

Abstract

In the current study we examined the effect of having the opportunity to plan an alibi in advance on the suitability of the verifiability approach in two crime scenarios that differed in their opportunity to carry out innocent activities at the time of the crime. One hundred and two participants imagined being involved in stealing money either from a café at a time when it was open (allows innocent activities) or from a bank at a time when it was closed (does not allow innocent activities). We asked participants about their strategies and difficulties in preparing a verifiable alibi in advance, and to write down their prepared alibis. The participants in both groups found this task difficult and did not differ in the difficulties they experienced, however they differed in their strategies (plans to include true witnesses) and actual success in the task. Participants in the Café scenario provided 30% more verifiable details than the participants in the Bank scenario. Strategies and difficulties mentioned by the participants are presented in the paper, and the implications of the study's results on the application of the verifiability approach are discussed.

Can someone fabricate verifiable details when planning in advance?

It all depends on the crime scenario

Suppose someone is planning to commit a crime. Obviously, the person will try to avoid getting caught, but may also be aware of the possibility that the police will suspect him or her at some point. Since a convincing alibi can save the person from prosecution, it is better for the person to think about a potential alibi at a very early stage, already before or while committing the crime. Is it possible for a criminal to plan in advance a convincing alibi? We examined this question in the present paper.

According to the Reality Monitoring approach (RM; Alonso-Quecuty, 1992), a truthful alibi is expected to be clear and to include many perceptual details (e.g., descriptions of what someone saw, heard, smelled etc.), emotional details (e.g., how the person felt) and contextual details (e.g., where and when the described activities took place) (Vrij, 2008). Recently, Nahari, Vrij and Fisher (2014a) introduced the verifiability approach, which emphasizes the ability to *verify* these contextual and perceptual details provided in the alibi rather than assessing their mere presence. Central to the verifiability approach are two assumptions. First, research has shown that the richer in detail an account is perceived to be, the more likely it is to be believed (Bell & Loftus, 1989; Johnson, 2006; Johnson, Foley, Suengas, & Raye, 1988). Liars seem to be aware of this assumption and are inclined to provide many details in order to make an honest impression on observers (see Nahari, Vrij, & Fisher, 2012). Second, liars prefer to avoid mentioning too many details out of fear that investigators can check such details and will discover that they are lying (Masip & Herrero, 2013; Nahari et al., 2012). Those two assumptions reflect contradicting motivations for liars which put them in a dilemma. On the one hand, they are motivated to report many details to make an honest impression, and on the other hand

they are motivated to avoid providing details to minimise the chances of being caught. A strategy that compromises between these two conflicting motivations is to provide details that cannot be verified. That is, when attempting to make an honest impression, liars may choose to provide details that are difficult to verify (e.g., ‘I saw a black Audi driving in Shenkin Street’) and avoid providing details that are easy to verify (e.g., ‘I phoned my friend Fred at 10.30 this morning’). Consequently, as Nahari, Vrij, and Fisher (2014a; 2014b) showed, liars tend to report fewer verifiable details than truth tellers.

Nahari et al. (2014b) further showed that informing interviewees just before they provide their statements about the interviewer’s intention to check for verifiable details in their alibis increased the ability to distinguish between truth tellers and liars. While informed truth tellers included more verifiable details into their accounts than the uninformed truth tellers, no difference emerged between informed and uninformed liars, presumably because informed liars did not have such details to provide. As a result, the difference in including verifiable details between truth tellers and liars was more pronounced in the informed participants than in the uninformed participants. Yet, the participants in Nahari et al. (2014b)'s study were informed regarding the interviewer’s intention to check for verifiable details only *after* they had carried out their crime. Therefore, a still unanswered question is what would happen if liars were made aware earlier about the interviewer’s intention to check their details - before or at the time when they carry out their criminal activity. In the current study we aimed to provide an answer to this question.

One strategy that liars may apply is to carry out verifiable innocent activities at the same time as carrying out their criminal activities. Nahari et al. (2014b) observed such a strategy when some liars carried out criminal activities (e.g., copying a stolen

exam in the library) but pretended that they carried out a non-criminal activity (e.g., copying an article in the library). They were therefore able to report true verifiable details, such as real conversations they had in the library or paying by credit card for the copies. However, in this study liars could report such a false account relatively easy, because their presence in the library when the crime was committed was legitimate. It may be much more difficult for liars to apply such a strategy in situations where their presence at the crime scene at a specific time is not legitimate (e.g., being in the library after closing time). In the current study, we manipulated the crime scenario making it legitimate or illegitimate for the suspect to be at the crime scene at the time the crime occurred, and examined the impact of this manipulation on suspects' strategies and the kind of details they provide.

The current study

The current study was designed to examine the suitability of the verifiability approach for cases where criminals have an opportunity to plan their alibies in advance. We introduced two crime scenarios. The participants were asked to imagine being involved in stealing money either from a café at a time when the café was open or from a bank at a time when the bank was closed. The Café scenario allows criminals to admit being present at the café when the crime took place, and, consequently, gives them the opportunity to carry out truthful verifiable activities. In such cases criminals can provide true witnesses (i.e., people they actually met in the café during or around the time the crime took place and can report these truthful interactions in their testimony). The Bank scenario does not allow criminals to admit being present at the bank at the time the crime was committed and, consequently, provides them with less opportunity to come up with truthful verifiable activities. In such a case, criminals who wish to provide verifiable details have to *fabricate* these

details. For example, they can provide circumstantial evidence. That is, evidence that can imply that a claimed fact is truthful, but which cannot be proven to be truthful (e.g., a cinema ticket provided as proof for an alibi is circumstantial physical evidence, because having a ticket does not prove that the suspect actually was in the cinema at the time of the crime). They can also provide false witnesses to back up their alibi (e.g., to ask a friend to tell the police that they were together).

Our aim was twofold: to (i) learn about the steps and strategies criminals may take to prepare in advance a verifiable alibi; and (ii) compare the two scenarios in terms of strategies used by the mock criminals and the amount of verifiable details provided in their alibi statements. These insights are important for the application of the verifiability approach in real life.

Our hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Participants in the Café scenario condition will plan to include more true witnesses in their accounts than participants in the Bank scenario condition. In contrast, participants in the Bank scenario condition will plan to use more fabricated details (false witnesses and circumstantial evidence [e.g., a receipt, phone calls, emails]) than participants in the Café scenario condition.

Hypothesis 2: Participants in the Bank scenario condition will find it more difficult to prepare a verifiable alibi than participants in the Café scenario.

Hypothesis 3: The percentage of participants in the Café scenario condition that will position themselves in the café will be higher than the percentage of participants in the Bank scenario condition that will position themselves in the bank.

Hypothesis 4: Participants in the Café scenario condition will provide more verifiable details than participants in the Bank scenario condition.

Method

Participants

A total of 102 students (72 females and 30 males) participated in the experiment for course credits or payment of 30 Israeli shekels (about \$9). Their mean age was 23.49 years ($SD = 4.26$ years).

Procedure

Participants arrived at the laboratory individually or in small groups (up to four participants) at a predetermined time. The experimenter told them that the experiment dealt with examining the efficiency of certain lie detection tools. All participants signed a consent form indicating that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the experiment at any time without penalty. Participants were then assigned randomly to one of two experimental conditions in which we systematically varied the crime scenarios (Bank, Café). In this way, 51 students (36 female and 15 males) were participated in each crime scenario condition.

Crime scenarios

We designed two scenarios – Bank and Café - that were similar in their crime features, such as type of crime (stealing money), duration of the event (about 45 minutes) and time of the day (Wednesday at 13:15). We referred to a specific Bank and a specific Café which are both located at the campus, so the participants (all students) are familiar with both of them. Since the Bank and the Café are close to each other, their surroundings are also similar.

Participants in the Bank scenario read the following instructions: "Imagine that you are planning to rob the Campus branch of Mizrahi bank next week. You prefer to do it when the bank is closed so that there are no customers. You prepare yourself by observing the activities at the bank from a nearby bench. You discovered that on Wednesdays the bank is closed between 13:30 and 16:00. During this break only one bank employee stays in the bank. You decide that between 13:30 and 16:00 is the best time to rob the bank. You also had to find a way to break into the bank. While observing the activities at the bank, you noticed that the manager leaves through the back door 15 minutes after the other workers leave the bank. The back door locks automatically after him, but since the door is heavy, the closing time is relatively long and takes about five seconds. This leaves you with an opportunity to enter the bank. Your plan is finalized. You are going to arrive at the bank next Wednesday at 13:15 to commit the crime. You expect to be at the bank for about 45 minutes."

The participants in the Café scenario condition received the following instructions: "Imagine that you are going to steal money from Greg café next week. You prefer to do it when customers are in the café. You prepare yourself by visiting the café to observe the activities in the café. You discovered that on Wednesdays the shifts change at 13:30. Just before that time the shift manager counts the money in the cash till, while the other workers continue serving the customers. After finishing counting the money the manager takes the money to his office in a special bag. He stays in his office with the money until the bank opening time (16:00), when he goes to the bank to deposit the money. You decide that the period between 13:30 and 16:00 is the best time to steal the money from the café. You also had to find a way to break into the shift manager's office. While observing the activities in the café, you noticed that the shift manager regularly stands by the window in his office to smoke a

cigarette. While he smokes, he stands with his back to the table on which the bag with money is. The shift manager's office is located next to the café toilets. Since the shift manager never closes his office door whilst he is in his office, it leaves you with an opportunity to enter his office and take the money. Your plan is complete. You will arrive at the café next Wednesday at 13:15 to commit the crime. You expect to be at the café for about 45 minutes."

Pre-crime stage

After reading the crime scenario instructions, the participants in both conditions read the following instructions: "You have to take into account that you may be caught by the police after having committed this crime. The police may interrogate you and ask you to provide an alibi. Usually, the police check the verifiability of alibis, that is, an investigator determines the extent to which a suspect provides details which veracity status can be checked. If the suspect provides many verifiable details the police may believe that his/her alibi is truthful. On the other hand, if the suspect does not provide enough verifiable details, the police may think that the suspect provides a false alibi." And subsequently participants were asked three questions regarding planning an alibi in advance: (a) What steps can you take in advance (before or while committing the crime) to prepare yourself for providing a verifiable alibi in case you will be questioned by the police after having committed the crime?; (b) Please specify what the difficulties are (if any) in preparing in advance (before or while committing the crime) such a verifiable alibi?; and (c) Please rate on a 7-point scale (1 – not at all to 7 – completely) to what extent you find it difficult to prepare in advance (before or while committing the crime) a verifiable alibi?

Post-crime stage

The participants were then told: "Let us imagine that you committed the crime successfully. The police suspect that you committed the crime, and want to interrogate you. They ask you to write a statement and to describe in as much detail as possible what you did on that Wednesday between 13:00 to 14:00. You know that, among others things, they will check the verifiability of the alibi you provide." The participants were first asked whether they were going to develop a strategy to appear convincing in their alibi. Participants who answered the question positively were asked to describe their strategy.

The participants were then asked to write down a statement. The specific instructions were: "The police ask you to provide a detailed statement about your activities on Wednesday between 13:00 and 14:00 (the time you committed the crime). They ask you to be as detailed as possible, so that they can understand exactly what you did at that period of time. A lie detection expert will check the statement you write.. She will check your statement in terms of verifiability, and the more verifiable detail your statement contains, the more likely it is that she will find your statement convincing. She may also actually check (some of) the detail you provide. If she found your statement convincing, you will receive your payment and be allowed to leave. In addition, you will participate in a draw in which four participants will win 50 Israeli shekels (about \$14) each. If the expert found your statement unconvincing, you will be asked to write a second statement about what happened and you will not participate in the draw.

Participants' feedback post interview

After writing their statements, participants were asked to complete a post-interview questionnaire and to mark their own statement. Participants were told that

the experiment had ended, that their answers would not influence the assessment of their statements as false or true, and that they were requested to answer the questions truthfully. They were asked to rate on 7-point scales (1 – not at all to 7 – completely): (i) To what extent were you motivated to appear convincing in your statement?, (ii) To what extent did you find it difficult to appear convincing in your statement?, (iii) To what extent did you find it difficult to provide verifiable details in your alibi? (iv) To what extent did you think you were convincing in your statement?, (v) To what extent do you think your statement is verifiable (vi) What do you think is the likelihood that you will participate in the draw?, (vii) What do you think is the likelihood that you have to write an additional second statement? We combined questions ii and iii (perceived difficulty to succeed in the task, Cronbach alpha = .86), and questions iv, v, vi and vii (perceived success in the task, Cronbach alpha = .78).

After the participants completed the questionnaire, they were debriefed and given their course credits. None of the participants were asked to write a second statement and all participants were included in the draw.

Coding the Verifiability of the Statements

All statements were rated by two independent coders (blind to the experimental conditions) who were asked to mark on the statements all the perceptual details (information about what the examinee saw, heard, or smelt during their alleged activities); spatial details (information about locations or the spatial arrangement of people and/or objects); and temporal details (information about when the event happened or an explicit description of a sequence of events) that potentially could be verified. Specifically, similar to Nahari et al. (2014a; 2014b), verifiable details were activities that were (i) documented and therefore checkable (examples are provided

below), or (ii) carried out together with (an)other identified person(s) (rather than alone or with a stranger who could not easily be traced), or (iii) witnessed by (an)other identified person(s). We counted as verifiable details only descriptions of actions that occurred (a) on Wednesday between 13:00 and 14:00, or (b) before or after this period of time, but at a location far enough away from the crime scene to rule out any possibility of the participant being at the crime scene between 13:00 and 14:00 (e.g., a participant who claimed to have withdrawn money at 12.15 from a bank located at a two hours driving distance from the crime scene, could not have been at the crime scene between 13.00 and 14.00).

For each participant we calculated the total number of details (perceptual, spatial and temporal) that could be verified. The ICC for coders was high and satisfactory: $ICC = .89, p < .001$. For example, they counted as verifiable details encounters or conversations with identified people; and documented activities such as withdrawal of money, phone calls, sending text messages or emails, and using credit cards. We calculated the average of the two coders' counts and labelled this variable 'number of verifiable details'.

Coding the open-ended questions' responses

A research assistant read the participants' responses and came up for each question with categories to classify them (these categories are described later in the Results section). Subsequently, two independent trained coders used these categories to classify the participant's responses. One coder classified all participants' responses into these categories (Coder 1), while a second coder (Coder 2) classified 25% of the participants' responses into these categories. The percentage of agreement between the two coders in the classification of the responses into the categories was high (83%), and indicated a sufficient inter- coder reliability.

Results

Pre-crime stage

Preparations and plans in advance for providing a verifiable alibi

The participants were asked to specify what steps they can take in advance to prepare themselves for providing a verifiable alibi in case the police will question them after having committed the crime. The answers given by more than 10% of the participants (both conditions combined) were:

Circumstantial evidence: Forty eight participants (47.1%) planned to mention evidence such as receipts or credit cards payments, public transport tickets, cinema tickets, receipts of money withdrawals, phone calls, emails, informing others (by a phone call or text) where they are, signature on a university class attendance list etc.

True alibi witness: Thirty six participants (35.3%) planned to mention people they are really going to meet during or around the relevant period of time as alibi witnesses. Thus these witnesses would be able to testify about truthful activities. Those witnesses could be strangers to the participant (e.g., salesman/saleswoman, people in the street that can be traced) or people known to the participant (e.g., friends, family members).

False alibi witness: Thirty two participants (31.4%) planned to ask a third party to cover up for them by pretending that they were together, at a different location, at the time the crime took place. Those witnesses would only be able to give a false testimony.

"Frame" alibi: Fourteen participants (13.7%) planned to be with other people before and after committing the crime, in a way that the others will believe that they were with them all this time. For example, visiting the cinema with friends, leaving without anyone noticing, committing the crime, and returning to the cinema before the end of the movie.

To test Hypothesis 1, we compared the frequency of the 'true alibi witness' and 'circumstantial evidence' strategies in the two conditions. As expected, twice as many participants in the Café scenario condition ($n = 24$; 47.1%) than in the Bank scenario condition ($n = 12$; 23.5%) planned to have a true witness present, $\chi^2(1) = 6.18$, $phi = .25$, $p < .05$. However, the circumstantial evidence ($n = 24$; 47.1% in each group) and false witness strategies ($n = 14$; 27.5% in the Café scenario and $n = 18$; 35.3% in the Bank scenario) were not mentioned more frequently by participants in the Bank scenario condition than by participants in the Café scenario condition, $\chi^2(1) = .00$ and $\chi^2(1) = .73$, ns, respectively. No differences between the groups were found for the frame alibi ($n = 7$; 13.7% in each group) either, $\chi^2(1) = .00$, ns.

Difficulties in preparing a verifiable alibi in advance

In contrast to Hypothesis 2, the participants in the Café and in the Bank scenario did not differ in the extent to which they reported to find it difficult to prepare in advance a verifiable alibi, $t(100) = 1.22$, ns. Both groups rated the difficulty level as relatively high ($M = 5.55$ out of 7, $SD = 1.14$ for the Bank scenario and $M = 5.24$ out of 7, $SD = 1.33$ for the Café scenario). When asked to specify these difficulties, all except three participants reported at least one difficulty. The two groups did not differ in the frequency of mentioning these difficulties, all $\chi^2s < 3.02$,

ns, and the answers given by more than 10% of the participants (both conditions combined) are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Post-crime stage

Suspect presence in the crime area

We examined whether participants described activities in which they positioned themselves at the crime scene at the time the crime took place. While a small minority ($n = 4$; 7.8%) of participants in the Bank scenario condition reported activities that took place in the bank (e.g., claiming that they did not know that the bank was closed and entering the bank when the manager left), almost forty percent of the participants in the Café scenario condition ($n = 20$; 39.2%) reported activities that took place in the café, $\chi^2(1) = 13.95$, $phi = .37$, $p < .001$. This supported Hypothesis 3.

All the participants who positioned themselves in the Café at the time of the crime, except one, attempted to provide evidence that eliminated the possibility of being in the Café manager's office (from where the money was stolen). The four participants, who positioned themselves inside the Bank provided 'innocent' reasons for their presence there. For example, one participant planned to pretend that she did not know that the bank is closed, and innocently followed the manager into the bank.

Number of verifiable details

We conducted a t-test with the number of verifiable details as dependent variable, and Group as factor. In accordance with Hypothesis 4, participants in the Bank scenario condition reported fewer verifiable details ($M = 9.05$, $SD = 8.80$) than

participants in the Café scenario condition ($M = 12.81$, $SD = 10.14$), $t(100) = 2.00$, *Cohen's d* = .40, $p < .05$.

Post interview responses

Motivation

The reported motivation of the participants to be convincing in the statement was high ($M = 6.26$, $SD = .96$ on a 7-point Likert scale). There was no difference between the two groups in motivation scores, $t(100) = 1.34$, *ns*.

Perception of difficulty and success in being convincing

Participants found it relatively difficult to appear convincing in their statements ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.67$), and assessed their success of being convincing ($M = 4.77$, $SD = 1.19$) = 1.62) at a medium-high level. No difference emerged between the groups in any of these measurements, all $t_s(100) < 1$, *ns*.

Discussion

In the present experiment we compared two crime scenarios which differed in their opportunity to embed truthful facts into a false account. We examined mock criminals' strategies and difficulties in preparing a verifiable alibi in advance, and the number of verifiable details they provided in their statements.

In the Café scenario the presence of the suspect in the café at the time of the crime was legitimate (because the crime took place when the café was open), whereas in the Bank scenario the presence of the suspect in the bank raised suspicion (because the crime took place when the bank was closed). It is not surprising, therefore, that 40% of the participants in the Café scenario positioned themselves in the café at the time of the crime, while only 8% of the participants in the Bank scenario positioned

themselves in the bank. Positioning themselves in the café, allowed participants in the Café scenario to report truthful and verifiable non-criminal activities they carried out in the Café at the time of crimeⁱ, and more so than the participants in the Bank scenario. Indeed, participants in the Café scenario provided 30% more verifiable details than participants in the Bank scenario.

One may wonder why 60% of the participant in the Café scenario did not use the legitimacy of presenting in the Café at the time of the crime, in order to provide an embedded lie. One possible explanation is that positioning themselves in the Café is a risky strategy, as being close to the crime scene increased their ability to commit the crime and thus weakened their defence claim. All participants –except one- who positioned themselves in the Café at the time of the crime, tried to provide evidence showing that they could not be in the manager’s office (crime scene). Of course, from a liar’s perspective, it remains to be seen how convincing this sounds.

Avoiding to position themselves in the crime scene nicely fits with the ‘avoid and escape’ strategy, often used by guilty suspects (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015; Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall & Doering, 2010). That is, in accordance with the concept of ‘aversive conditioning’ (see....), guilty suspects try to avoid or terminate an aversive stimulus. Specifically, when they have the opportunity to do so, guilty suspects *avoid* mentioning information that may incriminate them in order to prevent confrontation with the threaten stimuli (i.e., avoidance response). When they do not have the opportunity to simply avoid the incriminating information (e.g., when they are confronted with specific evidence), they may choose to determine the threatening stimuli by denying or contradicting the incriminating knowledge (i.e., escape response). In the current study, the participants provided their accounts in response to an open, general question (a free recall phase). Thus, participants in the Café scenario

condition had the opportunity to apply an avoidance response, and many of them used this opportunity and avoid mentioning that they were in the Café at the time the crime occurred. Obviously, those participants who applied the avoidance response took another risk – that the the interviewer had an evidence that they were present in the Café (e.g., CCTV records). This would make their entire **alibi questionable and would damage their credibility.**

The participants in the current study were encouraged to provide verifiable details. This might have encouraged the participants in the Café scenario condition to located themselves in the Café, as it is easier to provide true verifiable details when admitting presence in the Café than when denying it.. The design of the current study does not allow us to test how participants who are not encouraged to provide verifiable details would behave. This is a question for future studies.

Surprisingly, the groups did not differ in their perception of the task. Both groups thought it to be rather difficult to prepare in advance and to provide a verifiable alibi. This finding contradicted our expectations, and shows that even when a scenario creates the opportunity to report embedded lies, and even when the interviewee had the opportunity to plan an alibi in advance, providing a convincing statement was still perceived as difficult. Yet, although they found the task difficult, participants in both groups felt they succeed to overcome the difficulties, and believed they provided a reasonably convincing statement. This perception may be wrong, as we know from previous studies testing the verifiability approach (e.g., Nahari, et al. 2014b), that truth tellers are typically more convincing than liars and include more verifiable details into their accounts. **It happens because (a) they don't have (b) they try to avoid...**

When asked about steps they can take in advance to prepare a verifiable alibi, in accordance with our expectations, twice as many participants in the Café scenario compared to the Bank scenario planned to report a true witness, probably because the Café scenario provides a better opportunity to do so. Contrary to our expectations, a similar percentage in both groups planned to create circumstantial evidence and to report false witnesses. It seems, therefore, that although participants in the Café scenario could use more easily true witnesses, this did not decrease their motivation to create circumstantial evidence and to report false witnesses, perhaps in an attempt to boost the number of verifiable details in their accounts.

The participants were told to imagine that they were suspects in committing a crime, but they were not told what the reason for this suspicion was. It is reasonable to assume that participants' account will differ depending on what they think the reason for this suspicion is. For example, telling the participant that someone saw them near the crime scene may lead them to admit that they were at the crime scene (especially if their presence there is legitimate), no matter what their plans were in advance. In fact, what we did in this study is not fundamentally different from what is proposed in the Strategic Use of Evidence literature, to delay presenting evidence to suspects (Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall, & Kronkvist, 2006; Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall, & Vrij, 2005). We know from that literature that liars tend to position themselves away from the crime scene (as many participants in our study did), which creates evidence-statement inconsistencies in liars if subsequently evidence is presented that demonstrates that they were at the crime scene (Granhag & Hartwig, 2015).

The current study has several limitations worth mentioning. First, the participants were asked to imagine the crime act rather than committing a mock crime. In a mock crime, participants perceptually experience events. While being

present in the café, they may meet people, overhear conversations, and may witness events and interactions. This may allow them to provide more verifiable details than our participants, who only imagined that they were in the café, could provide. Consequently, it is possible that the tendency of participants who positioned themselves in the café to provide verifiable details is stronger in real-life than it was in our study. Since this limitation is relevant to the Café scenario only, one may expect that the difference in verifiable details provided between these two scenarios will be greater in real life than in our study.

Second, all participants in the current study were guilty. This means that we could not directly test the efficiency of the verifiability approach in distinguishing between truth tellers and liars in the examined scenarios. Such a test may be considered in future research.

Third, we used written statements in the current experiment. Written statements have been used before in deception research in general (e.g., Nahari, Vrij, Fisher, 2012; Sporer & Sharman, 2006) and in verifiability approach studies in particular (Nahari, et al, 2014a, 2014b; Nahari & Vrij, 2014; Nahari, Vrij, Leal, Warmelink, & Vernham, in press). In addition, other methods such as SCAN also use written statements and SCAN is popular amongst practitioners. However, one may argue that writing a statement is an easier task for a liar than providing an oral statement, because it gives more opportunity to consider what detail to provide. Thus, we expect that the task would be more difficult for the participants in both groups when they have to produce oral statements, a speculative assumption that has to be tested empirically in future research.

To conclude, adding verifiable details is a difficult task for liars, even when they have an opportunity to plan the crime and the alibi in advance. When the scenario allows a criminal to carry out innocent activities at the time of the crime, criminals who plan in advance may include more truthful verifiable details in their accounts than when the scenario does not allow them to do so. We suggest keeping the type of scenario in mind when applying the verifiability approach.

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Table 1: Difficulties to prepare in advance a verifiable alibi

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|-------------------------------|--|
| Find a witness | Thirty participants (29.4%) reported that they would find it difficult to find a witness. The participants indicated this difficulty regarding both false and true witnesses. The main difficulty regarding false witnesses was to convince them to cooperate, while the main difficulty regarding true witnesses was how to meet them at the time of the crime without raising suspicion among those witnesses. |
| Trust a witness | Thirty participants (29.4%) reported that they were concerned that the true or false witness will start to regret helping out the suspect and will not cooperate, will break down during a possible interrogation or will contradict the suspect's story or evidence. Participants also indicated that relying on another person would make them feel uncomfortable. |
| Timing | Twenty three participants (22.5%) indicated that it may be difficult to create verifiable details at the relevant time framing. For example, the time that appears on a receipt must be the time that the crime took place, and this is difficult to achieve. |
| Creation of evidence | Twenty participants (19.6%) mentioned difficulty in executing their plans. For example, a male participant who planned to claim being at the cinema raised the difficulty of collecting the cinema tickets just before the movie starts (because he has to commit the crime at this time), and thus needs a collaborator who will collect the tickets for him. |
| Prediction and control | Nineteen participants (18.6%) wrote that it is difficult to predict in advance what would happen because it is impossible to control all details and events. For example, hidden cameras, unexpected appearance of someone, and delays in executing some activities, may all hamper the execution of the planned activities. |
| Reliable alibi | Sixteen participants (15.7%) reported to find it difficult to provide a statement that is plausible and difficult to refute. They were concerned to contradict themselves, to forget details of their planned false alibi, etc. |

ⁱ The number of verifiable details provided by participants in the Café scenario was higher for participants who positioned themselves in the café ($M = 15.58, SD = 12.93$) than for participants who did not position themselves in the café ($M = 11.03, SD = 7.55$), with a medium effect size (*Cohen's d* = .45). However, presumably because of low statistical power in this test, the difference between these groups was not significant, $t(49) = 1.59, p = .12$.