Beliefs about suspect alibis: A survey of lay people in the United Kingdom, Israel, and Sweden

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Abstract

During police interviews, innocent suspects may provide unconvincing alibis due to impaired memory processes or guilt-presumptive behaviour on behalf of the interviewer. Consequently, innocent suspects may be prosecuted and tried in court, where lay people who serve jury duty will assess their alibi's credibility. To examine lay people's beliefs and knowledge regarding suspect alibis, and specifically about such factors that may hamper innocent suspects' ability to provide convincing alibis, we administrated an eight-question questionnaire across the United Kingdom (n = 96), Israel (n = 124), and Sweden (n = 123). Participants did not tend to believe that innocent suspects' alibis might inadvertently include incorrect details, but acknowledged that impaired memory processes may cause this. Additionally, most participants believed that a presumption of guilt can affect how interviewers interview suspect. The findings suggest that lay people who may serve jury duty hold some mistaken beliefs regarding alibi provision by suspects.

Keywords: alibis, innocent suspects, jury, presumption of guilt, survey

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Innocent suspects who fail to provide a convincing alibi when interviewed by the police may subsequently be tried in court, where their alibi may be evaluated again by jurors. Are lay members of the public familiar with factors that may lead to an innocent suspect providing an inaccurate, incomplete or otherwise unconvincing alibi? Using a survey, the current research sought to examine this question.

Providing a Convincing Alibi

When providing an alibi to a police interviewer, suspects generally attempt to convince the interviewer of their innocence of the crime for which they are being held suspects. This process has been identified as the *generation domain* of alibi provision which comprises two phases—the story phase and the validation phase (Burke, Turtle, & Olson, 2007; Olson & Charman, 2012; Olson & Wells, 2004). During the story phase, suspects provide their alibi by reporting from memory about their actions and whereabouts during the time of the crime. In the subsequent validation phase, suspects attempt to corroborate their alibi by offering objects (physical evidence) or details about people (person evidence) that may account for their presence at a certain place at a certain time during the time frame of the crime (Burke et al., 2007).

However, during both phases of the generation domain of alibi provision, innocent suspects may provide inaccurate information despite being motivated to provide an accurate and, ultimately, convincing alibi (see Kassam, Gilbert, Swencionis, & Wilson, 2009). One factor that has been found to hamper innocent suspects' ability to provide accurate information is impaired memory processes—a result of the fact that innocent suspects (as all truthful rememberers) must rely on their episodic and autobiographical memory to provide

their truthful statement (Burke et al., 2007; Culhane, Hosch, & Kehn, 2008; Olson & Wells, 2012; Strange, Dysart, & Loftus, 2014). Impaired memory processes concern, for example, the declining accessibility of event details with the passage of time (Pertzov, Manohar, & Husain, 2017; Tourangeau, 2000). Alternatively, innocent suspects may wrongly, though unintentionally, integrate details from memories for distinctive events into a report about an event that never actually took place (i.e., memory-conjunction errors; Reinitz, Lammers, & Cochran, 1992; see also Devitt, Monk-Fromont, Schacter & Addis, 2016).

In addition to memory problems that may compromise innocent suspects' ability to provide a convincing alibi, factors emerging in the course of the interview may also jeopardise their success with respect to convincing the interviewer of their innocence. One such factor is the presumption of guilt with which interviewers sometimes approach interviews with suspects whom they have never met or with whom they have interacted only very briefly. Research on the effects of interviewers' presumption of guilt on the verbal behaviour of suspects during interviews is relatively new. Findings to date have shown no correlation between interviewers' presumption of guilt and suspects' tendency to confess or deny involvement in a crime (Hill, Memon, & McGeorge, 2008), nor have they identified evidence that presumption of guilt affects the informativeness and accuracy of innocent suspects' alibis (Portnoy et al., 2019). However, research has shown that this presumption of guilt can lead interviewers to conduct more aggressive interviews with suspects and ultimately increase the probability that the interviewer will actually judge the suspect as guilty at the end of the interview, irrespective of the suspect's statement (Hill et al., 2008; Kassin, Goldstein, & Savitsky, 2003). These findings thus suggest that when interviewers approach the interview already believing the suspect to be guilty, alibis may become less efficient in suspects' attempts to convince interviewers of their innocence.

Evaluating the Credibility of Alibis

The story phase and the validation phase of the generation domain are followed by the evaluation phase and the ultimate evaluation phase, which comprise the *believability domain* (Burke et al., 2007; Olson & Charman, 2012; Olson & Wells, 2004). In the evaluation phase, the credibility of the alibi is evaluated, usually initially by the police. When police interviewers investigate an alibi and discover that the suspect provided incorrect information, they may fail to attribute such inaccuracies to memory errors (Burke et al., 2007; Dysart & Strange, 2012; Olson & Wells, 2012). Instead, unintentional inaccuracies in alibis may be perceived by the police as an intentional lying and hence guilt (Burke et al., 2007; Dysart & Strange, 2012; Olson & Charman, 2012). If suspects are judged as guilty during initial phases of an investigation (because of, for example, the provision of inaccurate information or interviewers' presumption of guilt), this may ultimately lead to the decision that they should be tried in court (Crozier, Strange, & Loftus, 2017; Wells et al., 1998). There, the ultimate credibility of the alibi is determined by different evaluators who are exposed to all the facts of the case.

Jury members may be the most influential evaluators of a suspect's alibi in court. The task of the jury is challenging, requiring citizens to reach a verdict by assessing the credibility of the suspect and decide whether s/he is innocent or guilty of a crime despite lacking legal training (Bornstein & Greene, 2011; Greene & Bornstein, 2000; Porter & ten Brinke, 2009). When suspects confess to a crime and this confession is then presented at trial, an effort is often made by defence attorneys and expert witnesses to explain the conditions that may have led to the confession in order to ensure that jurors can better decide whether or not the confession is reliable (Shaked-Schroer, Costanzo, & Berger, 2015). However, factors that may have led to a suspect's alibi being disbelieved during initial stages of the investigation and to the suspect ultimately being tried in court may not be explained to jurors, and they may fail to consider such factors when evaluating the suspect's alibi. During the course of the trial,

jurors may assume that there was a justifiable reason to prosecute the suspect, and this assumption is likely to make them doubt the suspect's alibi and guide them in deciding that an innocent suspect is guilty (Burke et al., 2007; Sommers & Douglass, 2007). Thus, it is crucial that, when necessary, jurors are informed and educated during a trail about the process of alibi provision and any factors that may jeopardize the provision of a convincing alibi.

The Present Research

A first step towards improving jurors' decision making in court during the evaluation of suspect alibis is studying what lay people, who may potentially constitute a jury, know about pertinent legal matters. Such examination is also required because judges largely base their decision of whether or not to allow expert witnesses to testify at trial on their assumptions about jurors' knowledge regarding legal matters (Costanzo, Shaked-Schroer, & Vinson, 2010).

To examine the extent to which lay people, as prospective jurors, are familiar with the factors of impaired memory processes and interviewers' presumption of guilt in the context of alibi provision, we recruited lay jury-eligible members of the public in the United Kingdom (UK) to complete a two-part questionnaire. To increase our sample size and thus improve the precision and power of our statistical analyses, and to improve the diversity of our sample, we also distributed the questionnaire to community members in Sweden and Israel. While the latter two countries do not employ a jury system[1], data from these countries are still informative with regard to our research question: lay beliefs and perceptions about alibis.

In the first part of the questionnaire we examined participants' knowledge and beliefs about alibi provision by truthful versus lying suspects in general, and about the provision of

[1] In Israel, verdicts are reached by the judge who then also makes the sentencing decisions (Barak, 1992). In Sweden, a panel comprising both professional and lay judges decides on both verdicts and sentencing outcomes (Ortwein, 2003).

incorrect alibis by truthful suspects in particular. Examining participants' knowledge about the differences in the provision of alibis between truthful and lying suspects was necessary because credibility judgments are partly influenced by evaluators' perceptions and beliefs about honest and deceptive verbal (and nonverbal) behaviour of suspects during interviews (Porter & ten Brinke, 2009). To this end, participants were first asked to indicate their belief about the extent to which six types of details are provided in alibis of truthful versus lying suspects. As research has shown that alibis of liars and truth-tellers differ with respect to their tendency to provide these details (for a review, see Vrij, 2008; see also DePaulo et al., 2003), we wanted to examine how participants' knowledge would align with such research findings. In order not to limit the data we could obtain with respect to participants' beliefs about the differences between truthful and deceptive alibis to one type of verbal behaviour (i.e., the tendency of suspects to provide the six types of details presented in the first question), participants were then asked to freely describe what strategies they believed truthful and lying suspects typically use to make their alibi seem convincing to the interviewer.

Next, we asked participates what they believed the relation between the amount of details provided in an alibi and the truthfulness of the alibi to be, and to explain their answer. The purpose of this question was twofold: Firstly, as research has demonstrated that statements of truthful suspects are more detailed than those of lying suspects (e.g. DePaulo et al., 2003; Vrij, 2008), we were interested in our participants' belief about the relation between alibis' level of detail and their truthfulness. Secondly, we wanted to see whether or not participants would mention the factor of (impaired) memory processes when explaining their belief and how they would mention it (e.g., would they explain that a more detailed alibi is more likely to be truthful because truth-tellers have a real memory for the critical time?).

Finally, participants were explicitly asked to indicate their belief regarding the extent to which truthful alibis might contain incorrect details. Participants who indicated that truthful

alibis may contain incorrect details were asked to explain their answer in order to see if and to what extent they would acknowledge the factor of memory constraints as a reason for mistakes during the provision of alibis by truthful suspects. To our knowledge, no previous research has surveyed lay people's beliefs about memory in relation to truthful suspects' mistaken alibis.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the issue of interviewers' presumption of guilt, which, to our knowledge, has also not been examined in previous survey research. We first asked participants to indicate what they believed was the point in the course of the investigation in which interviewers begin to form their opinion regarding the suspect's veracity. We are unaware of any data that describe when, during an investigation, interviewers usually form their belief regarding the guilt or innocence of suspects. However, as research has demonstrated that interviewers may be confident of suspects' guilt prior to interviewing them (Moston, Stephenson, & Williamson, 1992), this question was used to examine whether or not participants would consider it likely that interviewers may conduct suspect interviews with a presumption of guilt.

Then, we asked participants to indicate their belief regarding the extent to which a presumption of guilt held by interviewers at the beginning of suspect interviews might affect the interviewers' behaviour, and to indicate the likelihood that suspects provide more details and confess to committing the crime (regardless of their actual guilt) in response to a guilt-presumptive interviewer. Despite research on effects of interviewer's presumption of guilt on suspects' behaviour during interviews being relatively scarce and new (e.g., Hill et al., 2008; Portnoy et al., 2019), we wanted to examine what participants believed the effects of interviewers' presumption of guilt on the process of suspect interviews to be and how their beliefs would align with existing research findings.

Method

Participants

Overall, data were collected from 343 members of the general public from three countries. Specifically, a convenience sample of 96 participants from the UK, 124 participants from Israel, and 123 participants from Sweden completed the questionnaire. Data from 11 participants were removed from analyses because they did not complete the questionnaire thoroughly (e.g., provided a one-word reply to all open-ended questions in a manner unrelated to the questions) or failed to meet inclusion criteria (i.e., over the age of 18 years, without previous experience of providing a police alibi). This resulted in data from 332 participants (M = 29.85 years; SD = 11.33; 210 females, 108 males; 14 participants did not indicate their age and gender). Participants were recruited via advertisements on social media. All participants who completed the survey were entered into a prize draw for a £20 internet shopping voucher.

Alibi Questionnaire

An alibi questionnaire comprising eight questions was created in English. The questionnaire was translated into both Hebrew and Swedish by native speakers of both languages using a back-translation procedure. The three language versions of the questionnaire were administrated online using the Qualtrics platform.

When opening the link to the questionnaire, participants were informed that the questionnaire concerned beliefs that members of the general public hold about alibis. Participants completed informed consent procedures and were required to confirm that they had never provided an alibi as part of a police investigation. At the outset of the questionnaire, participants were presented with definitions of the following terms: an alibi, truthful suspects,

and lying suspects (see Appendix). Participants were then instructed to work through the eight questions, with each question presented on a new screen.

In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were first asked to indicate, for six types of details, the extent to which they thought each type of detail was provided in the alibis of lying suspects relative to those of truthful suspects using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *substantially more in liars' alibis than in truth-tellers' alibis,* 7 = *substantially more in truth-tellers' alibis than in liars' alibis*). These six types of details were (a) setting (i.e., description of the crime scene and/or any other place described in the alibi); (b) temporal (i.e., description of the order in which events took place and/or the specific times and dates in which events occurred); (c) object (i.e., details about objects used by the suspect and/or by others described in the alibi); (d) person description (i.e., details about the appearance of other people described in the alibi); (e) self-actions (i.e., details about actions taken by the suspect); and, (f) others' actions (i.e. details about actions taken by people described in the alibi that are not the suspect). Next, using two separate questions, participants were asked to freely describe what strategies they thought truthful and lying suspects typically use to make their alibi seem credible. Participants were then asked what they believed the relation between the amount of details provided in an alibi and the truthfulness of the alibi to be. Participants indicated their belief by choosing one of three response option indicating that more details in an alibi increase or decrease the likelihood that it is truthful, or that there is no relation between an alibi's level of detail and its truthfulness. Participants were also asked to explain their belief. Finally, participants were asked to indicate their belief regarding the extent to which truthful alibis might contain incorrect details (1 = *truthful alibis contain no incorrect details*, 7 = *truthful alibis contain only incorrect details*). Participants who indicated that truthful alibis might contain incorrect details (i.e., chose 2 or higher on the response scale) were then asked to explain their belief.

In the second part of the questionnaire, which concerned the factor of interviewers' presumption of guilt, participants were first asked to indicate the point in the course of the investigation in which they believed interviewers begin to form their opinion regarding the guilt or innocence of suspects. To indicate their belief, participants were asked to choose one of five response options (e.g., *usually prior to hearing the suspect's alibi for the first time*) or to freely report their belief if the options presented were not satisfactory[2]. Participants were then asked to indicate the extent to which they thought an interviewer's presumption of guilt affects what the interviewer says and how s/he behaves during an interview (1 = *does not at all affect the interviewer's words and behaviours,* 7 = *significantly affects the interviewer's words and behaviour*). Finally, we asked participants about the likelihood that suspects respond to the interviewer's presumption of guilt by (a) providing more details in their alibi, (b) providing details even if uncertain of their accuracy, and, (c) confessing to committing the crime (1 = *very unlikely,* 7 = *very likely*).

On completion of the questionnaire, participants were asked to report their age, gender, country of residence, and the main language they use in everyday communications. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

Results

Alibi Provision and Effects of Memory Processes

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations of participants' responses to the question concerning the extent to which setting, temporal, object, person, self-actions, and others' actions details are provided in alibis of truthful suspects relative to those of lying

[2] Due to the lack of data (to our knowledge) regarding the point in the course of an investigation in which police interviewers usually begin to form their opinion regarding suspects' veracity, the response options presented to participants in this question represented what we believed were plausible options of the timing in which a veracity belief is formed by interviewers. In order not to limit participants to these response options and thus not to lose access to their actual beliefs, if the response options presented to participants in this question were not satisfactory, they could freely report their belief.

suspects. One-sample t-tests indicated that, on average, participants believed that most types of details are provided significantly more often in truthful than in deceptive alibis.

Table 1 about here

Next, we categorised the freely-reported strategies that participants thought truthful and lying suspects typically use to make their alibi seem truthful and convincing to the interviewer. The first author coded all responses in a data-driven manner, meaning that the categories were derived from participants' reports. A second coder coded 32 responses (9.8%) of participants for each of the two strategies questions (liars and truth-tellers). Tables 2 and 3 present the categories of the strategies perceived by participants to be used by truthful and lying suspects, respectively. The tables also present inter-coder reliability computed using intra-class correlation coefficient (ICC). The three most common strategies of truthful suspects during alibi provision reported by participants (Table 2) were that truth tellers cooperate with the interviewer, express confidence, and provide detailed alibis. With respect to liars' strategies during alibi provision (Table 3), the three most commonly reported strategies concerned providing detailed alibis, engaging in general impression management, and expressing confidence.

Table 2 about here

As two of the three most commonly reported strategies for each of the two strategies questions were strategies reported for both truthful and lying suspects (i.e., providing detailed alibis and expressing confidence), we examined whether the proportion to which participants reported each of these two strategies differed for truthful and lying suspects. Two exact McNemar's tests were conducted only among participants whose reports could be coded for both truthful and lying suspects' strategies questions (n = 321). The tests showed that participants believed that a detailed alibi occurs more often with respect to lying (39.0%) than

truthful suspects (26.6%), $p = .001$. In contrast, participants believed that expressing confidence occurs more often among truthful (30.0%) than lying suspects (16.6%), $p < .001$.

Table 3 about here

Table 4 presents the frequencies with which participants chose each response option to the question concerning the relation between the amount of details provided in an alibi and the truthfulness of the alibi. A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit revealed that the preference for the three response options was not equally distributed, $X^2(2, N = 332) = 8.32$, $p = .015$. Post-hoc analyses of standardized (Pearson) residuals showed that the belief that more details indicate a less truthful alibi was reported more often than would be expected by chance, $p = .021$. However, this test just barely failed to reach statistical significance when compared against the Bonferroni-corrected alpha ($\alpha = .05/3 = .017$). None of the other two response options approached statistical significance, ps $\geq .112$.

Table 4 about here

Also presented in Table 4 are participants' reasons for their belief regarding the relation between the amount of details provided in an alibi and its truthfulness. Most participants who believed that a detailed alibi is *less likely* to be truthful explained that liars may believe that a detailed alibi is perceived as truthful and convincing. With respect to participants who believed that a detailed alibi is *more likely* to be truthful, most of them explained their belief by reporting that the truth is easy to keep track of and thus being informative is not difficult. Finally, most participants who believed that the amount of details provided in an alibi is *not related* to its truthfulness reported that the truthfulness of an alibi depends on different factors, such as the verifiability of the details provided, the extent to which the details provided are central to the main event, and the suspect's personal strategy to appear truthful (which may or may not be to provide a detailed alibi).

We then examined participants' belief regarding the extent to which truthful alibis might contain incorrect details. Participants' beliefs are presented in Table 5. On average, participants rated the likelihood that a truthful alibi might contain incorrect details as relatively low (M = 3.41, SD = 1.15; 1 = *truthful alibis contain no incorrect details*). The reasons underpinning beliefs that truthful alibis might contain incorrect details to different extent, as reported by participants who chose response option 2 or higher on the response scale, are presented in Table 5. Most participants who indicated to believe that truthful alibis may contain incorrect details explained that this may be due to impaired memory processes.

Table 5 about here

Interviewers' Presumption of Guilt

The point of the investigation at which participants believed an interviewer likely begins to form an opinion about the guilt or innocence of the suspect is presented in Table 6. A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit revealed that participants' preference of the six possible response options was not equally distributed, $X^2(5, N = 332) = 170.37$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc tests of standardized (Pearson) residuals, using a Bonferroni-corrected alpha ($\alpha = .05/6 = 0.008$), indicated that participants tended to believe significantly more often than would be expected by chance that interviewers usually begin to form their opinion of the guilt or innocence of suspects *prior* to hearing their alibi for the first time ($p < .001$) or *while* suspects are providing their alibi for the first time ($p < .001$). The post-hoc tests also indicated that the beliefs that interviewers *never* form a belief regarding suspects' involvement in a crime and that there may be another option for the timing of the formation of this belief ("*other*" response option) were both significantly underrepresented, both ps < .001. The remaining two response options were not statistically significant, ps ≥ .074.

Table 6 about here

Then, we found that, on average (M = 5.61, SD = 1.23), participants believed that interviewers' presumption of guilt can affect what interviewers say and how they behave during an interview. The explanations underpinning these beliefs are presented in Table 7. The most common explanation provided by participants who strongly believed this to be true (i.e., chose 5 or higher on the response scale) was that presumptions of guilt make interviewers conduct harsher interviews, ask leading questions, and pressure the suspect to confess.

Table 7 about here

Finally, on average, participants believed that when suspects get the impression that the interviewer thinks they are guilty, they will provide more details in their alibi (M = 5.47, SD = 1.45) and provide details even if they are uncertain of their accuracy (M = 5.27, SD = 1.33). However, participants believed that, under such interviewing circumstances, the extent to which suspects will confess to committing the crime is low (M = 2.98, SD = 1.45).

Discussion

Using a questionnaire administrated in three countries, the present research examined lay people's beliefs about factors that may hinder innocent suspects' ability to provide convincing alibis—impaired memory processes and interviewers' presumption of guilt. In general, participants' responses indicated that they did not believe that innocent suspects might inadvertently provide inaccurate alibis, but that when this happens, impaired memory processes are likely to be the reason. With respect to the factor of interviewers' presumption of guilt, participants mostly believed that interviewers usually begin to form their opinion regarding the veracity of suspects before or while suspects are providing their alibi for the first time. Also, participants tended to believe that a presumption of guilt can affect how

interviewers conduct an interview with suspects. Below we discuss all findings in depth and review how they fit with existing research.

Beliefs About Alibi Provision and Impaired Memory Processes

The most noteworthy finding concerning participants' beliefs about the qualities of suspect alibis was that participants believed that while truth-tellers are more informative with respect to specific types of details, liars more often try to appear generally informative. Specifically, participants tended to believe that, on average, setting, temporal, object, and person-description details are provided only slightly more often in alibis of truthful suspects than lying suspects. This belief aligns with existing research findings (Vrij, 2008; see also DePaulo et al., 2003). However, when participants freely reported that suspects provide a generally detailed alibi to appear convincing, this was reported more often with respect to lying suspects than truthful suspects. Most participants also believed that the more details provided in an alibi, the less likely the alibi is to be truthful. Previous survey research has demonstrated similar beliefs of lay people about the relation between the amount of details provided by suspects during police interviews and suspects' veracity (Granhag, Andersson, Strömwall, & Hartwig, 2004; Bogaard, Meijer, Vrij, & Merckelbach, 2016; but see Akehurst, Köhnken, Vrij, & Bull, 1996). Liars may succeed in providing a rich, detailed statement by describing an actual experience that occurred on a different time than that of the crime, with details concerning the crime nevertheless being denied or omitted (i.e., embedded lies; Vrij, 2008; Vrij, Granhag, & Porter, 2010). However, this belief of participants that a detailed alibi is less likely to be truthful contrasts findings according to which statements of truthful suspects are usually more detailed than those of lying suspects (e.g. DePaulo et al., 2003; Vrij, 2008).

It may be that participants believed that with the use of two alibi-provision strategies they mentioned with respect to liars—making up details and preparing an alibi—liars can

maintain a detailed statement throughout the interview and make their lie "work". Participants did mention that a lie is difficult to keep up with; however, they may not fully realise how difficult it is. Lying is a cognitively demanding task that requires more mental resources than telling the truth does, and even planning a lie may be difficult for liars. They may fail to formulate a lie that will convince the interviewer of their innocence, and thus they may decide not to provide a detailed statement in an upcoming interview. During the interview, liars must remember what information they have already provided to the interviewer earlier in the same interview or in previous ones in order to maintain a consistent statement. However, impaired memory processes may prevent liars from remembering what information they have already provided (and to whom). In order not to struggle with remembering a detailed lie, liars are likely to provide a relatively short statement (Vrij, Fisher, Mann, & Leal, 2008; Vrij, Granhag, Mann, & Leal, 2011; Vrij, Mann, Fisher, Leal, Milne, & Bull, 2008). Indeed, innocent, truthful suspects tend more than guilty, lying ones to employ an alibi-provision strategy of providing a detailed statement (Hartwig, Granhag, & Strömwall, 2007; Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall, & Doering, 2010; Strömwall, Hartwig, & Granhag, 2006).

Turning to the issue of impaired memory processes in the context innocent suspects' alibis, participants' responses indicated that they were reluctant to acknowledge that truthful alibis may unintentionally include incorrect details. This finding embodies another demonstration of lay people's lack of understanding of issues concerning psychology and law and is consistent with previous findings that demonstrated this poor knowledge by lay people (e.g., Benton, Ross, Bradshaw, Thomas, & Bradshaw, 2006; Simons & Chabris, 2011, 2012). For example, Benton et al. (2006) found that agreement between 111 jurors from the United States and 64 eyewitness experts regarding items concerning eyewitness issues (e.g., memory, weapon focus, and elderly witnesses) was obtained only on four (13%) of 30 items.

However, when examining the explanations of participants as to why they believed that truthful alibis may contain incorrect details, a more encouraging picture emerged. Participants acknowledged that impaired memory processes may prevent innocent suspects from reporting accurately from memory. For example, participants correctly acknowledged that innocent suspects may not encode relevant event details because of not realising the importance of remembering the event for a later reporting (see Burke et al., 2007; Tourangeau, 2000). Participants also correctly mentioned that event details may be forgotten over time (see Pertzov et al., 2017; Tourangeau, 2000). Participants mentioned the factor of forgetting by truthful suspects also when explaining why they believed a detailed alibi may indicate that the suspect is lying (that is, because impaired memory processes may prevent innocent suspects from providing a detailed alibi).

Altogether, findings from the first part of the questionnaire suggest that participants hold some mistaken beliefs about suspect alibis. Nevertheless, participants did demonstrate an understanding that innocent suspects may provide incorrect details due to impaired memory processes.

Beliefs about Interviewers' Presumption of Guilt

Participants' beliefs that interviewers' presumption of guilt may lead them to conduct harsher interviews, use leading questions, and pressure suspects to confess align with findings of previous research (e.g., Hill et al., 2008; Kassin et al., 2003). This finding regarding participants' beliefs about the effects of presumption of guilt on interviewers, combined with the finding that most participants believed that interviewers usually begin to form their opinion regarding suspects' guilt or innocence prior to or while meeting them for the first time, suggests that if suspects claim that the interviewer to whom they provided their alibi

treated them in accordance with a guilt belief, lay people may find this claim plausible at court.

Participants additionally tended to believe that when suspects feel that they are being interviewed by a guilt-presumptive interviewer, they are likely to be more forthcoming and not to confess to a crime. However, existing research have found no evidence that when suspects are interviewed by a guilt-presumptive interviewer, their verbal behaviour differs from that of suspects interviewed by a neutral or innocence-presumptive interviewer (e.g., Hill et al., 2008; Portnoy et al., 2019). Nevertheless, research on the effects of interviewers' presumption of guilt on suspects' verbal behaviour during interviews is relatively new and scarce, and has examined narrow interviewing contexts (e.g., interviewing mock suspects over the telephone as in Hill et al., 2008). Future research on lay people's beliefs about suspect alibis might compare between the beliefs expressed in the present research and findings obtained from new research on the effects of interviewers' presumption of guilt on suspects' verbal behaviour during interviews.

In sum, results from the second part of the questionnaire suggest that lay people are aware of the fact that interviewers might approach suspect interviews while already presuming guilt and that this presumption of guilt might affect how interviewers conduct interviews. The findings also suggest that lay people believe that suspects' verbal behaviour is not likely to be negatively affected by a guilt-presumptive interviewer. Future research might compare the beliefs of police interviewers with those of members of the general public about the topics of memory limitations and presumption of guilt in the context of suspect alibis.

Contributions of the Present Findings

Existing findings concerning lay people's mistaken knowledge about eyewitness issues suggest that eyewitness expert testimony may be required in court to educate jurors

(e.g., Benton et al., 2006; Simons & Chabris, 2011, 2012). The present findings add to this body of research by identifying some of the factors concerning the process of suspect interviewing that jurors may need to hear expert testimony about, as their mistaken beliefs about these factors may directly affect how they evaluate suspect alibis. Specifically, jurors may benefit from being informed that innocent suspects may provide incorrect details due to memory constraints despite being motivated to be accurate. In addition, the present findings suggest that jurors may also need to be explicitly informed that suspects sometimes provide their alibi to a guilt-presumptive interviewer; this should be done especially when suspects complain that their interviewer treated them as if they had already decided that they were guilty.

The implications mentioned thus far are relevant only to countries whereby verdicts are reached by jurors. Nonetheless, the present findings are also relevant to any country where information gathering from suspects is necessary, as these findings can inform the development of interviewing techniques. For example, assuming that participants' beliefs about the behaviour of suspects reflect how *they* would behave as suspects during police interviews (as was also suggested by some responses), the finding that they believed that a more detailed statement is less likely to be truthful suggests that, as truth-tellers during police interviews, they would not try to provide a detailed statement. Accordingly, when interviewing suspects and instructing them to provide a detailed statement, it may be crucial to also explain to them the importance of being informative, for example, for the course of the investigation and the possibility of exonerating them as suspects by having more details to verify.

Finally, the data obtained from the present research may be used in the future to examine how lay people's knowledge and beliefs about suspect alibis and interviewers' presumption of guilt align with new findings obtained following the examination of

interviewing contexts that were not applied in previous alibi research, especially in research on effects of interviewer's presumption of guilt on suspects' behaviour during interviews.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations are associated with the present research. Firstly, it may be that the response options for some questions limited the range of responses, even though participants were provided with free space throughout and at the end of the questionnaire to express any thoughts they may have had. Secondly, although our findings demonstrate what lay people *believe* and *know* about the factors of memory failures and presumption of guilt in the context of alibis, we did not ask participants whether they would *consider* these factors when evaluating alibis' credibility. Future research may focus on this specific question. Finally, the terms "truth-tellers" and "liars" were used interchangeably as synonyms for "innocent suspects" and "guilty suspects", respectively. Admittedly, guilty suspects may speak the truth and innocent suspects may lie in police interviews, and one cannot be certain that participants' reported beliefs about truth-tellers and liars correspond perfectly with their beliefs about innocent and guilty suspects, respectively. However, because suspects' veracity and guilt are probably correlated in real life, the conclusions drawn from the present findings and the potential contributions of these findings remain valid.

The present research was the first to examine the extent to which lay members of the public are familiar with factors that may hamper innocent suspects' ability to provide a convincing alibi. As lay people in the role of jurors sometimes determine the fate of those who may be innocent, the present findings suggest that judges must not prevent memory and interview experts from discussing relevant research findings in court (as was the case with the United States' former Vice-Presidential Chief of Staff I. Lewis Libby; see Kassam et al., 2009) on the grounds that "such research would tell jurors little that they did not already know" (ibid, p. 552). In countries where a jury system is not employed (but also in ones

where it is), the present findings may assist with informing the development of interview protocols. Alongside developing interviewing techniques that work to maximise the quality of alibis provided by innocent suspects, further research should examine the extent to which (prospective) jury members are informed of the interrogation contexts in which suspects provide their initial alibi.

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Table 1
Participants' Belief Regarding the Extent to Which Details Occur in Truth-Tellers' versus Liars' Alibis

Type of detail	*M* (*SD*)	*t* (*p*-value)	*d* [95% CI]
Person description	4.40 (1.52)	4.78 (< .001)	0.26 [0.15, 0.37]
Temporal	4.38 (1.63)	4.20 (< .001)	0.23 [0.12, 0.34]
Object	4.37 (1.45)	4.69 (< .001)	0.26 [0.15, 0.37]
Setting	4.34 (1.72)	3.63 (< .001)	0.20 [0.09, 0.31]
Others' actions	4.10 (1.52)	1.23 (= .221)	0.07 [-0.04, 0.18]
Self-actions	4.00 (1.65)	0.00 (= .990)	0.00 [-0.11, 0.11]

Note. Beliefs were reported on a scale ranging from 1 (*substantially more in liars' alibis*) to 7 (*substantially more in truth-tellers' alibis*). Reported *t*-values were computed using one-sample *t*-tests (*df* = 331) comparing the mean rating against the scale mid-point (4).

Table 2
Strategies That Participants Believed Are Used by Truthful Suspects to Provide a Convincing

Strategy	Frequency (% of total N)	ICC (p-value)
Alibi		

Non-verbal behaviour and impression management		
Suspect is cooperative and does not use strategies	108 (33.0)	0.94 (< .001)
Suspect expresses calmness/confidence and is confident in innocence	98 (30.0)	0.94 (< .001)
Suspect engages in general impression management to appear and sound innocent	50 (15.3)	0.79 (< .001)
Open, calm (sometimes expressive) movements and voice	35 (10.7)	0.84 (< .001)
Suspect is naturally nervous, fidgety	34 (10.4)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect keeps eye contact with the interviewer	31 (9.5)	1.00 (< .001)
Informativeness, accuracy, and evidence details		
Suspect provides detailed alibis	87 (26.6)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect provides person/object evidence details	61 (18.7)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect provides accurate information	54 (16.5)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect is informative about self-actions, whereabouts, and feelings during the critical time	37 (11.3)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect is not too informative	34 (10.4)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect is informative about surroundings and objects	28 (8.6)	1.00 (< .001)
Statement's characteristics		
Suspect describes events chronologically; provides exact times	36 (11.0)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect's statement is coherent, logical	34 (10.4)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect's statement is consistent	24 (7.3)	1.00 (< .001)
Other	79 (24.2)	0.80 (< .001)

Note. $N = 327$; Data from five participants were removed from analysis because their reports were too vague. Categories are presented in the order of the frequency with which participants reported each category. "Other" = strategies that were individually reported by less than 5.5% of participants (e.g., truthful suspects repeat their story; report incorrect information; and, do not describe events chronologically). Participants could report a strategy more than once and from more than one category.

Table 3
Strategies That Participants Believed Are Used by Lying Suspects to Provide a Convincing Alibi

Strategy	Frequency (% of total N)	ICC (p-value)

Informativeness, accuracy, and evidence details		
Suspect provides detailed alibis	127 (39.0)	.88 (< .001)
Suspect is not too informative	46 (14.1)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect is informative about surroundings and objects	23 (7.1)	-*
Suspect is informative about self-actions, whereabouts, and feelings during the critical time	18 (5.5)	.79 (< .001)
Non-verbal behaviour and impression management		
Suspect engages in general impression management to appear and sound innocent; denies guilt	84 (25.8)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect expresses calmness/confidence	54 (16.6)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect prepares an alibi; memorises details	53 (16.2)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect is naturally nervous, fidgety	41 (12.6)	1.00 (< .001)
Open, calm (sometimes expressive) movements and voice (naturally or faked)	28 (8.6)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect makes up details	26 (8.0)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect keeps eye contact with the interviewer	25 (7.7)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect appeals to interviewer's feelings	25 (7.7)	1.00 (< .001)
Statement's characteristics		
Statement is coherent, logical (naturally or with effort)	36 (11.0)	1.00 (< .001)
Suspect describes events chronologically; provides exact times	33 (10.1)	1.00 (< .001)
Statement is vague, not coherent (naturally or on purpose)	22 (6.7)	1.00 (< .001)
Other	127 (39.0)	1.00 (< .001)

Note. $N = 326$; Data from six participants were removed from analysis due to being vague. Categories are presented in the order of the frequency with which participants reported each category. "Other" = strategies that were individually reported by 4.9% of participants, or less (e.g., liars provide verifiable/unverifiable information; feign forgetting/not knowing details; name another person as the culprit; and, do not speak). Participants could report a strategy more than once and from more than one category. *Inter-coder reliability cannot be computed because of lack of variance in item coding.

Table 4
Participants' Belief About the Relation Between Amount of Details Provided in an Alibi and Its Truthfulness and Their Explanations for Their Beliefs

	Response option

	The more details provided in the alibi, the less likely the alibi is truthful	The more details provided in the alibi, the more likely the alibi is truthful	The amount of details provided in the alibi is not related to its truthfulness
	Endorsement of belief[a]		
	135 (40.7%)	94 (28.3%)	103 (31.0%)
	Explanations for belief[b]		
Liars believe that a detailed alibi is perceived as truthful	80 (59.3%)	0 (0.0%)	20 (19.4%)
The truth is easy to keep track of; many details can corroborate the suspect's story	2 (1.5%)	43 (45.7%)	7 (6.8%)
Depends on different factors	3 (2.2%)	3 (3.2%)	57 (55.4%)
Truth tellers have memory for the critical time	0 (0.0%)	40 (42.6%)	10 (9.7%)
Truth tellers do not remember everything	52 (38.5%)	0 (0.0%)	26 (25.2%)
A detailed alibi seems planned	49 (36.3%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (10.7%)
Fewer details lower the risk of providing incriminating information	2 (1.5%)	33 (35.1%)	4 (3.9%)

Note. [a]Number of participants from total sample ($N = 332$) who chose this response option (parentheses include percentage of total sample). [b]Number of participants who provided this explanation out of the participants who chose the response option (parentheses include percentage out of the total number of participants who chose the response option). Column percentages for explanations do not add to 100%, as participants could provide more than one explanation.

Table 5
Participants' Explanations for Their Belief About the Extent to Which Truthful Alibis Might Contain Incorrect Details

	The extent to which truthful alibis might contain incorrect details (1 = *truthful alibis contain no incorrect details*, 7 = *truthful alibis contain only incorrect details*)					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Explanation	9* (2.7%)	67 (20.2%)	113 (34.0%)	75 (22.6%)	59 (17.8%)	9 (2.7%)
Impaired memory processes	0 (0.0%)	52** (77.6%)	103 (91.2%)	66 (88.0%)	51 (86.4%)	6 (66.7%)
Pressure/excitement from being interviewed	0 (0.0%)	27 (40.3%)	40 (35.4%)	23 (30.7%)	18 (30.5%)	3 (33.3%)
On purpose (e.g., to end the interview; to cover for another truth)	0 (0.0%)	15 (22.4%)	12 (10.6%)	6 (8.0%)	5 (8.5%)	2 (22.2%)
Confusion	0 (0.0%)	11 (16.4%)	8 (7.1%)	4 (5.3%)	4 (6.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.7%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. Label 7 is not included because no participant chose this response option. *Number of participants from total sample (N = 332) who chose this response option (parentheses include percentage of participants who chose this response option out of the total sample). **Number of participants who provided this explanation out of total number of participants who chose the response option (parentheses include percentage of participants who provided this explanation out of the total number of participants who chose the response option). "Other" = explanations that truthful alibis may contain incorrect information due to, for example, difficulty to communicate thoughts or lack of effort. Participants could provide an explanation of more than one type.

Table 6
Participants' Belief About the Point in the Investigation at Which the Interviewer Begins to Form an Opinion Regarding the Guilt/Innocence of the Suspect

Response Option	Frequency (% of total N)
Usually while the suspect is providing the alibi for the first time	118 (35.5%)
Usually prior to hearing the suspect's alibi for the first time	93 (28.0%)
Usually after there is evidence to corroborate/refute the alibi	56 (16.9%)
Usually after interviewing the suspect several times	42 (12.7%)
Other	17 (5.1%)
The interviewer never forms a belief regarding the suspect's involvement in the crime	6 (1.8%)

Note. $N = 332$. "Other" category included reports that the point in the investigation at which the interviewer begins to form an opinion regarding the guilt/innocence of the suspect varies from one interviewer to another, that it depends on factors such as the suspects' behaviour, and that it may be a combination of several of the response options provided.

Table 7
Participants' Explanation for Their Belief About the Extent to Which Interviewer's Presumption of Guilt Might Affect What This Interviewer Says and How S/He Behaves During This Interview

Explanation of belief	The extent to which interviewer's presumed guilt might affect what this interviewer says and how s/he behaves during this interview (1 = *does not at all affect the interviewer's words and behaviours,* 7 = *significantly affects the interviewer's words and behaviour*)					
	2	3	4	5	6	7
	7* (2.1%)	13 (3.9%)	33 (9.9%)	94 (28.3%)	88 (26.5%)	97 (29.2%)
The interviewer will conduct harsher interviews	1** (14.3%)	4 (30.8%)	6 (18.2%)	50 (53.2%)	55 (62.5%)	44 (45.4%)
General reports that bias affects the interviewer's behaviour without explaining how	3 (42.9%)	7 (53.8%)	10 (30.3%)	26 (27.7%)	19 (21.6%)	33 (34.0%)
The interviewer will focus on and/or interpret suspects' alibi and/or behaviour in accordance with the belief and/or ignore contradicting information	2 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (18.2%)	22 (23.4%)	17 (19.3%)	24 (24.7%)
Depends on different factors (e.g., the interviewer; existing evidence)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (33.3%)	3 (3.2%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.1%)
Interviewers are trained to avoid biased interviews and will not communicate the suspicion to the suspect	2 (28.6%)	5 (38.5%)	9 (27.3%)	9 (9.6%)	2 (2.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Report is about effects on suspect, not the interviewer	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.3%)	6 (6.2%)

Note. Label 1 is not included because no participant chose this response option. *Number of participants from total sample (N = 332) who chose this response option (parentheses include percentage of participants who chose this response option out of the total sample). **Number of participants who provided this explanation out of total number of participants who chose the response option (parentheses include percentage of participants who provided this explanation out of the total number of participants who chose the response option). Participants could provide an explanation of more than one type.