells (2004) had participants evaluate alibis representing varying strengths of physical and person evidence and found that alibis corroborated by difficult-to-fabricate physical evidence (e.g., security camera footage) were perceived as more believable than alibis supported by easy-to-fabricate physical evidence (e.g., restaurant receipt). Allison, Mathews, and Michael (2012) also found similar results, indicating that strong alibis (i.e., supported by an unbiased person and physical evidence) were found to be more believable, and suspects with strong evidence in support of their alibi were less likely to be given guilty verdicts than suspects with weak evidence (i.e., supported by a biased person and no physical evidence). Comparable findings are seen when evaluating eyewitness evidence. For example, in Skolnick and Shaw's study (2001), a greater number of participants reported guilty verdicts when physical evidence (that implicated the defendant) was provided with or without an eyewitness over eyewitness evidence only. Interestingly, an examination of a subset of American and Canadian cases revealed on average only 2% (Supreme Court of Canada) to 14% (U.S. Court of Appeal) of cases that involved alibis that were substantiated by physical evidence (Burke & Turtle, 2003). When physical evidence such as DNA is available, alibis play an integral role in courtroom decisions. By presenting mock jurors with either

DNA evidence alone or DNA evidence accompanied by a corroborated alibi, Golding, Stewart, Yozwiak, Djadali, and Sanchez (2000) found that alibis served to attenuate the impact of DNA evidence. Participants in the alibi condition rendered fewer guilty verdicts and rated the sexual assault victim's testimony as less believable.

Similarly, previous research has shown that person evidence influences juror decision making. Olson and Wells (2004) found that the credibility of the person corroborating an alibi is affected by the relationship between the defendant and corroborator. Specifically, alibis that were substantiated by an individual who did not have a relationship with the defendant received higher believability ratings than alibis corroborated by someone who knows the defendant. Culhane and Hosch (2004) found that mock jurors gave higher conviction rates when the defendant's girlfriend, rather than a neighbor, testified on his behalf. Their findings further concluded that jurors' verdict decisions are more influenced by corroborators who did not stand to personally gain from confirming the alibi provider's proposed location. However, extant studies have yet to examine whether the level of physical intimacy between these individuals impacts jurors' perceptions of alibi believability and likelihood of suspect guilt. Also, it is unclear whether the nature of the relationship interacts with the features of the alibi (e.g., presence of supporting physical evidence).

Another line of research has examined the nature of the alibis used by defendants. In a previously mentioned study, Allison et al. (2012) examined whether the salaciousness of the alibi activities (i.e., whether or not it contains reference to immoral conduct) had an influence on believability of the alibi and corroborator. They found that suspects with salacious alibis (i.e., watched an X-rated movie vs. [non-salacious] who watched a regular movie) were seen as less likely to have committed the crime and that their alibi and corroborator were seen as more believable. Another study by Allison, Jung, Sweeney, and Culhane (in press) created three conditions where the alibi was salacious in a sexual and illegal nature, salacious in a nonsexual but illegal way, and non-salacious in nature. They found that alibi salaciousness did not impact alibi believability, but did influence mock jurors' perception of the defendant and corroborator and their certainty in their verdict decision. The non-sexually salacious alibi seemed to lead to more positive ratings of the defendant and corroborators.

Of note, Allison et al.'s study (in press) used a sexual assault as the crime event, and similarly past studies have typically focused on a single type of crime for each study, such as property vandalism (Sommers & Douglass, 2007) or a robbery (Allison et al., 2012; Allison & Brimacombe, 2010; Culhane & Hosch, 2004; Sargent & Bradfield, 2004), which may lead to varying results. Sommers and Douglass (2007) demonstrated in their study that contextual factors play a critical role in the evaluation of alibis. Consistent with their hypothesis, if an alibi was provided in the context of a police investigation, the alibi was rated higher in terms of strength and believability compared to an alibi used in the context of a criminal trial. Given that context may influence the use of alibis in making decisions in the courtroom, it is open to question whether the varied nature of the crime may interact with the influence of alibis in general and whether the nature of the alibi may interact with

the type of crime. For example, it may be prudent to query the influence of alibis (e.g., having an affair) that are similar in nature to the crime (e.g., sexual offense).

In addition to the above-mentioned, case-relevant variables, individual differences have commonly shown to play a role in influencing juror decision-making. Past research has shown that those who espouse conservative views were more likely to be supportive of government sanctioned executions (McCann, 2008), deliver a greater number of guilty verdicts (Álvarez, De la Fuente, García, & De la Fuente, 2009), and recommend harsher prison sentences (Nemeth & Sosis, 1973). Hence, external and internal factors may influence alibi believability in the courtroom.

The current study examines variables that may influence mock-jurors' perceptions of alibis and whether verdict decisions are associated with these alibi perceptions. Through systematically manipulating the presence of physical evidence (receipt vs. no receipt), salaciousness of the alibi (having an affair with a co-worker vs. having dinner with a co-worker), and the type of crime for which the alibi is provided (sexual assault vs. physical assault vs. theft), the present study examined variables that may influence the believability of the alibi, the perceptions of the defendant and the alibi corroborator, and decisions that are made in the courtroom. We hypothesized that non-salacious alibis that lacked supportive physical evidence would lead to more negative evaluations of the alibi, the defendant, and the alibi corroborator, greater guilty verdicts, and more prison sentences, particularly for increasingly violent crimes. With the inclusion of a variable measuring individual differences on conservative views, it also was predicted that individuals who espouse more conservative views would be more likely to deliver a guilty verdict and to negatively evaluate the salacious alibi, defendant, and corroborator than those with less conservative views. We further hypothesized that guilty verdict decisions would be associated with negative evaluations of the alibi, defendant, and the alibi corroborator, with increased verdict certainty, and with more conservative views.

METHOD

Participants

The following study was comprised of 317 introductory level psychology students (87 males, 229 females, 1 undisclosed) from a Canadian undergraduate university. Eight percent ($n = 24$) of the participants indicated that they had been a juror in a criminal and/or civil case. The mean age of the participants was 20.8 years ($SD = 4.96$), and they ranged in age from 18 to 56 years. The number of participants in each of the 12 experimental conditions ranged from 23 to 28, and most were female (61 to 88% of participants in each condition).

Materials

The crime scenario was delivered to participants in the form of an official police narrative. In the first of three sections, individuals read a police summary that briefly outlined the events of the crime. For the sexual assault condition, the summary described that a young female heard a noise in her apartment and, upon going to investigate, came

upon a masked man standing in her living room. Despite her objections, he forced her to the ground and proceeded to sexually assault her. For the physical assault condition, participants read that the victim found a masked man standing in her living room rummaging through her purse. The attacker immediately took notice of her, and proceeded to strike her in the face several times before fleeing the scene. In the theft condition, the victim was described as coming upon a masked man standing in her living room rummaging through her purse; however, this scenario stated that her presence startled the intruder, causing him to rush out of the apartment with her iPod and camera in hand. Each of these vignettes also informed participants that, as soon as the man was no longer in her apartment, the victim ran into her bedroom, locked the door, and called 911. Although law officials arrived within 10 minutes to search the surrounding area, they did not find any male who matched the victim's description of the perpetrator.

Given that the responding officers had failed to locate any suspects, it was hypothesized that a fellow resident may have been the perpetrator. As such, law officials began questioning residents of the apartment building as to their whereabouts during the time of the crime. The information garnered by this investigation was reported in the second component of the police narrative. The contents of this section informed participants that a suspect matching the victim's description was being questioned by the police. The individual stated that he could not have committed the offense because he was out that evening. In the salacious alibi condition, he told officers that he met a colleague from work at a hotel that evening to continue their extra-marital affair. He permitted investigators to contact her to obtain verification that he was indeed telling the truth. In contrast, participants in the non-salacious alibi condition read that he was out all evening having dinner with a colleague to discuss the potential of starting up a small business. Once again, he encouraged investigators to speak with his colleague to confirm his whereabouts. When contacted, the colleague in both conditions confirmed that she was with the accused during the time of the offense. Despite her corroboration, the case proceeded to trial.

The final aspect of the crime scenario consisted of a trial summary in which further information about the alibi was disclosed. Of particular importance was the defendant's response to the prosecution's request that he generate physical evidence to confirm his proposed location. Participants exposed to the salacious alibi read either (a) that the defendant could produce a dated hotel receipt or (b) that he had paid cash for the room and thus did not receive a receipt. Similarly, individuals in the non-salacious alibi condition either read (a) that the defendant was able to provide a dated receipt from the restaurant or (b) that he had paid cash for the meal and did not receive a receipt.

Measures

Upon reading the crime scenario, participants completed a series of questionnaires. The first questionnaire included dependent variables that were measured in four sections (adapted from a study by Olson & Wells, 2004). In the first section, participants were asked to render a trial verdict (i.e., guilty or not guilty) and indicate their level of certainty that their verdict was correct. In instances where the defendant was deemed to be guilty, participants were asked to report if they would recommend a prison sentence and, if the answer

was yes, for what duration of time. In the second section, participants were asked to rate the believability of the alibi on an 11-point Likert-type scale, with higher ratings indicating that the alibi was more believable. In the third and fourth sections, participants rated the defendant and corroborator on a variety of character traits. The defendant was rated on credibility, honesty, persuasiveness, knowledge, competency, and intelligence. The corroborator was rated on believability, credibility, honesty, and persuasiveness. Questionnaire items pertaining to character perceptions were worded in such a fashion that higher scores bore a positive connotation.

Participants also were asked to complete a measure on conservatism. The 15-item Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale ([RWA]; Zakrisson, 2005) was included in the questionnaire. The RWA was developed to assess conventionalism, authoritarian aggression, and authoritarian submission as a singular construct. The RWA has been shown to be associated with various forms of prejudice, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and political orientation and behavior (see Zakrisson, 2005). The last questionnaire given to participants was to ensure that the independent variables had been adequately manipulated, so participants were asked a series of questions about the manipulations used in the study.

Procedure

The authors received ethical approval by the university's Research Ethics Board (REB). Participants were given course credit for their participation in the study. Participants were recruited through an online research website, randomly assigned to experimental conditions, and administered the questionnaire in a group session. Upon receiving informed consent from each participant, they were given verbal instructions, the questionnaire, and subsequently a written debriefing. The participants were told that they were going to read an actual police narrative of a criminal offense and asked to assume the role of mock jurors while they completed the questionnaire. In the debriefing, participants were informed that the content of the police narratives had been fabricated for the purpose of the study and that specific variables were manipulated in the narratives to examine the influence of these variables on their decision-making.

RESULTS

In light of the inclusion of categorical and continuous variables, the following analyses included non-parametric (i.e., chi-square) and parametric statistics (factorial analysis of variance, ANOVA). An alpha level of .05 was used in each of the analyses. All significant main effects and interactions were examined by post hoc analyses using the Bonferroni procedure.

Impact of Physical Evidence, Salaciousness, and Crime Type

The first hypothesis predicts that the fixed factors of salaciousness, availability of physical evidence, and type of crime would impact the dependent variables, which include alibi believability, character perceptions of both alibi provider and corroborator, verdict, verdict certainty, and sentence and duration. The analyses follow a 2 (salaciousness) \times 2

(physical evidence) \times 3 (type of crime) between-subjects factorial design. Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations and proportions for each dependent variable by fixed factor.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for alibi believability, character perceptions, verdict, verdict certainty, and sentencing by alibi salaciousness, physical evidence, and type of crime.

Dependent variables	Salaciousness		Physical Evidence		Crime Type		
	S	NS	P	A	S	P	T
Alibi believability	6.04 (2.06)	6.12 (2.16)	7.06** (1.84)	5.13** (1.92)	6.01 (2.12)	5.99 (2.19)	6.24 (2.04)
Character perception of the defendant	31.98 (9.76)	33.99 (10.11)	36.36** (9.26)	29.84** (9.62)	32.88 (9.77)	32.28 (10.96)	33.89 (9.98)
Character perception of the corroborator	19.62** (7.12)	23.10** (7.59)	23.45** (7.22)	19.50** (7.39)	21.25 (7.53)	20.84 (7.68)	22.22 (7.48)
Verdict	38% (57/150)	34% (57/166)	22%** (34/155)	50%** (80/161)	29% (30/105)	44% (45/103)	36% (39/108)
Verdict certainty	3.32 (0.91)	3.39 (0.90)	3.35 (0.92)	3.30 (0.90)	3.24 (0.88)	3.36 (0.94)	3.46 (0.89)
Prison sentence (guilt only, $n = 114$)	74% (40/54)	86% (49/57)	79% (26/33)	81% (63/78)	97%* (29/30)	84%* (37/44)	62%* (23/37)
Sentencing severity (guilt only, $n = 114$)	4.36 (3.84)	3.29 (3.24)	3.62 (3.93)	3.84 (3.39)	6.33* (4.62)	2.97* (2.37)	2.08* (1.56)

Note. Significance levels for main effects are denoted: * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$. For non-continuous variables (verdict and prison sentence), proportions and frequencies are provided. For continuous variables, means and standard deviations (in parentheses) are listed.

Alibi Believability. When looking at alibi believability, significant findings were found for physical evidence, $F_{(1,317)} = 81.02$, $p < .001$. As in past studies, alibis that were supported by physical evidence ($M = 7.06$; $SD = 1.84$) were deemed more believable than those not supported by evidence ($M = 5.13$; $SD = 1.92$). Hence, the original hypothesis was partially supported, but no significant main effects were noted for the salaciousness of the alibi or crime type, and no interactions emerged ($p > .05$, *ns*).

Perceptions of the Defendant and Corroborator's Character. Given that the character trait items for the defendant were highly correlated, a composite score was calculated by combining all six of the character traits. To examine the influence of salaciousness, physical evidence, and crime type on perceptions of the defendant, a factorial ANOVA was conducted, and a main effect of physical evidence was found, $F_{(1,313)} = 36.01, p < .001$, with a defendant using an alibi supported by physical evidence seen more positively than defendants without evidence. This main effect was moderated by an interaction between salaciousness and physical evidence, $F_{(1,313)} = 7.25, p < .01$. Specifically, only in cases where physical evidence was present was a defendant with a non-salacious alibi ($M = 38.65; SD = 8.82$) rated more positively than a defendant with a salacious alibi ($M = 33.78; SD = 9.12$) or a defendant with no physical evidence at all (salacious, $M = 30.32; SD = 10.08$; non-salacious, $M = 29.38; SD = 9.19$).

A similar procedure to form a composite score was used to examine the corroborator ratings because the characteristics were highly correlated. A factorial ANOVA was conducted, and main effects of alibi salaciousness, $F_{(1,317)} = 19.81, p < .001$, and physical evidence emerged, $F_{(1,317)} = 22.31, p < .001$. These findings were moderated by an interaction between salaciousness and physical evidence, $F_{(1,317)} = 15.48, p < .001$. Corroborators who provided non-salacious alibis supported by physical evidence ($M = 26.52; SD = 6.18$) were rated more positively than corroborators with salacious alibis and physical evidence ($M = 19.96; SD = 6.74$), with salacious alibis and no evidence ($M = 19.31; SD = 7.48$), and with non-salacious alibis and no evidence ($M = 19.69; SD = 7.35$). No main effect or any interactions with crime type were significant.

Verdict Decisions and Certainty. The influence of each independent variable on verdict decisions was examined using the chi-square statistic. As seen in past research, it was hypothesized that salacious alibis, the presence of corroborating physical evidence, and non-sexual offenses would result in the delivery of fewer guilty verdicts. A main effect of physical evidence emerged, $\chi^2_{(1)} = 26.38, p < .001$, with guilty verdicts given more to cases without evidence to support the alibi. Neither the salaciousness of the alibi nor the type of crime had a significant impact on mock jurors' verdicts. Mock jurors' certainty in making their verdict decisions was also examined. A factorial ANOVA was conducted, and no significant differences emerged.

Decisions about Sentencing. Decisions to assign a prison sentence and to recommend the length of prison were examined for mock jurors who chose guilty as their verdict decision, hence, limiting the analysis to 114 participants. Independent chi-square statistics were calculated for whether prison adjudication differed for each fixed variable. The type of crime revealed a significant difference in the decision to make a prison recommendation, $\chi^2_{(2)} = 13.11, p < .01$, with sexual offenses receiving the most prison assignments. Similarly, when the length of prison sentence was examined using a factorial ANOVA, the type of crime emerged with a significant main effect, $F_{(2,87)} = 7.50, p < .01$. Sexual offenses received longer prison sentences than physical assault cases, $t_{(61)} = 3.36, p < .001$, and theft crimes, $t_{(49)} = 4.25, p < .001$ (while physical assault and theft crime did not differ). No other

main effects or interactions involving salaciousness or the presence of physical evidence were significant in the analyses.

Conservatism. We examined whether conservatism (as measured by the RWA) differed among participants in each condition of our 2 x 2 x 3 factorial design. A factorial ANOVA revealed no significant main effects or interactions, suggesting that the participants were truly randomly assigned into the 12 conditions as we had hoped.

A secondary prediction in our first hypothesis was that conservatism would be associated with more negative ratings of the defendant and the corroborator, greater verdict certainty, and more severe sentencing using Pearson correlation coefficients. Although the association between the RWA score and the defendant's composite character ratings was non-significant, $r_{(306)} = -0.04$, *ns*, the RWA score and the corroborator's composite character ratings were found to be negatively correlated, $r_{(310)} = -0.15$, $p = .01$. We also examined the relationship between the RWA score and verdict certainty but found no significant association, $r_{(308)} = 0.10$, *ns*. The analyses also revealed that, of the mock-jurors who chose guilty verdicts, those who chose prison sentences ($M = 59.16$; $SD = 11.62$) had more conservative views than those who did not choose prison sentences ($M = 52.81$; $SD = 12.79$), $F_{(1,108)} = 4.86$, $p < .05$. Moreover, conservatism was significantly associated with longer prison sentences, $r_{(83)} = 0.22$, $p < .05$.

Nature of the Verdict Decisions

The second part of the analyses divided the sample into those who chose a guilty verdict versus a not-guilty verdict to examine a second hypothesis. Our second hypothesis predicted that mock-jurors who chose guilty as their verdict would find the alibis less believable, view the characters of the defendant and corroborator more negatively, be more certain in their decision, and be more conservative in their personal views. Separate means comparisons were conducted for each of these predictions.

Alibi Believability. It was hypothesized that verdict decisions would be associated with evaluations of the alibi and the individuals involved. Mock-jurors who chose guilty verdicts ($M = 4.52$; $SD = 1.95$; $n = 114$) saw the alibis as less believable than those who chose not-guilty verdicts ($M = 6.96$; $SD = 1.65$; $n = 202$), $t_{(315)} = 1.84$, $p < .001$.

Perceptions of the Defendant and Corroborator. Significant results also emerged when we examined the composite character ratings of the defendant and corroborator composite scores. Participants who chose a guilty verdict viewed the defendant ($M = 28.01$; $SD = 8.83$) more negatively than participants who gave not-guilty verdicts ($M = 35.98$; $SD = 9.34$), $t_{(311)} = 7.39$, $p < .001$. Similarly, participants who gave guilty verdicts ($M = 16.67$; $SD = 6.86$) evaluated the corroborator more negatively than those who gave not-guilty decisions ($M = 24.21$; $SD = 6.47$), $t_{(315)} = 9.74$, $p < .001$.

Verdict Certainty. No main effect of verdict emerged when examining the mock-jurors' certainty in making their decisions, $t_{(314)} = 1.36$, *ns*.

Individual Differences in Conservatism. We predicted that those who delivered guilty verdicts would be more conservative in their views and found support for this prediction, $t_{(310)} = 4.51$, $p < .001$, with those making the choice of guilty ($M = 57.62$; $SD = 12.05$) having higher conservatism scores on the Right Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) Scale than those who chose not-guilty as their verdict decision ($M = 51.33$; $SD = 11.64$).

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the relationship between alibi and crime features with mock jurors' perceptions and decision-making and extends the existing research that investigates the impact of alibi evidence. Our findings support some of our original hypotheses, although physical evidence figured most prominently in its influence on many of the dependent variables.

Our first hypothesis predicted that physical evidence, alibi salaciousness, and crime type would influence jurors' perceptions of the alibi, defendant, and corroborator, decisions on the verdict, and assignment of prison. Consistent support primarily was found for the influence of physical evidence on verdicts and character ratings, which was similar to the findings seen in other studies (e.g., Olson & Wells, 2004). Our study demonstrated that the presence of physical evidence in the police and court summaries increased jurors' positive perceptions of the defendant and corroborator and the likelihood of making verdict decisions of not guilty. Moreover, alibis substantiated by physical evidence were deemed to be more believable than those without evidence. These findings parallel those seen in previous research (Allison et al., 2012; Allison & Brimacombe, 2010; Olson & Wells, 2004).

When character evaluations were examined, a consistent interaction emerged, but only for mock jurors' perceptions of the defendant and corroborator. Alibi salaciousness did not impact alibi believability, verdict decisions and certainty, or sentencing decisions. In legal contexts, the latter two non-significant findings are encouraging because what a suspect is engaging in should not have an effect on either judgments of guilt or sentencing decisions. These findings contrast with Allison et al.'s (in press) study where salaciousness affected jurors' certainty (in fact, verdict certainty was not affected by any of the manipulated variables); specifically, participants were more certain in their verdict decisions in the non-sexually salacious but illegal alibi condition (i.e., watching a movie to copy onto DVDs to sell the next day). In the current study, we found that when the alibi was salacious, the presence of physical evidence did not affect defendant or corroborator character ratings—meaning, defendants were not seen any differently whether their excuse was supported or not supported with a receipt when their excuse involved a morally questionable behavior. On the other hand, when the excuse was non-salacious, jurors rated the defendant and corroborator more positively if their excuse was supported with physical evidence (i.e., a receipt). Mock jurors delivered the highest positive character ratings to the corroborator when the alibi was both supported by physical evidence and was non-salacious. When these findings are taken together, these results arguably suggest that disclosing a salacious alibi in the courtroom does not predispose the jury to be lenient to defendants (Allison et al., in press) or to convict/advocate for a jail sentence to be enacted. However, what may

be happening here is that salacious alibis dampen the effect of physical evidence on mock-jurors' perceptions of the key players in a case or the physical evidence is downplaying the effect of the alibi. As the vast majority of the lay public believes that a defendant's character should influence the juror decision-making process (Efran, 1974), this finding has particular relevance to legal proceedings and suggests that legal counsel must be cautious in the disclosure of the nature of the alibi or in the emphasis that is placed on the nature of the alibi in the proceedings.

Contrary to our prediction, crime type, which has never been varied in studies examining alibis, did not influence jurors' ratings of believability, defendant and corroborator credibility, or verdict decisions and certainty. Despite past research indicating that the context in which the alibi is presented may affect the influence it has, the crime type was not shown to influence mock-jurors' decision-making with the sole exception of sentencing. Hence, the type of crime was not influential in the mock-jurors' evaluations of the alibi, defendant, or corroborator, and this was contrary to our original hypotheses. The type of crime only influenced decisions regarding the assignment of a prison sentence; namely, participants assigned longer sentences for the sexual crime than the non-sexual violent crime or the property crime. These findings are consistent with the behavior that is expected of judicial and juror decision-making; that is, guilt should be determined by evidence and sentencing by severity and nature of the crime. These findings also are consistent with those supported in the literature—the more severe a crime, the more severe the penalty is given (e.g., Ghetti & Redlich, 2001; Walker & Woody, 2001). Ghetti and Redlich's study (2001) found if the crime led to severe consequences (e.g., death) the defendant judged to be more credible even though actions may be same as those of the defendant whose crime led to less severe outcomes (e.g., injury); hence, crime type can potentially lead to different perceptions of the defendant.

We also examined individual differences on conservatism. Our prediction of conservatism's association with negative corroborator evaluations and prison sentencing were supported, but conservatism was not associated with negative perceptions of the defendant or verdict certainty. Consistent with existing research (e.g., Feather & Souter, 2002; Nemeth & Sosis, 1973), individuals espousing conservative views are more likely to give harsher prison sentences. It also has been suggested that higher conservatism is associated with authoritarian aggression, such as corporal punishment (Benjamin, 2006), and this is consistent with our findings. In addition, our findings add to the literature and indicate that greater conservative views are related to negative overall evaluation of the corroborator, suggesting that conservatism is an individual feature that may lead to *voir dire* decisions by the defense's legal counsel to avoid or reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes for the defendant (see Atkin & Cramer, 2012). However, it is contrary to our prediction that conservatism was not associated with negative evaluations of the defendant.

The second set of hypotheses predicted that guilty verdict decisions would be associated with negative evaluations of the alibi, defendant, and the alibi corroborator, with increased verdict certainty, and with more conservative views. Almost all of these expectations were met, with the exception of verdict certainty. Participants who found the defend-

ant guilty were more likely to negatively evaluate the alibi's believability and the character of the defendant and the corroborator. It would be expected that those who deem the defendant guilty would be more skeptical of the evidence, including the alibi used by the defendant, and the parties associated with the defense. Moreover, in our study, it was found that those who elected guilty verdicts and chose prison sentences had more conservative views than those who believed the defendant was not guilty and did not assign a prison sentence. This was consistent with past research, showing that persons with more conservative views were more likely to deliver guilty verdicts (Álvarez et al., 2009) and conservatism was associated with perceived responsibility for a crime and the seriousness of the crime (Feather, 1996).

The results generated by the present study must be viewed within the context of certain methodological limitations. Given that the sample was comprised solely of university students, the aforementioned findings may not be representative of the decisions reached by actual jurors. However, Bornstein (1999) has demonstrated that juror status (i.e., student vs. not a student) typically does not interact with variables pertaining to trial outcome. The ability of these results to generalize to the juror decision-making process may be further restricted by the low mean age of participants. Although we attempted to present the crime scenarios as real cases, the experimental context of the study was clearly simulated and therefore limited the study's realism.

Through systematically manipulating the type of crime and salaciousness, the present study served to remediate an existing gap in literature pertaining to the psychology of alibis. Moreover, it replicated the findings of previous studies that have examined the role physical evidence plays in legal proceedings. However, continued research efforts are needed. The impact that salaciousness has on the aforementioned dependent variables is a ripe avenue for exploration. Alibis containing varying degrees of morally suggestive content (e.g., engaging in an illegal act vs. sexual act) could be disclosed to participants. In addition, in light of the finding that alibi strength varies according to the context it is presented in (Sommers & Douglass, 2007), salacious alibis could be disclosed to participants in the form of a police investigation, rather than a trial. Finally, various characteristics of alibi provider (e.g., socioeconomic status, level of remorse for questionable behavior, gender) could be manipulated.

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