

I'm grateful to Uri Simonsohn and the Data Colada team for examining the data behind Ariely and Wertenbroch (2002; AW). Their forensic analysis is far more sophisticated and thorough than what researchers without their experience could have done, and the evidence of data tampering they found is convincing. It shows that much or all of the data — and therefore the results — are false.

As the Data Colada team note in their posts, I “never had access to any version of the data for any of the studies” in the article. When I learned about the tampering, I contacted Simine Vazire, Editor-in-Chief of Psychological Science, and asked her to retract the article to correct the scientific record.

To the best of my recollection, some 25 years later, here's what I remember. Dan and I developed the idea for the paper while he was finishing his PhD at Duke and I was an Assistant Professor at Yale. The research question of whether people impose costly deadlines on themselves to avoid procrastinating grew out of my earlier work on precommitment (Wertenbroch, 1998). I ran one early pilot study myself in 1998–99, but I did not collect or analyze the data behind the published studies, and I never had that data. As second author, I helped edit and revise the manuscript during the review process. Such a division of labor between authors was not unusual at the time and consistent with my experience with other research collaborations. That's why I still had old drafts and reviewer comments, which I was able to send to Data Colada, to help them understand what must have happened.

I'm glad Dan shared the data with Kyle Hyndman in 2006, after I asked him to. I no longer have that email exchange, but Data Colada obtained it from Kyle. Comparing that dataset with an earlier INSEAD working-paper version I had published online in 2001 helped them identify the tampering.

Retraction is one of the worst things that can happen to a scientist. But for science's sake, it also seems worth separating this paper from the underlying question of whether people impose costly limits on their own choices to address their self-control problems, contrary to what standard economic theory suggests. That question mattered before this paper and still does. Unfortunately, the data problems invalidate AW's key findings. Still, my own earlier paper (Wertenbroch 1998) suggested and later research confirmed that demand for precommitment is a fairly robust phenomenon across different contexts,¹ and Hyndman and Bisin's (2026) replication shows demand specifically for costly deadlines. Perhaps there are lessons here for what conceptual and direct replications can teach us (Crandall and Sherman 2016; Lynch, Bradlow, Huber, and Lehmann 2015).

I'm disappointed and saddened by what led to the paper, but I am also glad that Data Colada's work is setting the record straight. I'm also grateful for Hyndman and Bisin's (2026) replication, which helps clarify what we actually know — and don't know — about deadlines and performance. I'm glad that I still had the reviews to help confirm how this happened so that the scientific record gets corrected.

¹ See, for instance, Acland and Chow (2018); Ashraf, Karlan, and Yin (2006); Duflo, Kremer, and Robinson (2011); Giné, Karlan, and Zinman (2010); Kaur, Kremer, and Mullainathan (2015); Thaler and Benartzi (2004).

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