LIE TO ME:  
COMPLIANT FALSE  
ACCUSATIONS BY CHILDREN  

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Child Suggestibility

• Subjecting children to repeated false suggestions can alter their memories.¹
  • Leading questions
  • Bribes
  • Selective Reinforcement

• Children will make false accusations based on these memories.

• What if you simply ask children to make a false accusation?

¹ For a review see Bruck & Ceci (1999).
Questions Asked in Current Study

• Will children make a false accusation, merely because someone asked them to do so?

• Will children maintain the accusation in later interviews?
Participants

- N=70, ages 4-12 years old (M=8.5), 56% male

- 16 saw a magic show performed by clowns (pilot study)
  - After-school students
  - Evidence: broken wand
  - Magician was clumsy
  - Magician was a stranger

- 54 saw a chemistry show
  - Science museum campers
  - No evidence
  - Chemist did not drop anything during show
  - Children saw chemist every day
Methods

**Interview 1**
- Can you tell me that the chemist broke the test tube?

**Interview 2**
- The adult last week made a mistake.
- Did the chemist break the test tube?
- Did you see it happen?
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Magician (n=16)</th>
<th>Chemist (n=54)</th>
<th>Total (n=70)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonsuggested</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6%)</td>
<td>(94%)</td>
<td>(37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(38%)</td>
<td>(63%)</td>
<td>(76%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(88%)</td>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(89%)</td>
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</table>

*Note: Values = n (%)*
Who Will Make a False Accusation?

• Most children! 15.42 times more likely to comply

• Children who saw the magic show ($p<0.10$)

• Age, time delay, suggestibility and gender not significant
False Accusations by Age

- 5 and 6 (n=7)
- 7 and 8 (n=38)
- 9 and 10 (n=18)
- 11 and 12 (n=7)

- Yes
- No
Who Will Maintain the Accusation?

- Children who saw the magic show ($p<0.01$)
- Younger children ($p<.05$)
- Children who waited longer to be interviewed ($p<0.10$)
- Interview 1 response, gender and suggestibility not significant
Maintained False Accusations by Age

- 5 and 6 (n=7)
- 7 and 8 (n=38)
- 9 and 10 (n=18)
- 11 and 12 (n=7)

Yes
No
“I saw it with my own eyes”

- 5 and 6 (n=7)
- 7 and 8 (n=38)
- 9 and 10 (n=18)
- 11 and 12 (n=7)
Summary

• Children will comply with a blatantly false request even if they know they are not being truthful.

• Most children will accurately disclose in a neutral interview.

• Even with little suggestion, initial compliance may create false memories in young children.
Future Directions

• What created the false memory in the younger children?

• Was it the act of making the false accusation or the incorporation of the adult’s suggestion?
References


THANK YOU!
Who Will Make a False Accusation?

Logistic regression predicting who will make the false accusation during the first interview.

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<th>B</th>
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<th>Odds</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.74**</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>15.42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show Type</td>
<td>-1.91+</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time Delay</td>
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<td>0.30</td>
<td>1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td>0.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suggestibility</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>1.08</td>
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*Notes: **p<0.01, +p<0.10*
Who Will Maintain the Accusation?

Logistic regression predicting who will make the false accusation during the second interview.

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>B</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>4.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>T1 Compliance</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show Type</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suggestibility</td>
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<td>0.86</td>
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Notes: **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.10