

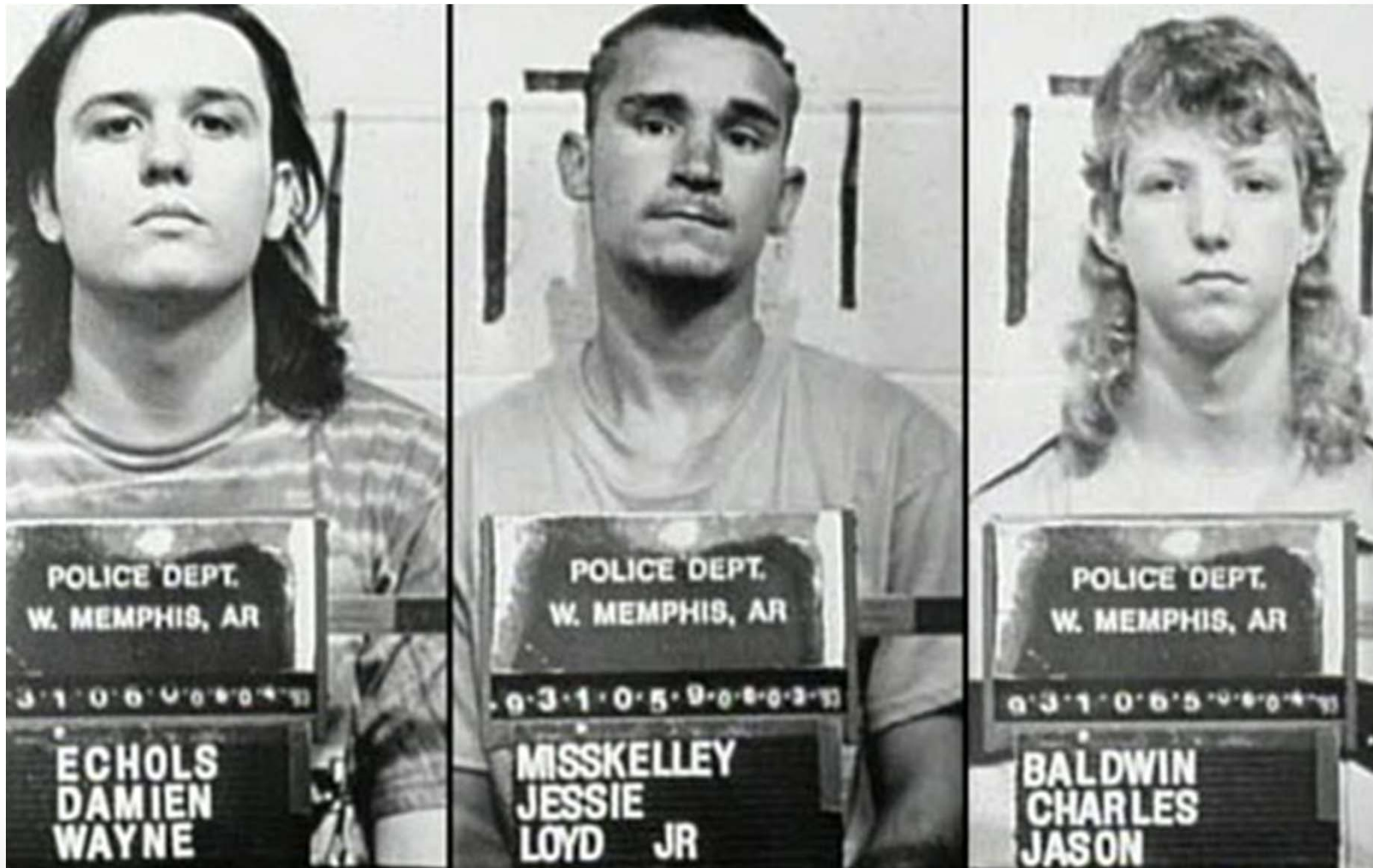
# **Self-Incrimination and Culpability: Examining Perceptions of Biological vs. Psychological Evidence**

Tara Gough, Julia Paulson, & Dawn McQuiston, Ph.D.

Department of Psychology

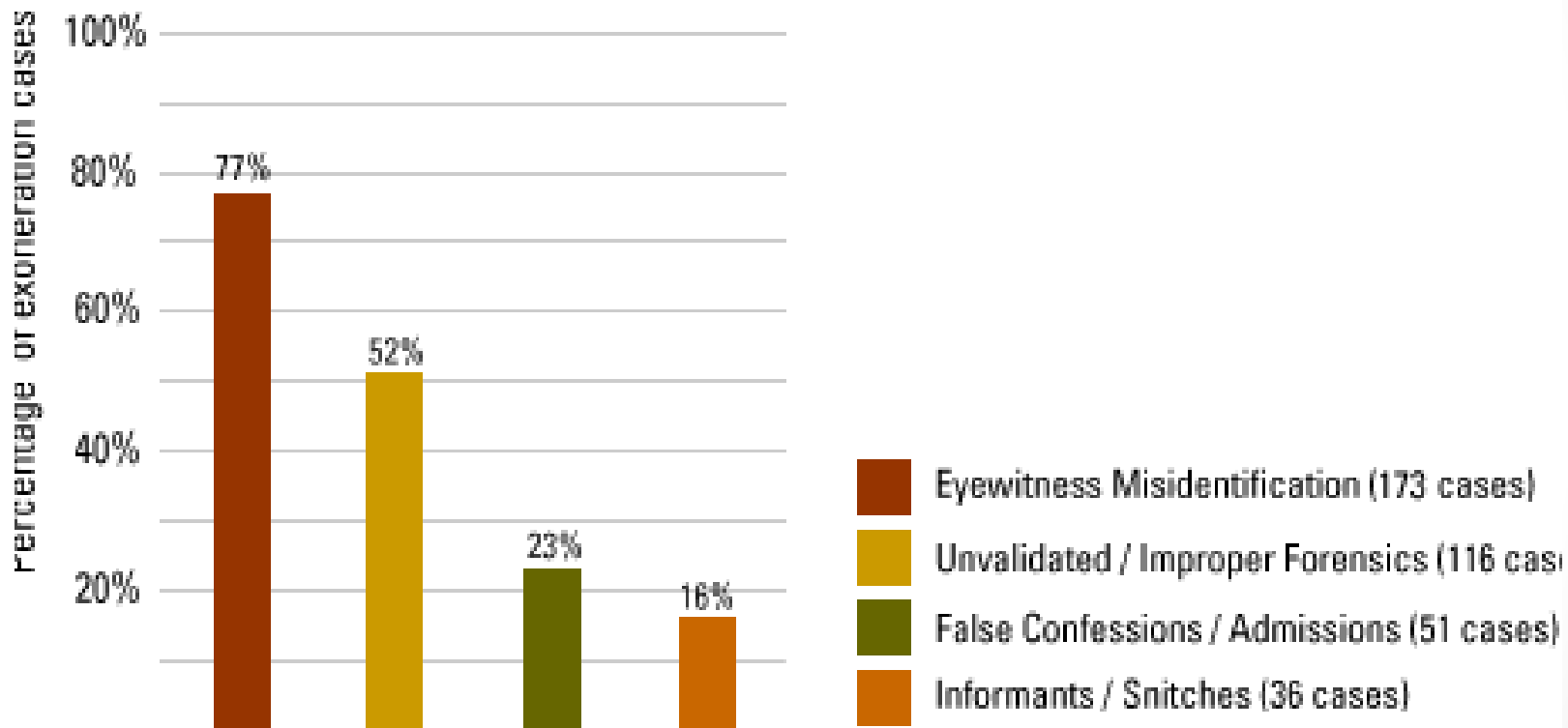
Wofford College

# West Memphis Three



## Contributing Causes of Wrongful Convictions (first 225 DNA exonerations)

Total is more than 100% because wrongful convictions can have more than one cause.



# Biological Evidence

- Body Fluids (blood, semen, saliva)
- Mitochondrial DNA (hairs, bones, teeth)
- Impression Evidence (fingerprints, bitemarks)

## **DNA Analysis**

- Body Fluids
- Mitochondrial DNA
- Considered gold standard

## **Other Forensic Disciplines**

- Impression evidence
- Lack of scientific basis
- Improper forensic testimony

# Juries & Forensic Evidence

- Exaggerated view overall
- “CSI Effect”
- Match viewed as evidence of guilt, but nonmatch NOT viewed as evidence of innocence (Kaasa et al., 2007)

# Confession Evidence

Why do innocent people confess? (Kassin, 2008)

- Mental impairment / diminished capacity
- Coercion
- Extreme fatigue
- Fear of violence/threat of charges
- Juveniles

# Juries & Confessions

- Corroboration Inflation: tendency for confessions to produce an illusion of support for other evidence (Kassin, 2012)
  - Details of the confession statement
  - Extrinsic evidence
  - Confirmation bias

# Purpose of this research

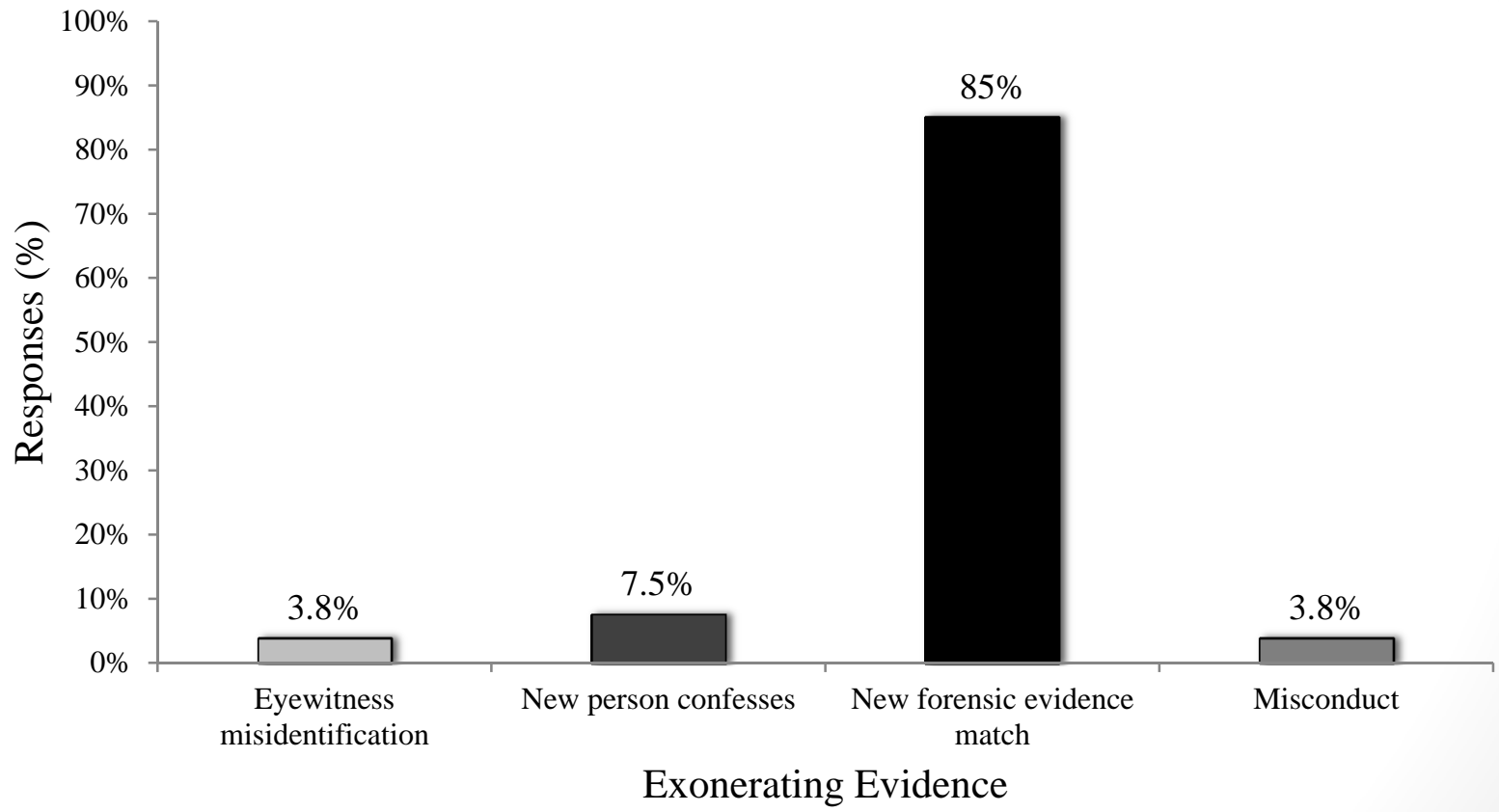
- To gain a greater understanding of people's beliefs about both confession and DNA evidence



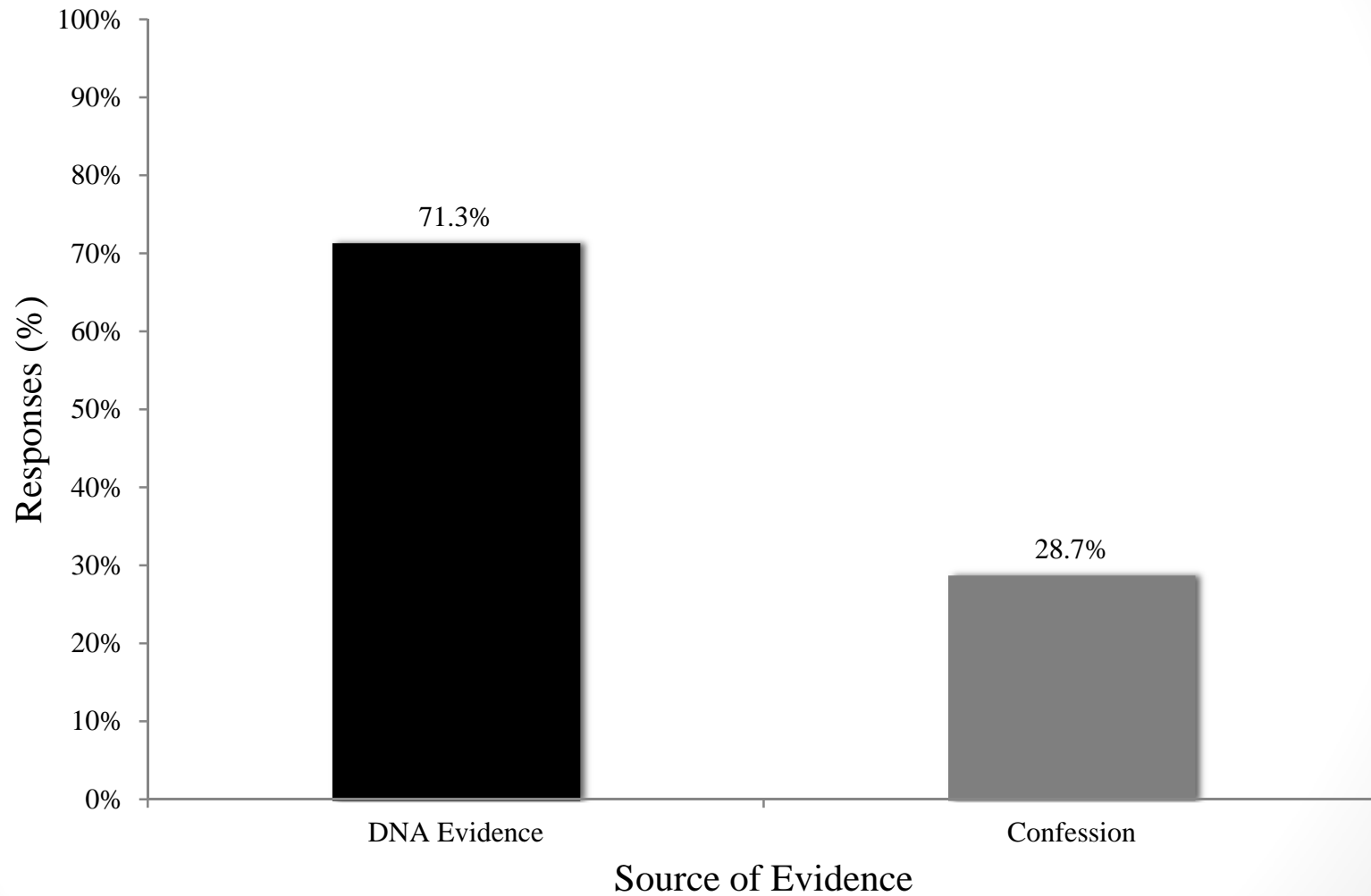
# Method

- Participants
  - 80 jury eligible adults attending Wofford College
- Materials
  - Survey consisting of 21 items plus some demographic questions
- Survey assessed people's beliefs about DNA and confession evidence

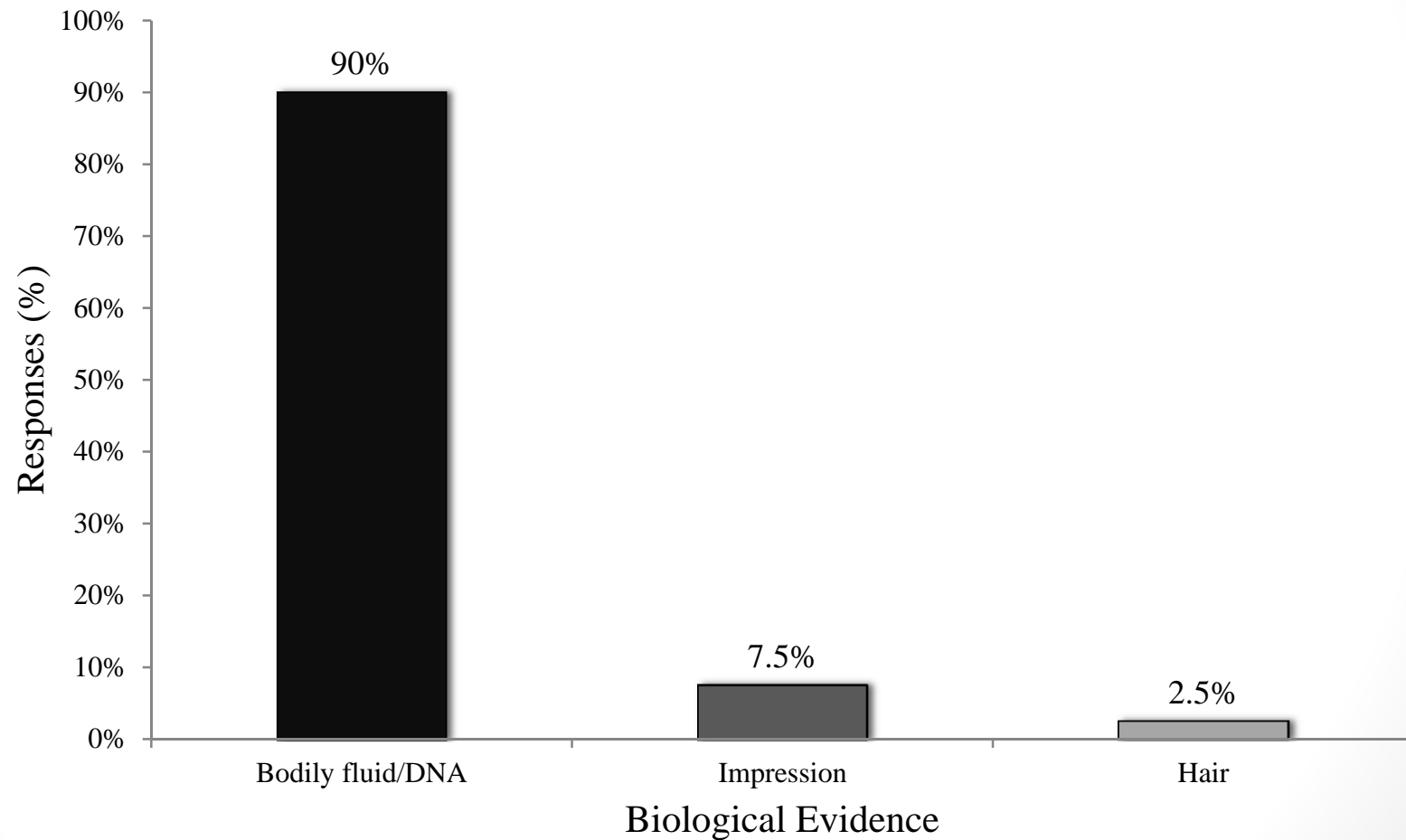
# Exonerating Evidence



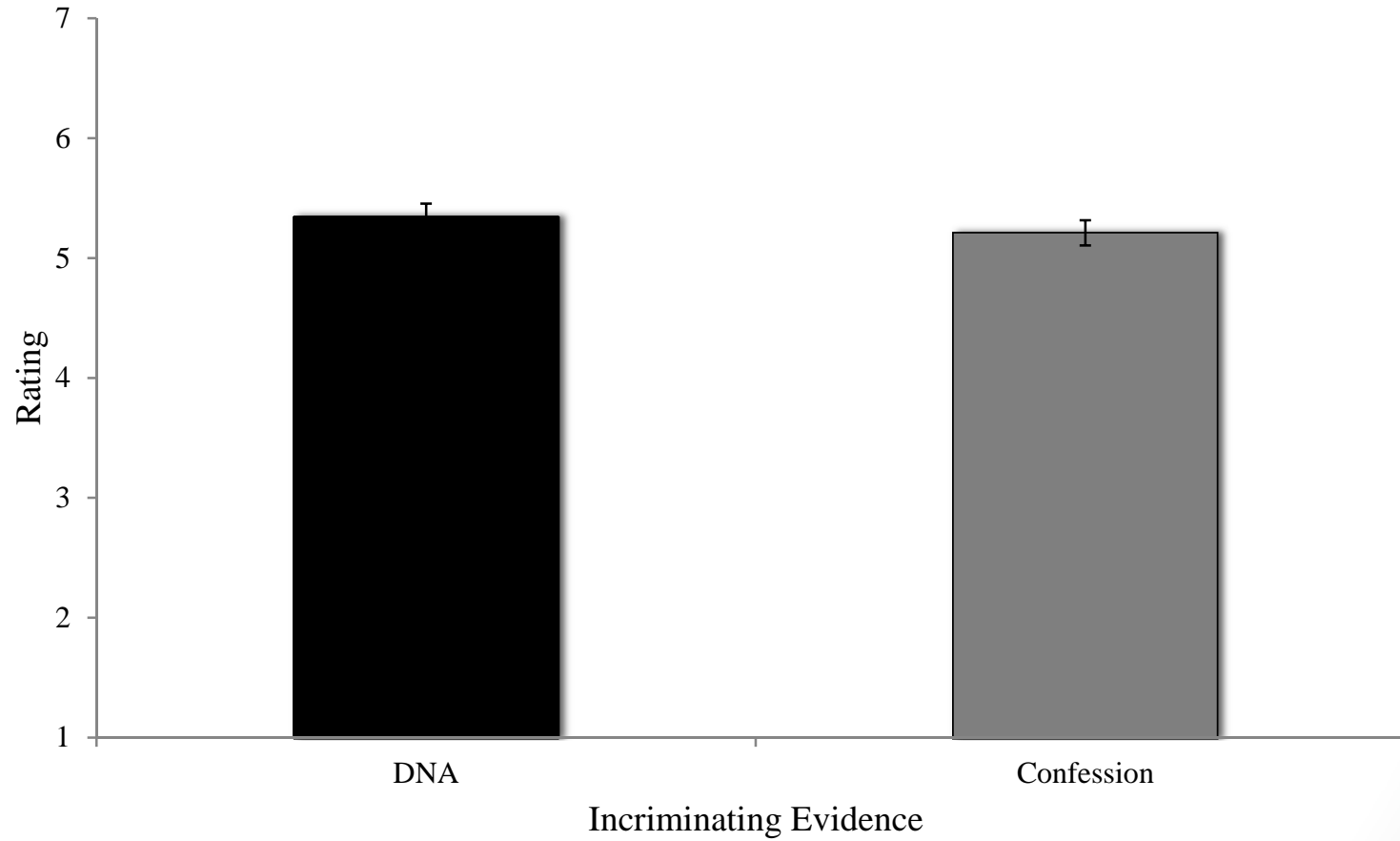
# Biological v. Psychological



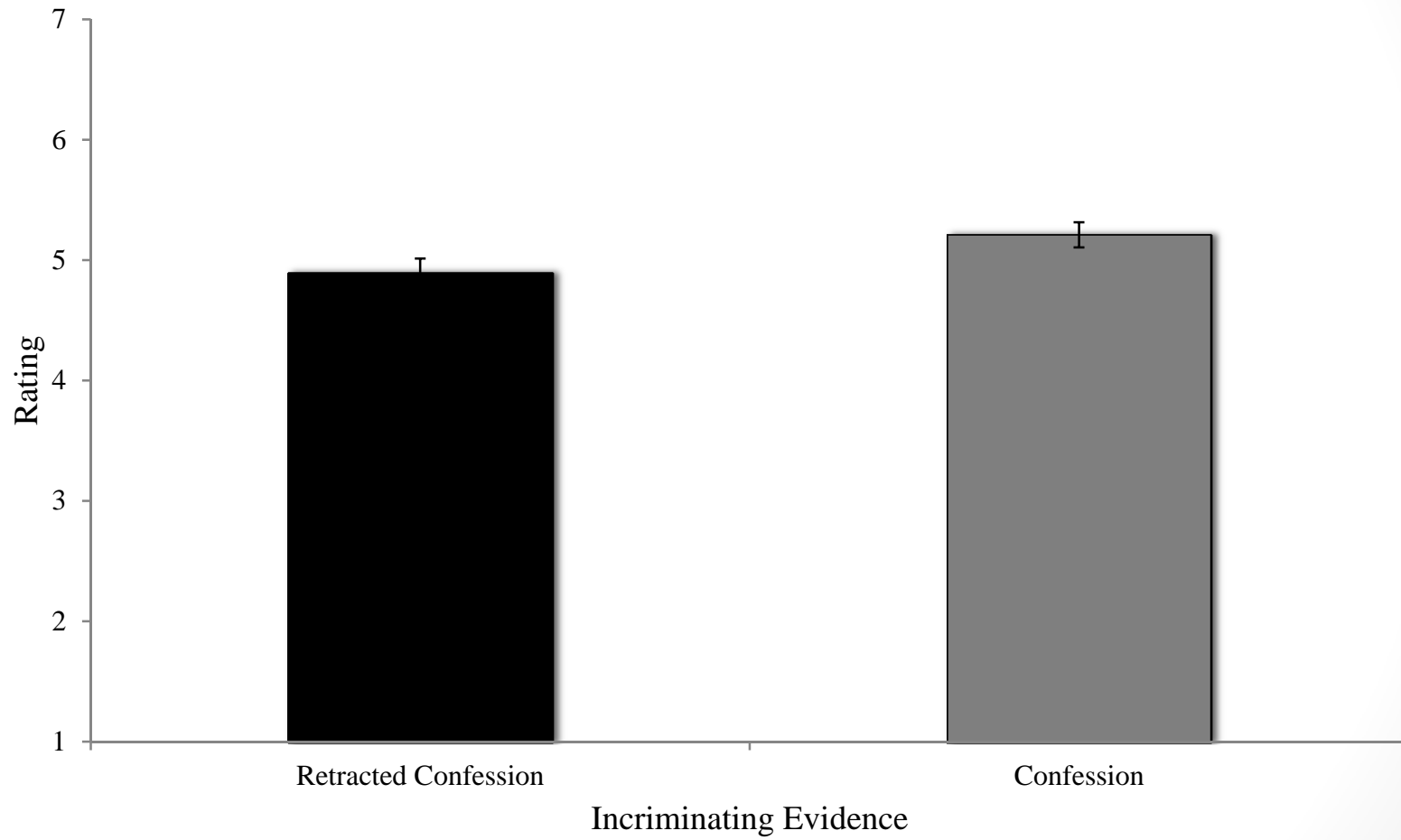
# Weight of Biological Evidence



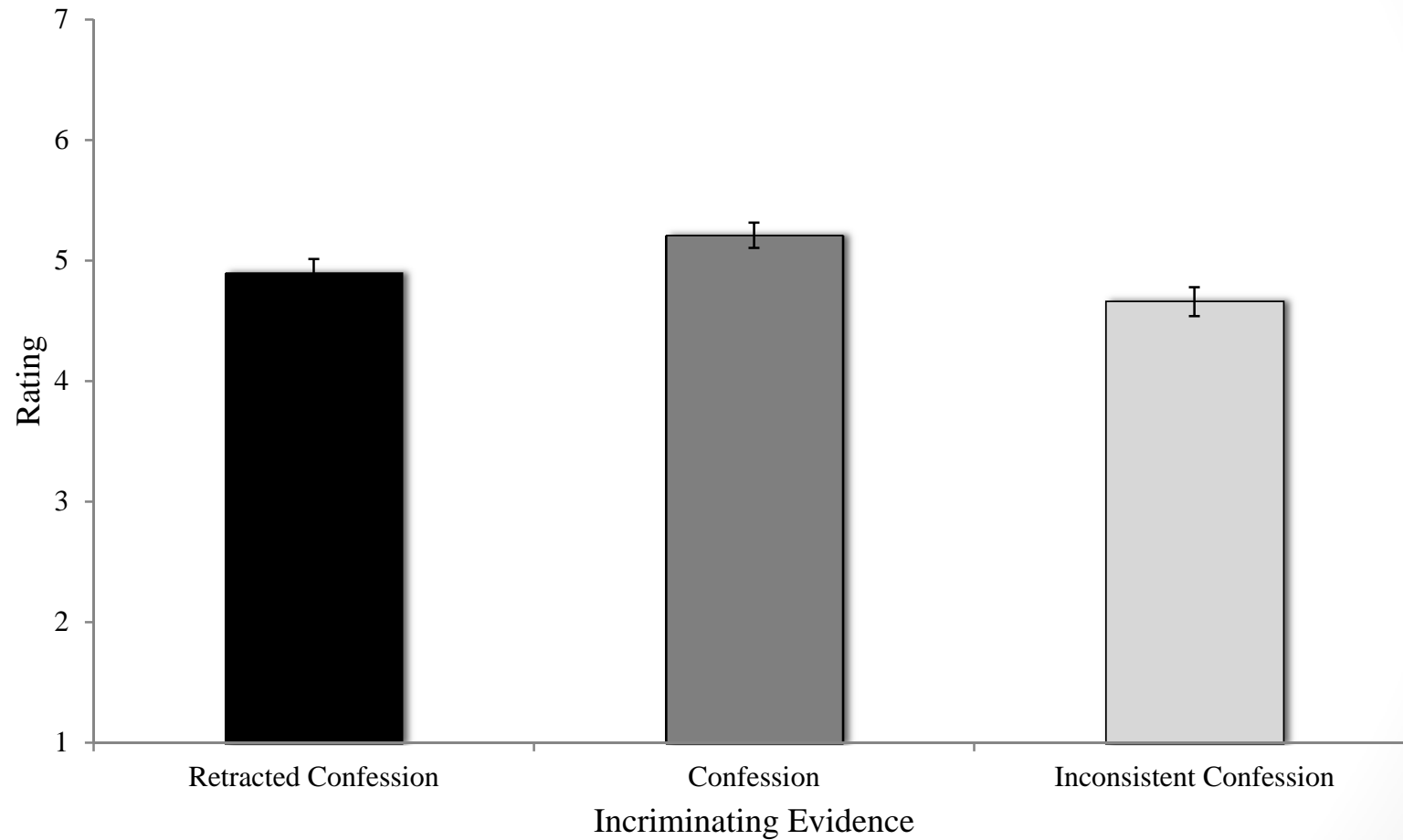
# Biological v. Psychological



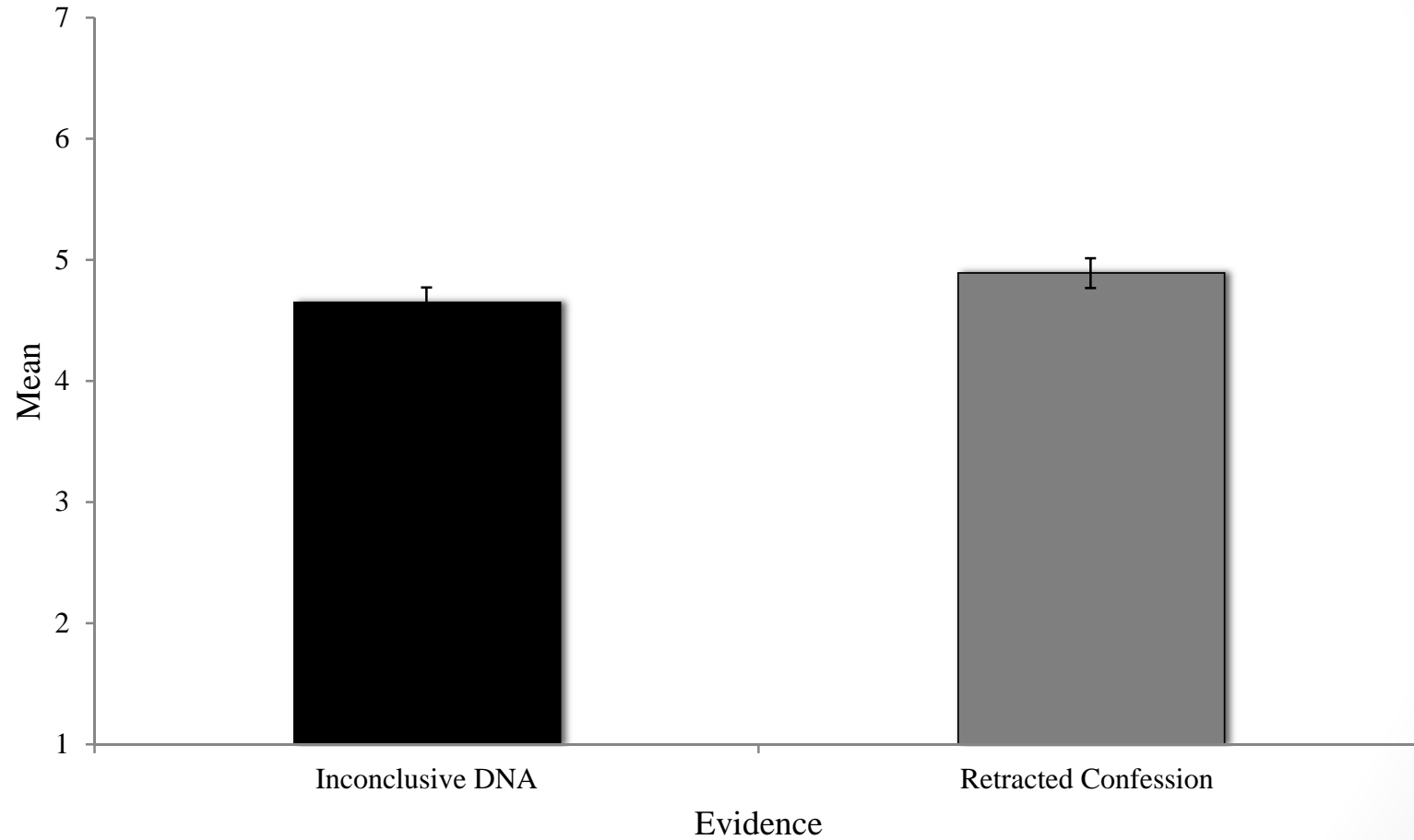
# Confession Evidence



# Confession Evidence



# Biological v. Psychological





# Discussion

- Similar guilt ratings for biological and psychological evidence
- Great doubt that false confessions occur
- Biological evidence is very incriminating; often considered critical for a conviction
- Inconclusive DNA results and retracted confessions are not fully discounted

# Some Future Directions

- Further exploration of demographic variables
- Can jurors disregard any piece of how a confession is obtained when instructed to do so by the judge?

*Thank you! 😊*

*Questions?*