



Religion and Objectivity of Video Evidence

How Religious Identity Biases Perception of Video and Leads to Biased Decision-Making

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Abstract

Video evidence is heralded as an objective tool in the legal justice system, yet, there are instances where the same video evidence led to disparate interpretations. In this study, we predict that religious affiliation shapes individuals' perception of video evidence, and this perceptual bias in turn leads to harsher punishment decisions.

Introduction

Video may not be an objective form of evidence in the legal justice system.

(Granot, Balcetis, Schneider, & Tyler, 2014; Ware, Lassiter, Patterson, & Ransom, 2008)

Why?

Selective visual attention while viewing video evidence biases the judgements people made about a defendant.

(Ware et al., 2008)

Social group identification, based on race and other factors, predicts accuracy and shapes interpretations of jurors' understanding of case facts to which they attend and punishment decisions.

(Granot et al., 2014; Rowatt, Franklin, & Cotton, 2005)

Research Question:

Does religious identification bias perception of video evidence and, subsequently, punishment decisions for religious out-group members?

Method

Participants:

N= 312, 177 Jewish, 135 Muslim, 152 male,

M_{age} = 39.01.

Video Stimulus:

Participants watched a muted 58-s video depicting an altercation between two men in which wrongdoing was ambiguous.

Between-subjects, the men in the video were identified as either Ezra, a Jewish man, or Ali, a Muslim man.

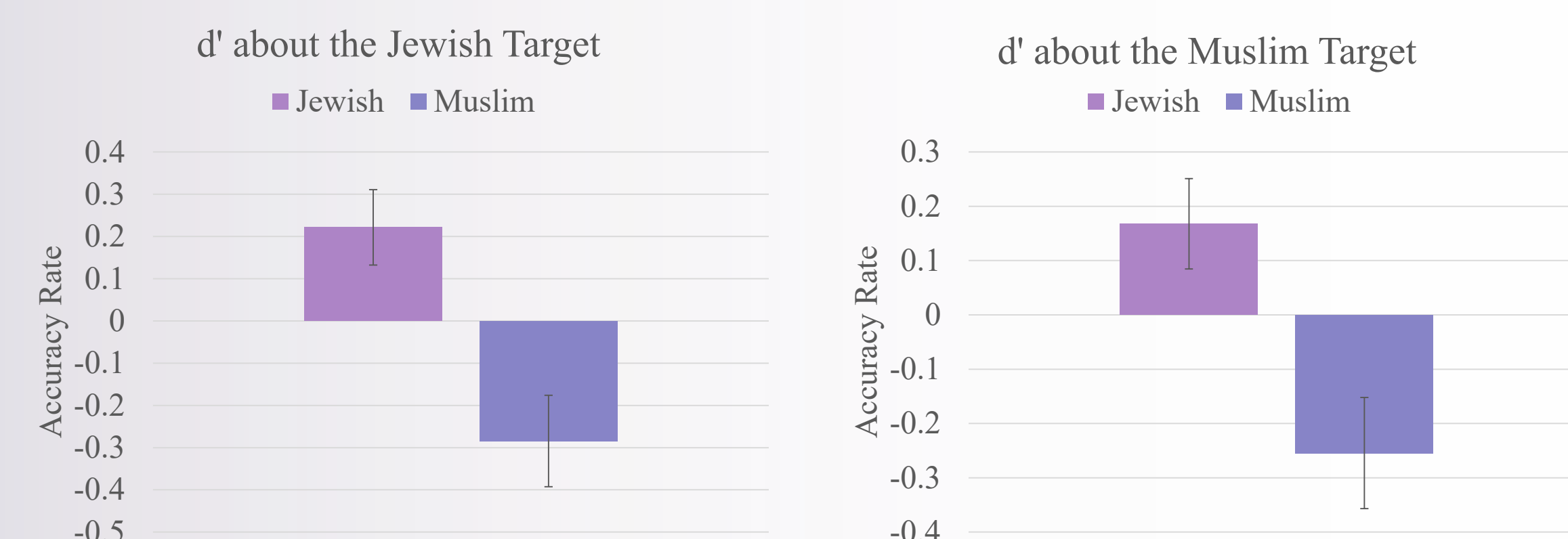
Method (continued)

Outcome Measures:

- Participants answered 28 *true* or *false* questions about the facts of the harm committed in the altercation.
 - Computed hits, false alarms, accuracy (*d'*), and bias (*c*) scores for the Jewish and Muslim target.
- Participants answered a series of 10 punishment questions, including likelihood of punishing, severity of fine, severity of probation sentence, etc for the Jewish and Muslim target.

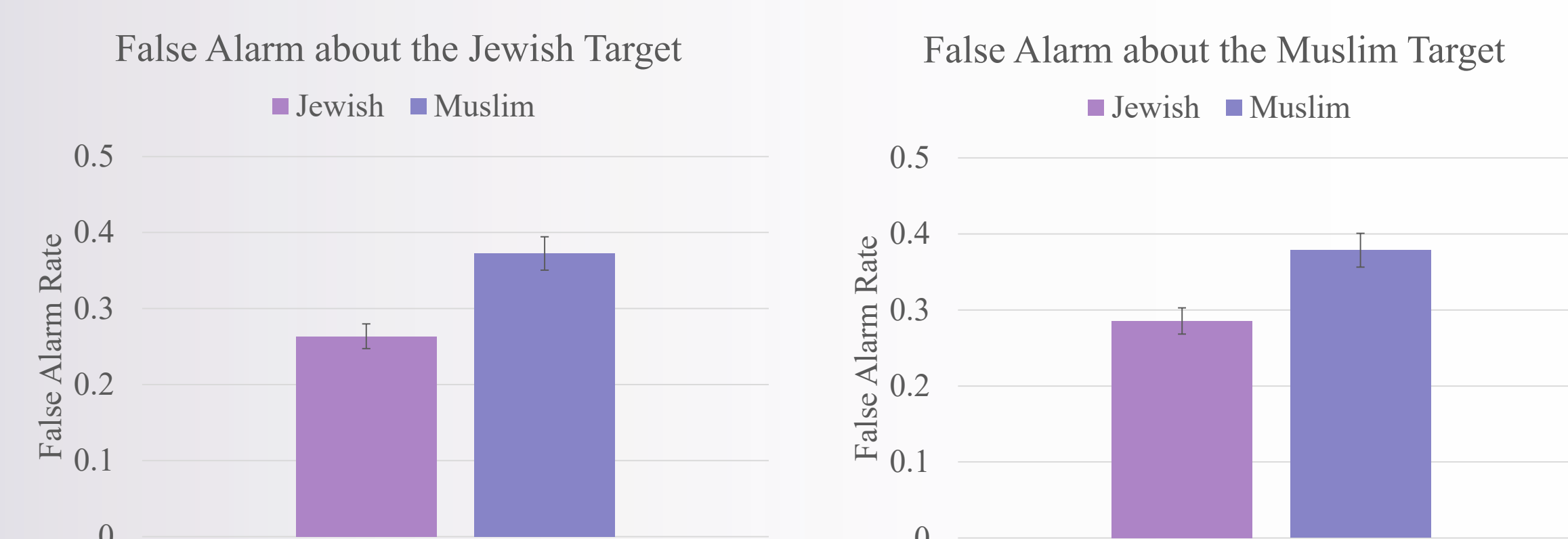
Results

Compared to Jewish participants, Muslim participants showed:



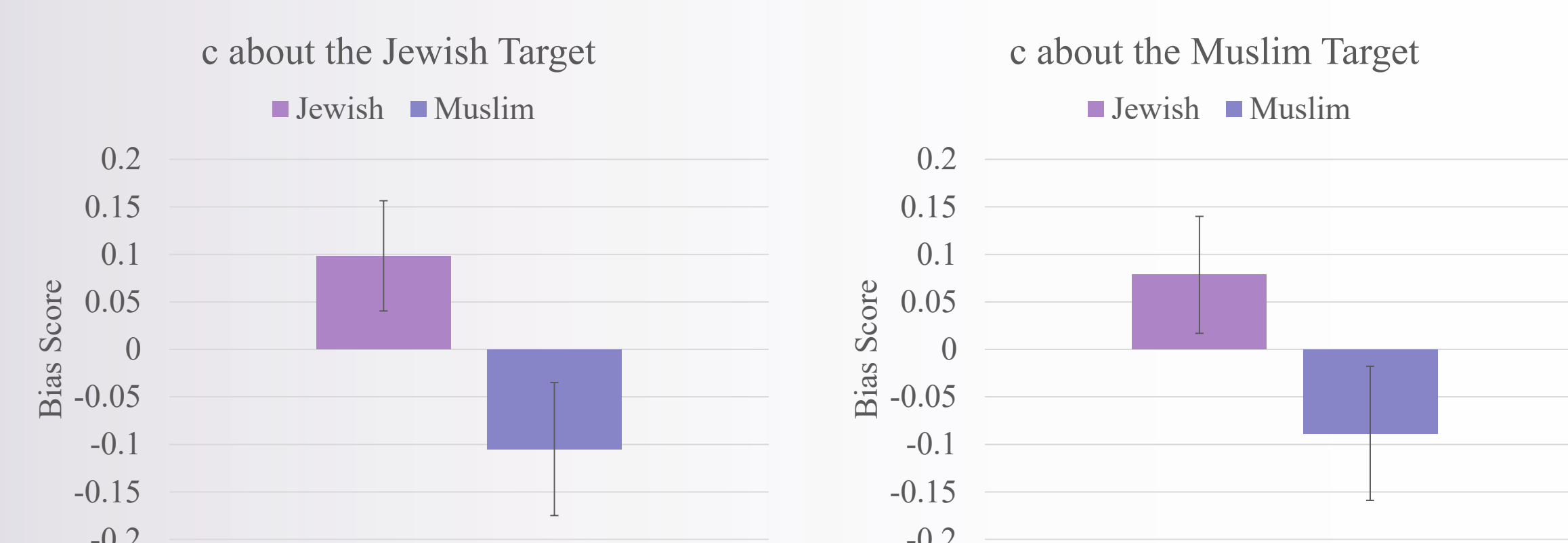
less accuracy about the Jewish man's actions, $t(310)=-3.64, p<.001$.

less accuracy about the Muslim man's actions, $t(310)=-3.23, p=.001$.



higher false alarm rate about the Jewish man's actions, $t(310)=4.07, p<.001$.

higher false alarm rate about the Muslim man's actions, $t(310)=3.34, p=.001$.



more bias about the Jewish man's actions, $t(310)=-2.25, p=.025$.

marginal more bias about the Muslim man's actions, $t(310)=-1.78, p=.076$.

Predicting Punishment from Bias and False Alarms

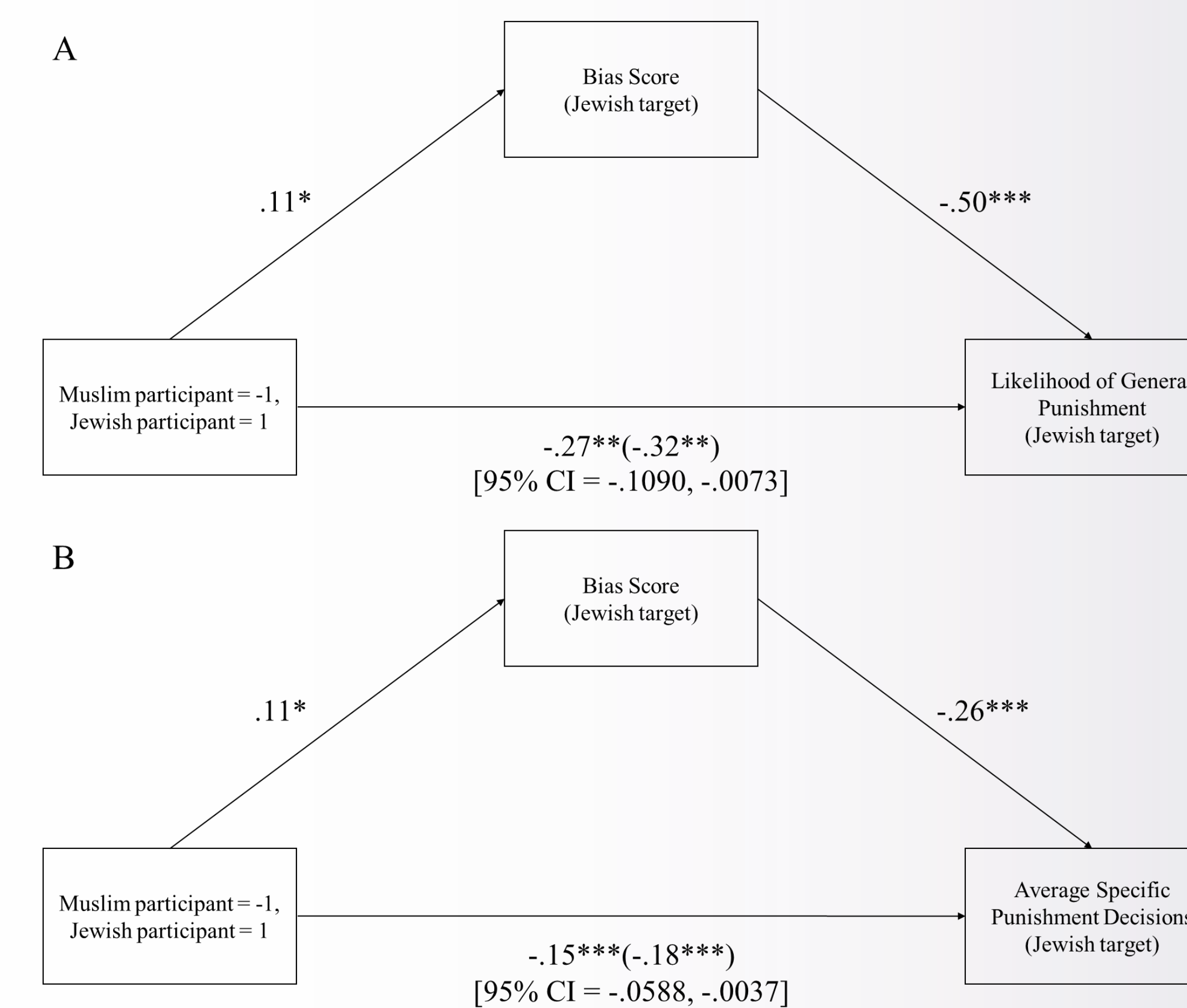


Figure 1. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the relationship between religion identification and likelihood of punishment (Panel A) and specific punishment decisions (Panel A) as mediated by the bias score. The total effect is represented in parentheses; * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.

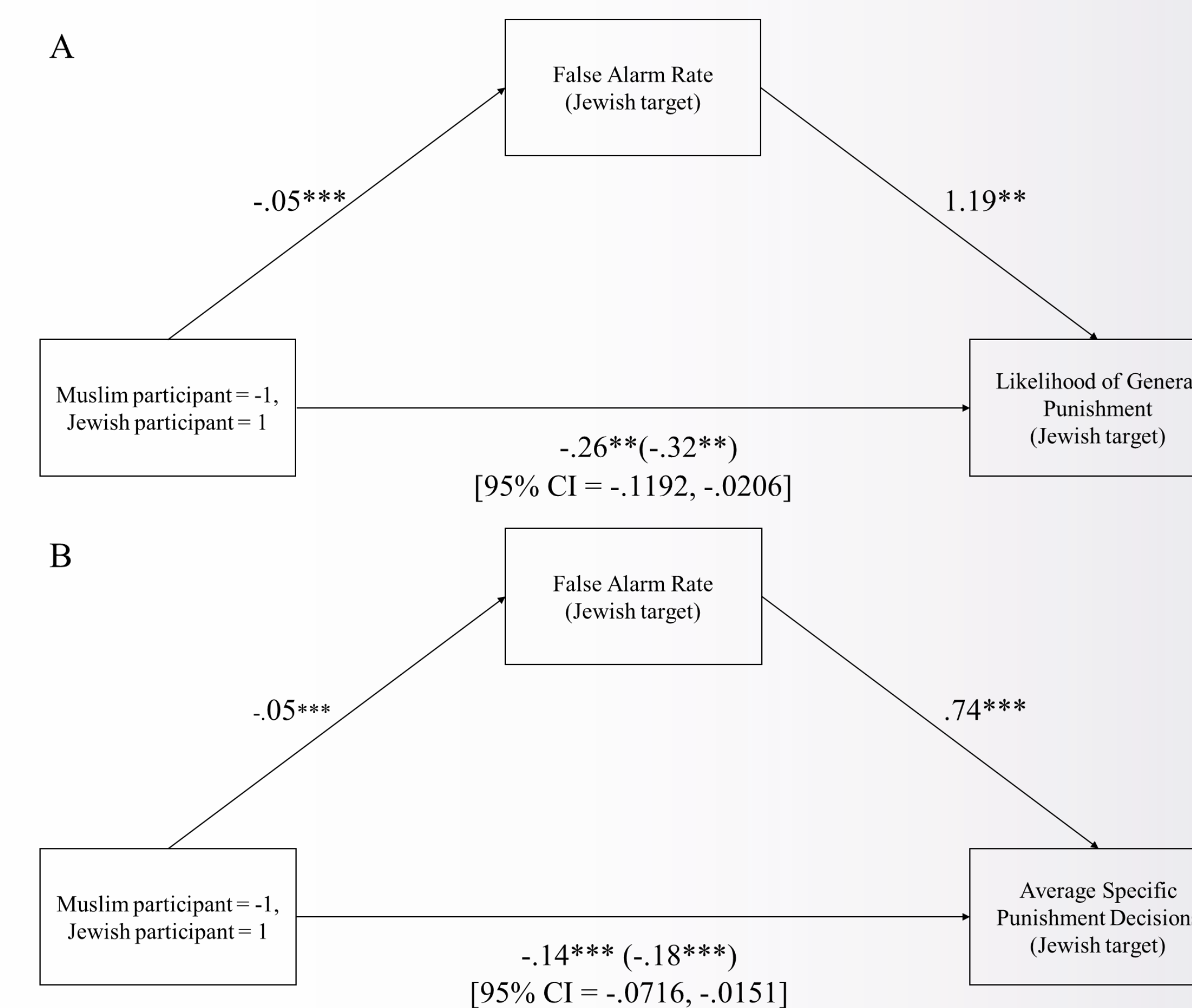


Figure 2. Unstandardized regression coefficients for the relationship between religion identification and likelihood of punishment (Panel A) and specific punishment decisions (Panel A) as mediated by the false alarm rate. The total effect is represented in parentheses; * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$.

Discussion

- Evidence suggests religious group biases the assessment of video evidence.
- Beyond being slower in helping religious out-group members, and having implicit prejudice toward religious out-group members, this study demonstrates that people punish religious out-group members more harshly than they punish religious in-group members. (Rowatt, Franklin, & Cotton, 2005; Rózycka-Tran, 2017)
- Punishment decisions were mediated by bias scores and false alarm rates: participants were more likely to answer *yes* to aggressive acts questions which in turn predicted the severity of punishment decisions.
- Muslim participants showed both out-group as well as in-group derogation.

Implications

- Membership in social groups biases individuals' understanding of legal case facts.
- People are both unjustly favorable in their perceptions of in-group members but also unjustly ascribe to the general attitude about members of their own social group.
- Resolving when out-group favoritism or black sheep effects will emerge is warranted. In this study, it is possible that Muslim participants were writing-off the Muslims man's Muslim identity, and treating him as non-representative of the Muslim community.

References

Granot, Y., Balcetis, E., Schneider, K. E., & Tyler, T. R. (2014). Justice is not blind: Visual attention exaggerates effects of group identification on legal punishment. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 143, 2196-2208.

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Ware, L. J., Lassiter, D. G., Patterson, S. M., & Ransom, M. R. (2008). Camera perspective bias in videotaped confessions: Evidence that visual attention is a mediator. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 14, 192-200.

Further Information

Questions or comments?

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