

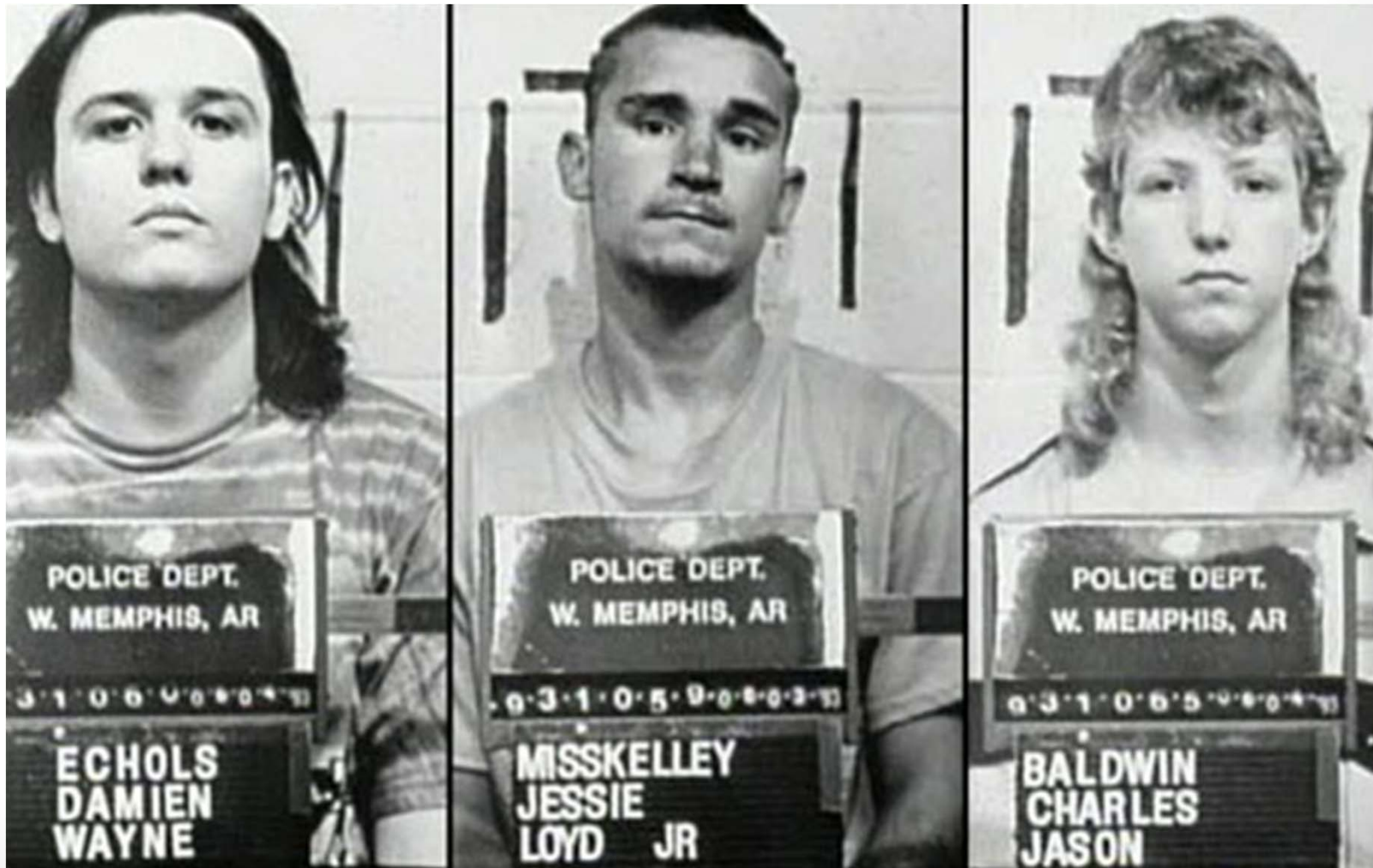
Self-Incrimination and Culpability: Examining Perceptions of Biological vs. Psychological Evidence

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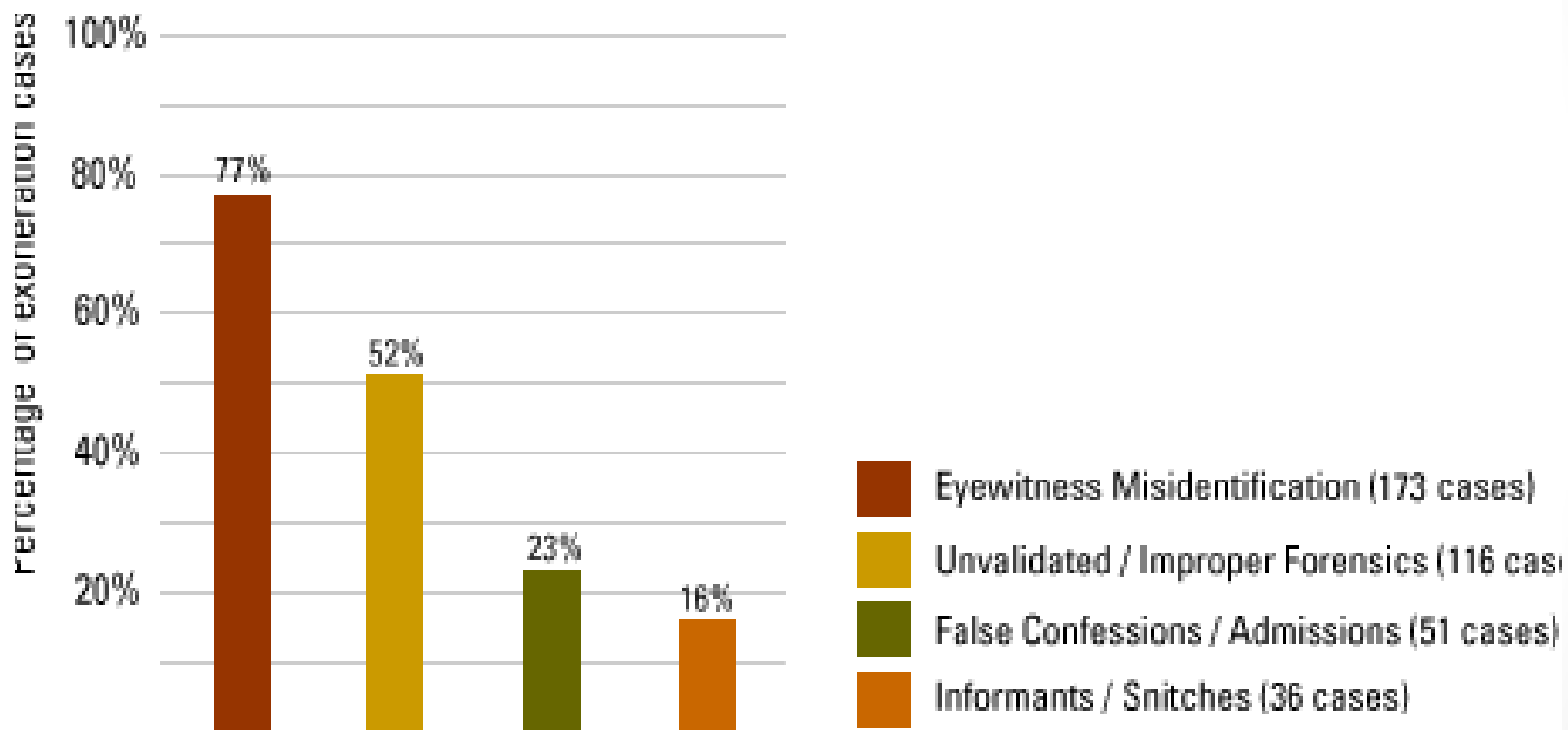
Wofford College

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

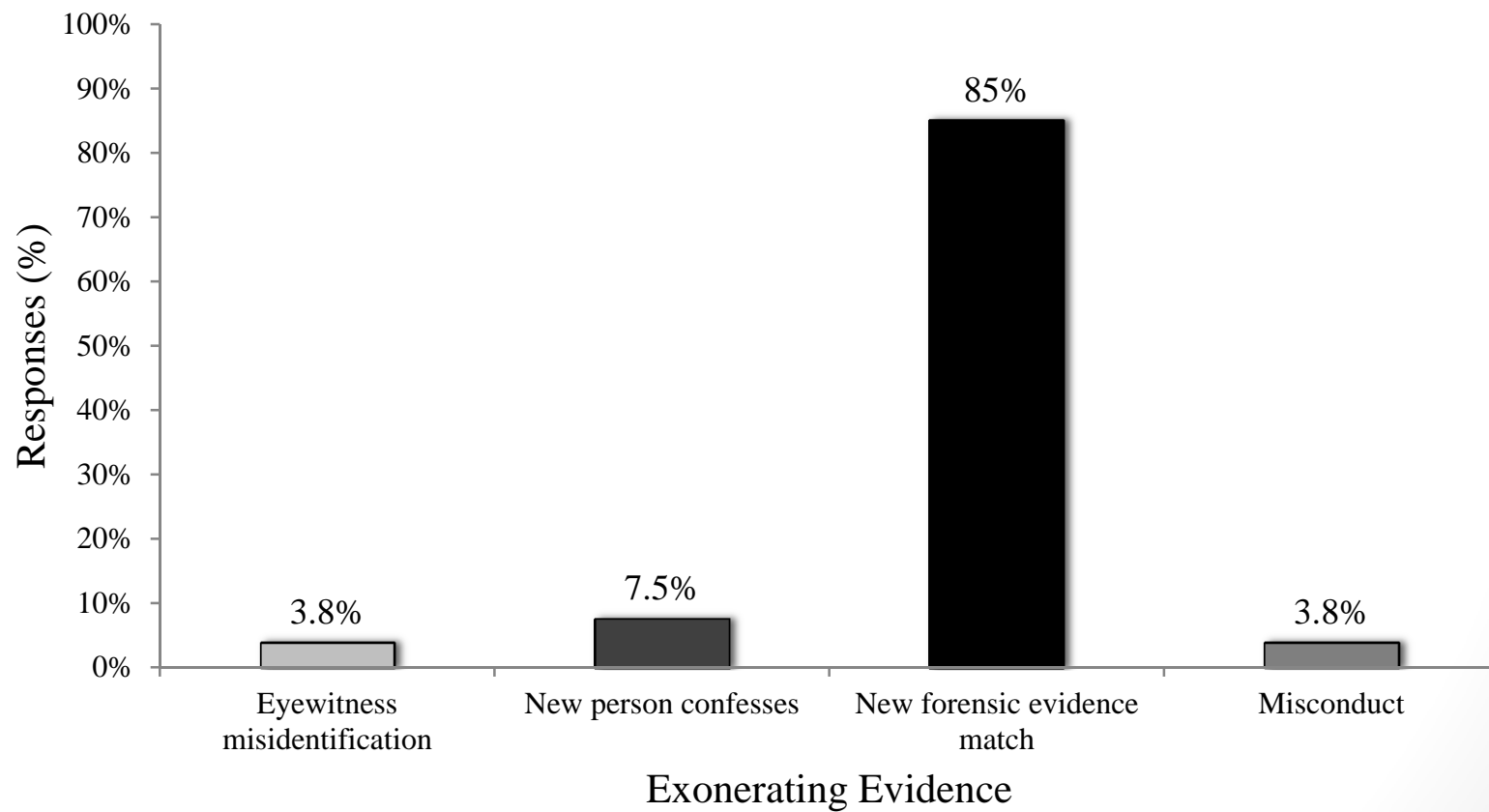
Purpose of this research

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

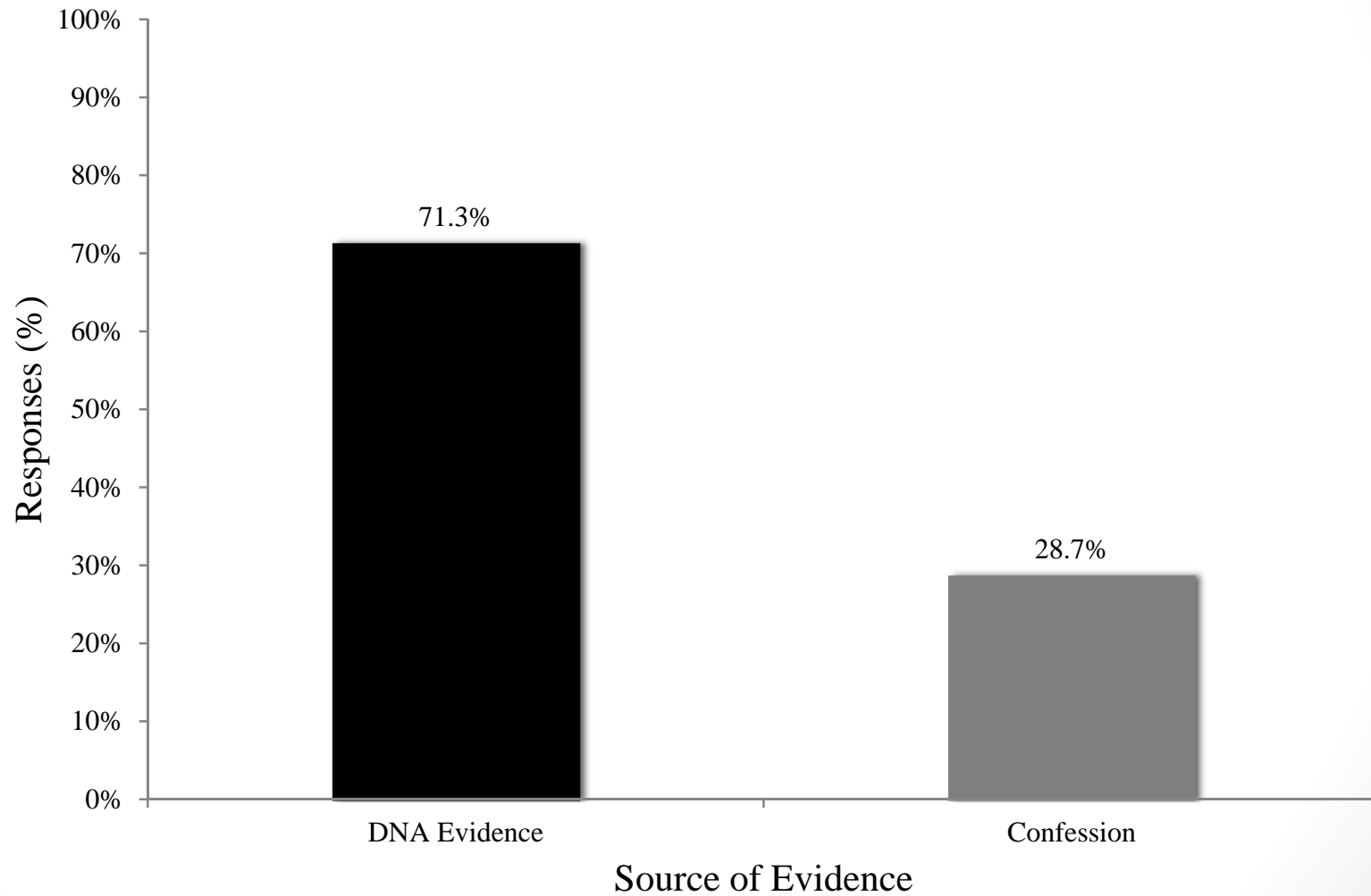
Method

- 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

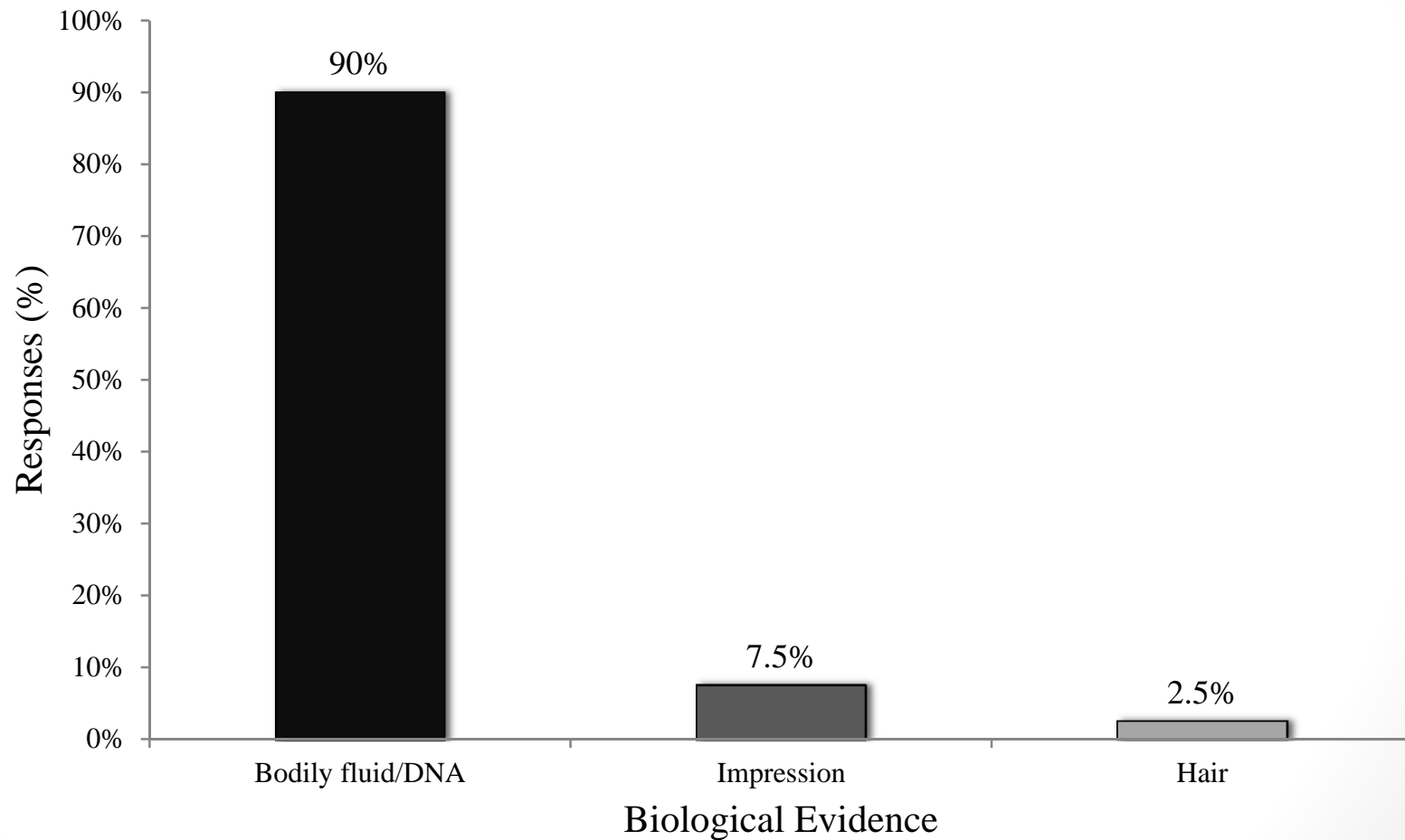
Exonerating Evidence



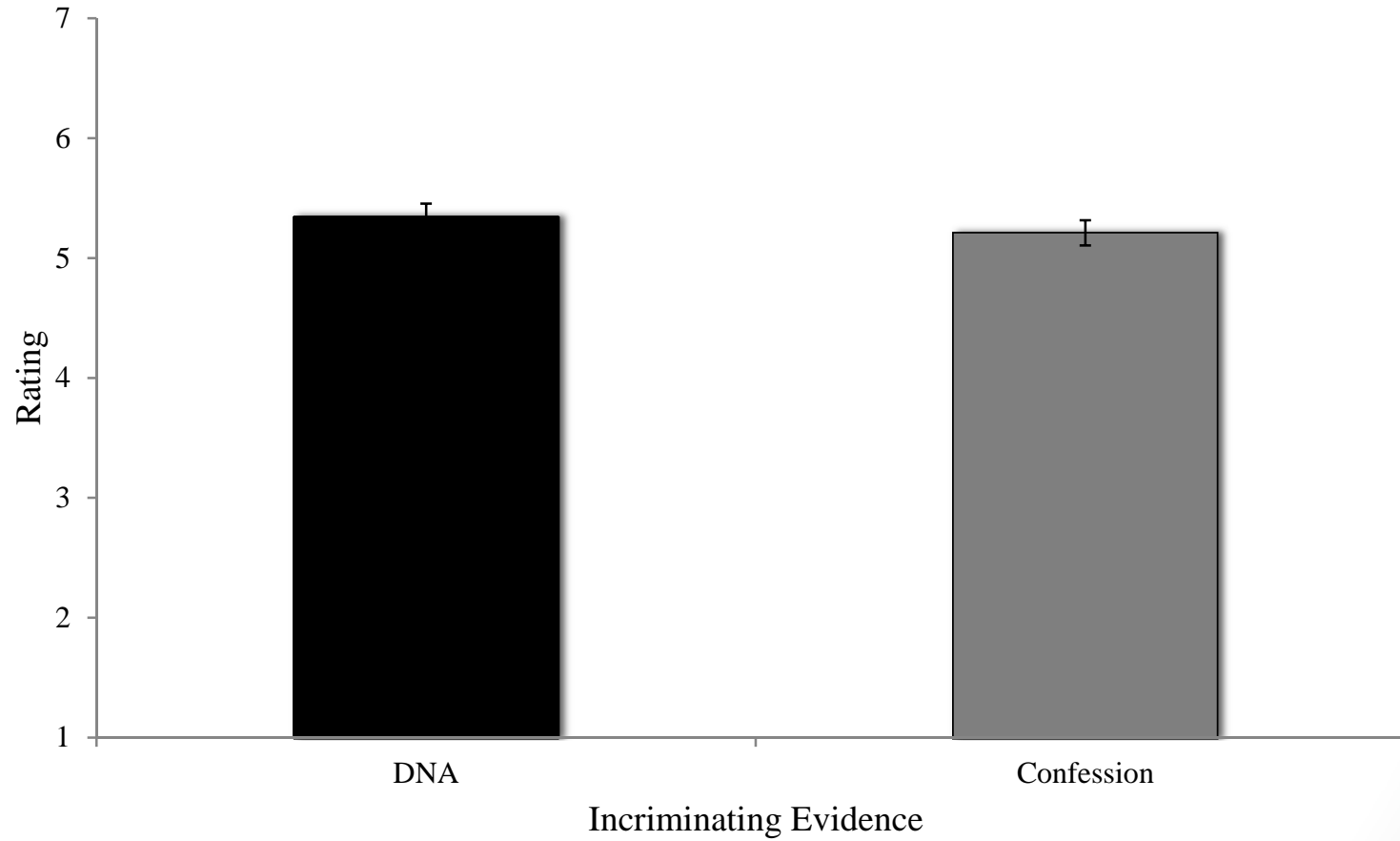
Biological v. Psychological



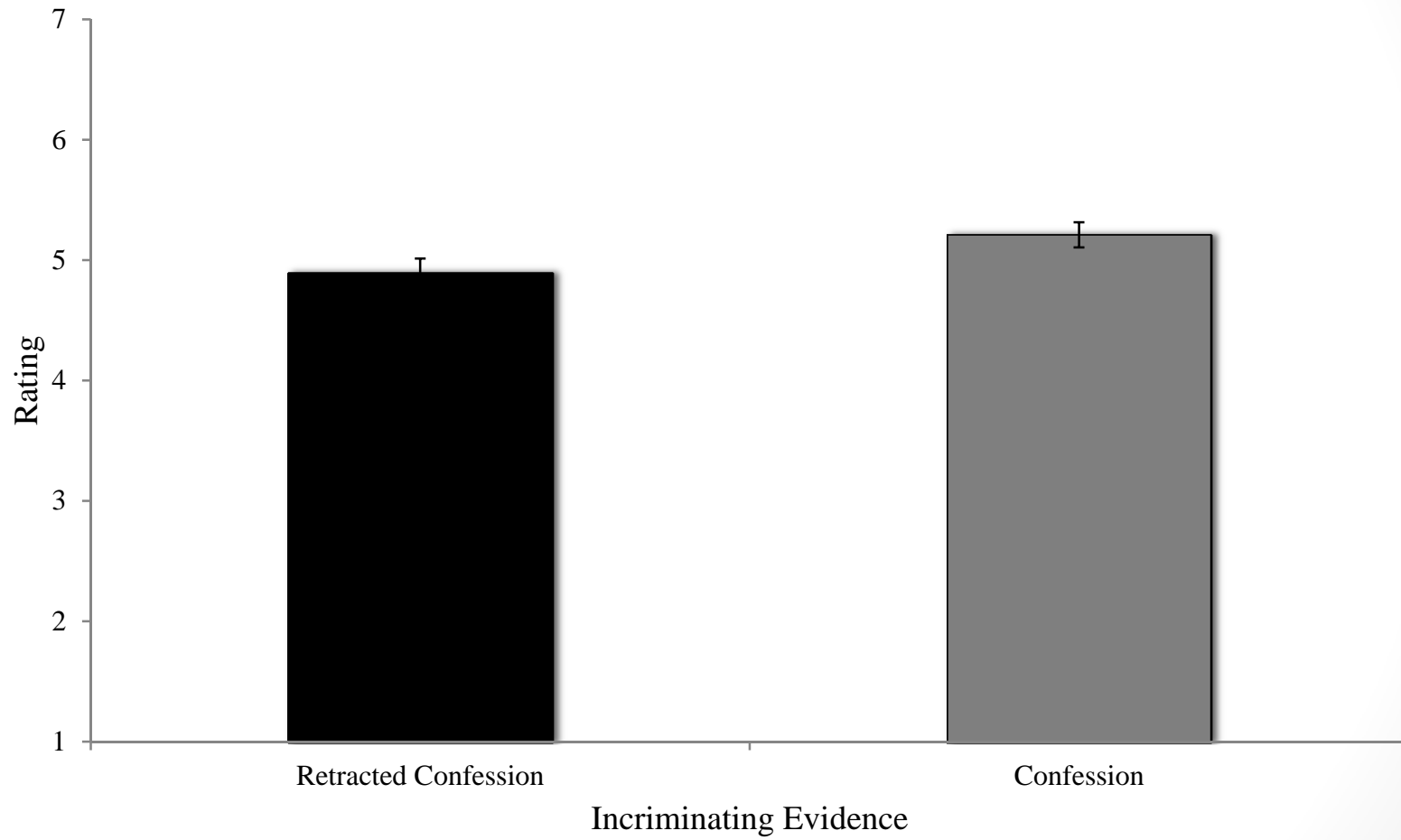
Weight of Biological Evidence



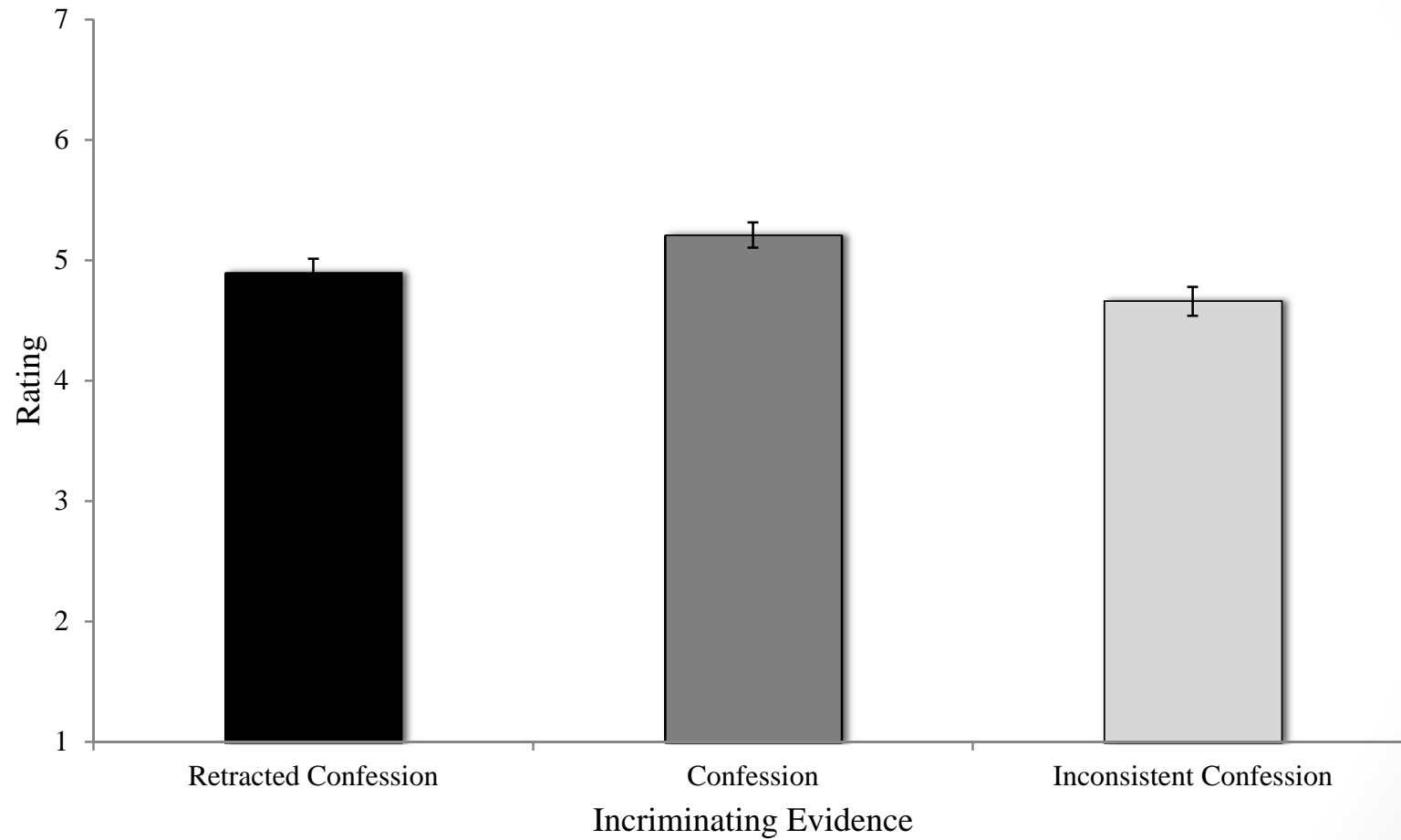
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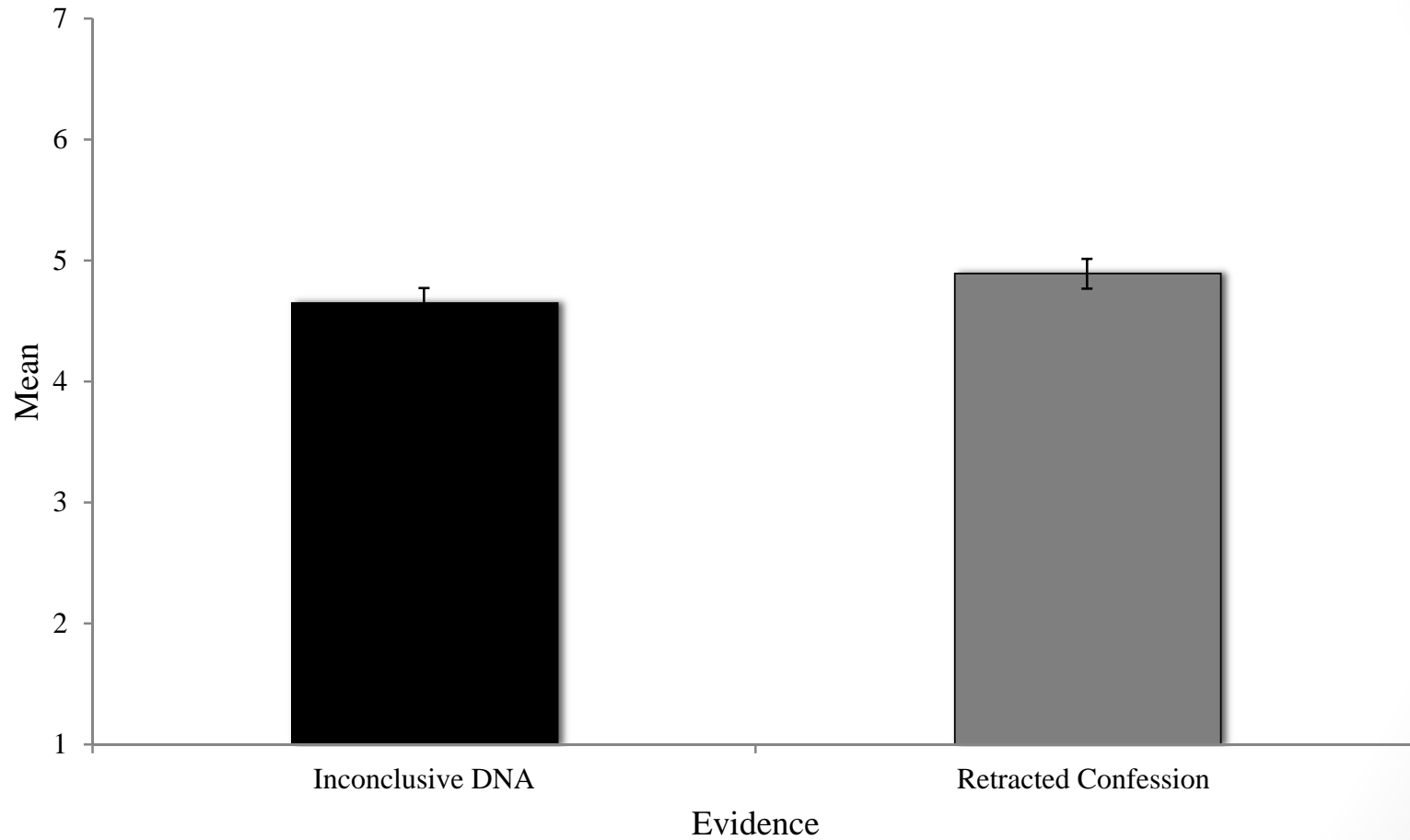
Confession Evidence



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?