# The Shift-of-Strategy Approach: Verbal Counter-Interrogation Strategies of Guilty Mock Suspects and Disclosure of Critical Information

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**Abstract.** *The Shift-of-Strategy (SoS) approach is employed by interviewers with the aim of influencing suspects' counter-interrogation strategies (CIS) by encouraging suspects to become more forthcoming with information. This is achieved through challenging inconsistencies between their statements and the available evidence. The present study had two aims: to build on existing research regarding self-reported CISs employed by the mock suspects (N=10) using Thematic Analysis and to examine two new variations of the SoS approach (SoS-Cooling Off and SoS-Diversion) and their ability to elicit critical information by the mock suspects (N=159) during a particular stage using quantitative data analysis. The two research questions were: 1. What verbal counter-interrogation strategies did the participants state that they used? 2. Which interview condition resulted in statements disclosing the most critical details during the lay low stage? Concerning the first question, results from the interviews indicated that frequently used CISs were: adapting statements to evidence; providing majority truthful statements incorporated with lies; employing escape strategies. Results concerning the second question show that the SoS-Cooling Off condition led to participants providing the longest statements disclosing the most critical details. Using the SoS approach, future research should compare the influence on guilty and innocent mock suspects' CISs.*

One of the biggest challenges for suspects during interviews in legal settings is to be perceived as credible (Luke et al., 2014). Regardless of their actual culpability, suspects employ strategies in their effort to convince the interviewer of their innocence (Clemens & Grolig, 2019). These so-called counter-interrogation strategies (CIS) are suspects' attempts to appear convincing and credible, intending to successfully withstand being interviewed (Luke & Granhag, 2022). There are both verbal and non-verbal CISs, where the former concerns behavior such as attempting to tell a story rich in detail or discussing a topic unrelated to the events in question, and the latter e.g., trying not to show signs of nervousness (Alison et al., 2014; Granhag & Luke, 2018). Psychological research on deception has largely focused on identifying objective differences between verbal and non-verbal behavior of liars and truth tellers (DePaulo et al., 2003). By examining CISs more closely, one can further develop an understanding of their objective differences and thus advance the ability to make use of them in suspect interviews (Granhag et al., 2013).

Opposite to the suspect in an interview, is the interviewer who needs to determine whether they are being truthful or deceptive. To date, there is a large empirical body of research on cues to deception showing that interviewers in legal settings are generally rather poor at distinguishing truth-tellers from liars (Bond & DePaulo, 2006). There are many methods and strategies that help guide the interviewer during suspect interviews in assessing veracity. One example of an interviewing technique is the Strategic Use of Evidence (SUE) (Hartwig et al., 2006), through which evidence is revealed in a tactical way to affect the suspect's perception of the interviewer's knowledge regarding the events in question (Luke et al., 2016).

Interviewers are commonly faced with the challenge of counteracting the suspect's motivation to potentially conceal critical information relevant to the investigation, all the while assessing the veracity of the suspect's statements. The difference between a suspect not

revealing any new information, and them admitting to being at the crime scene can be crucial information in legal contexts (Luke & Granhag, 2022). To elicit unknown and crime-relevant information, interviewers can potentially influence the verbal CISs employed by suspects and through challenging discrepancies between the evidence and the statements given, suspects would be encouraged to become more forthcoming with information (Luke & Granhag, 2022). This approach called the Shift-of-Strategy (SoS) is an extension of the SUE technique and has been developed on a foundation of empirical research, psychological theory, and the experience of practitioners (Luke & Granhag, 2022).

It is of great importance to conduct further research on interviewing methods to keep developing tactics that can be used in certain legal settings where a person is being questioned. One weakness of the current methods with which CISs have been studied is that there is a reliance on written self-reports, which tend to be sparse in detail. The self-reports often lack information about the suspects' own reasoning about how and why they implemented the strategies they used. Moreover, the SoS approach is premised on the idea that suspects' strategies change over the course of an interview, and the existing self-report methods are going to be fairly limited in their ability to capture such changes. With this limitation in mind, the present study concerns self-reported CISs employed by the participants in the interviews. The study also concerns two new variations of the SoS approach and their ability to obtain information during a particular stage in the experimental procedure.

Initially, theory and previous research are presented, followed by a review of the method where the approach of the study is accounted for. This is followed by a presentation of the results of the study, as well as a concluding discussion.


## Self-regulation Theory

To understand how suspects go about pursuing their goals, it is important to first examine the psychological processes behind such decisions. These processes can be explained through the self-presentational perspective, which is defined as regulating one's behavior to create a particular impression on other people (Carver & Scheier, 2012). In view of this perspective, both guilty and innocent suspects share the mutual goal of appearing innocent. In doing so, they need to create an impression of being credible and honest. In an attempt at reaching their goals, both innocent and guilty suspects will be employing some type of strategy. The self-presentational perspective emphasizes the motivation of being truthful, but also of misrepresenting the truth.

The efforts of appearing credible relate to a person's self-control and can therefore be explained through the theory of self-regulation (DePaulo, 1992). Self-regulation theory states that people maintain their behavior to avoid unwanted consequences that may arise from certain types of behavior. In the current context, the goal is to appear innocent and to avoid the undesired outcome of being perceived as guilty. In attempting to achieve their goals, both guilty and innocent suspects make great efforts at being assessed as innocent. When the likelihood of an unsuccessful outcome is high, the suspects may experience distress (Granhag & Luke, 2018).


## Counter-interrogation Strategies (CIS)

As the focus of the present study is verbal CISs, the following section will address existing research within this dimension.

As mentioned previously, CISs are suspects' attempts to appear convincing and credible, intending to successfully withstand being interviewed (Granhag & Luke, 2018). CISs are employed by both guilty and innocent suspects, and even though their goal of being assessed as truthful is mutual, how they share information differs in various ways (Clemens et al., 2013). In the event of an upcoming interview, suspects contemplate and decide which information related to the crime should be shared, and what information to avoid, deny or admit to – this process is referred to as information management (Granhag & Luke, 2018).

Firstly, the two types of suspects differ in terms of the information they possess. Guilty suspects possess details of the crime, which they deliberately withhold from the interviewer, while innocent ones usually lack information about the events in question. The innocent suspects, on the other hand, want the interviewer to be aware that they have no knowledge of the crime, when in fact, they might have knowledge that is related to the crime (Hartwig et al., 2007). This will result in guilty suspects, if given the chance, most likely employing aversive strategies such as providing misleading or incorrect information or withholding information altogether. In contrast, innocent suspects are more prone to voluntarily come forward with any information that they might possess, as they seldom have anything to gain by concealing the information they hold (Hartwig et al., 2007).

Secondly, the two kinds of suspects differ in terms of how they share information. It is known that guilty suspects tend to provide fewer details in their accounts compared to innocent suspects (Hartwig et al., 2006). Due to this notion, liars likely run a higher risk of contradicting the evidence, in comparison to truth-tellers. Although liars compared to truth-tellers will be providing less information, they often provide some information. When there is evidence against them that they are unaware of, they might contradict the evidence. That being said, the chances of liars contradicting the evidence are higher compared to truth-tellers, as truth-tellers have less reason to be providing inaccurate information (Hartwig et al., 2006). In line with this, in the study by Strömwall et al. (2006) the authors saw the tendency of liars to hold information back during a free recall to a greater extent than truth-tellers. The researchers also found that the most common CIS by liars was to keep the story simple, in contrast to truth-tellers' most frequently reported strategy being to tell the story the way it happened.

Research that contributes to insights into CISs, which in turn forms the basis for the development of interview protocols, is, for example, the SUE technique used to interview suspects in crime-related contexts (e.g., Granhag & Hartwig, 2015), the Scharff technique applied with the purpose of gathering information in intelligence contexts (e.g., Granhag et al., 2016) and methods related to interviews with people who make verbal threats (e.g., Geurts et al., 2017). In their study, Alison et al. (2014) identified five different clusters consisting of CISs, such as remaining silent, claiming not to remember, and contributing with already known information. Similar results were found in a study by Hartwig et al. (2007) in which five categories of liars' CISs regarding the verbal content of their statements were reported, for example: to provide a detailed story, avoid lying, and provide a consistent cover story. The CISs just mentioned are only a few examples of a large number of strategies being employed by suspects. Something worth mentioning, however, is that the use of a particular CIS is oftentimes a result of the person's own decision, i.e., that the strategy is self-generated, but could also be a result of so-called resistance training, i.e., that the person has been prepared for the situation (Alison et al., 2014). In addition, suspects may employ several different strategies simultaneously (e.g., to avoid particular information and then distort the truth about other information), and suspects may also switch from one strategy to another (e.g., initially denying involvement and then divulging information already known to the interviewer; Granhag & Luke, 2018).

**Strategic Use of Evidence (SUE)**

Interviewers can utilize certain interrogation methods to challenge suspects' CISs and make the suspect disclose crime-relevant information. As mentioned previously, guilty, and innocent suspects differ with respect to the CISs they employ (Clemens et al., 2013). This makes it possible to further amplify the suspects' verbal differences through the strategic use of available evidence (May et al., 2017). The SUE model introduced by Granhag (2010) consists of a tactical level and a strategic level. The tactical level, which is concrete, consists of a package containing tactics that are specific and case-dependent. The principles underlying the abstract, and strategic level are general and case-independent. The tactical guidance offered by the SUE technique can be divided into three different categories, namely: (1) pre-interview assessment of the evidence, (2) how the questions should be asked during the interview, and (3) when, how, and in what order the evidence should be disclosed (Granhag & Hartwig, 2014).

The SUE technique has several different purposes, such as detecting deception and eliciting admissions (Granhag & Hartwig, 2014). In essence, the SUE framework concerns the suspects' perceptions of what and how much crime-relevant information the interviewer possesses. These perceptions influence what CISs the suspects employ and in turn also the verbal responses they give (May et al., 2017). This perception implies that the more information and evidence the suspect believes the interviewer to possess, the more forthcoming they will be in their attempts to avoid contradictions between rendered accounts and the available evidence (Luke et al., 2014).

The most basic way to use the SUE technique is by the interviewer initially eliciting a statement of what happened (Hartwig et al., 2005), and then asking tactical questions without revealing evidence with the goal of the suspect addressing the evidence (Granhag & Hartwig, 2014), and finally revealing previously unknown information linked to the evidence (Granhag et al., 2013). The statement can then be assessed based on any discrepancies between the available evidence and the suspect's statement (Luke & Granhag, 2022). More specifically, when a suspect is being dishonest, strategic interviewing will most often result in contradictions between the statements made by the suspect and the evidence held by the interviewer, so-called 'statement-evidence inconsistencies' (Granhag & Luke, 2018).

**Shift-of-Strategy (SoS)**

As the name suggests, SoS refers to influencing the suspect's CIS during an interview from being withholding to becoming more forthcoming (Luke & Granhag, 2022). The method can be briefly introduced per its three main components: (1) create a social context in which the suspect is motivated to continue talking, as well as to maintain, strengthen, and regain their credibility; (2) through strategic disclosure of evidence giving the source (e.g., suspect) an impression of the interviewer being highly aware of their activities; and (3) to reinforce as well as to discourage the suspect's desirable and undesirable behaviors, respectively, by dealing with contradictions or inconsistencies between statements and evidence per its first two principles (Luke & Granhag, 2022).

To understand the structure of the SoS approach, it is important to first explain its foundations. The SoS approach (Granhag & Luke, 2018) is an extension of the previous exploration of a technique known as SUE-confrontation. The SUE-confrontation technique is in turn an extension of the SUE method mentioned in the preceding section. The SUE-confrontation technique has been developed with regards to the critical phase during which a crime is committed (Tekin et al., 2015). It is commonly challenging to obtain information from the suspect regarding this critical phase compared to the phases before and after the crime was

committed (Tekin et al., 2016). Presumably, the suspect may be even more reticent about information regarding this phase.

Tekin et al. (2015) were the first to apply the SUE framework in eliciting admissions during this critical phase. The authors found that by initially withholding evidence, and then subsequently, after the suspect gave their statement, alerting them to their account either being in line with the evidence or that they had contradicted the evidence, the suspect revealed information that was not yet known to the interviewer. During the interview, the suspect would discern a certain pattern – the interviewer was more knowledgeable than they gave the impression of. This led the suspect to overestimate the extent to which the interviewer possessed information related to the critical phase, which made them disclose more crime-relevant information to avoid self-incrimination or to contradict the evidence not yet revealed. In addition to this, Tekin et al. (2015) found that suspects disclosed more truthful information regarding their activities during the critical phase compared to suspects in the control groups in which the evidence was either presented at the beginning of the interview or not at all. Thus, the technique was termed SUE-confrontation with the intent of inducing guilty suspects to shift their CIS from a withholding one to a more forthcoming one.

The SUE-confrontation technique has formed the basis of how the SoS approach is used and is one of the core components of the approach (Granhag & Luke, 2018). Luke and Granhag (2022) tested the effectiveness of two different variations of the SoS approach. In one variant (Reactive) the interviewer immediately responded to discrepancies between the suspect's account and the evidence, while the interviewer only responded to severe discrepancies in the other variant (Selective). In an experiment with *N*=300 mock suspects, the suspects committed a simulated crime after which they were interviewed either with one of the two versions of the SoS approach (Reactive or Selective) or with a method in which no evidence was presented. The authors found that the 'Reactive' version was more effective in eliciting new information than the direct questioning of the suspect.

Another core component of the SoS approach is to keep the suspect motivated, i.e., to keep the suspect encouraged to maintain their credibility and thus in sharing information (Luke & Granhag, 2022). How a suspect is treated during their interview is crucial for the interview outcome (Alison et al., 2013). The most successful interviewing tactics are those that strive to create an atmosphere in which the suspect is treated with empathy, respect, and a non-judgmental attitude on the part of the interviewer (Tekin et al., 2016). With this in mind, the SoS approach avoids directly accusing the suspect of lying or of criminal conduct. Instead, when identifying inconsistencies, the interviewer encourages further explanation without suggesting that the suspect is hiding something or being dishonest (Luke & Granhag, 2022).

**The Present Study**

The current study rests on experimental data and intends to build on existing research concerning guilty mock suspects' self-reported use of verbal CISs using qualitative methods. This study is the first of its kind to examine CISs with the SoS approach using qualitative methods, which is particularly important given that SoS aims at changing the CISs of the person being interviewed. The study also intends on examining information disclosure concerning a particular stage referred to as the "lay low stage" (sequence in experimental procedure depicting non-criminal acts) using three variations of the SoS approach. The three variations are SoS-Cooling Off, SoS-Diversion, and SoS-Standard (also referred to as 'Open'), where the two former variants are new. In the Cooling-off condition, participants are asked about matters not directly linked to their potential criminal involvement. In doing so, the mock suspect will stay engaged by sharing information that is not self-incriminating, as

well as having a "cooling off" period during the SoS mock interrogation. In the "Diversion" condition, the participants are asked about subjects that could lead to an alternate suspect. The purpose of this tactic is to give the suspect an impression of possibly "winning the game" by casting suspicion on someone else. In the Open condition, no specific type of questions or tactics are used. By comparing the three interview conditions, it is possible to further develop the SoS approach and thus improve interviewers' ability to obtain new information during suspect interviews.

### *Research Questions and Hypothesis*

The study intends to answer two questions. The first question concerns what verbal counter-interrogation strategies the participants stated that they used. To answer this question, interviews with suspects in which they described their own strategies will be examined. The second question concerns which interview condition resulted in statements disclosing the most critical details during the lay low stage. The second question will be answered through quantitative analysis of the coded statements that the participants provided in the mock suspect interviews. The prediction related to the second question is that participants would disclose more critical details in the SoS-Cooling Off and SoS-Diversion conditions compared to the SoS-Standard condition during the lay low stage. This relates to the disclosure of evidence in the two new conditions which will be elicited by challenging inconsistencies in the suspects' statements and thus leading to more critical details being revealed. This, in turn, stems from the notion that the interviewer could possibly shift a suspect's strategy by giving them the opportunity to talk about other topics and consequently attempt to lead the attention elsewhere.

## Method

The present study was conducted within the frame of a currently unpublished larger project (https://osf.io/td7ue). The data used as a basis for this study have not been used elsewhere. The experiment aimed to assess the effectiveness of two new variations of the SoS approach (SoS-Cooling Off and SoS-Diversion), which are designed to keep the sources motivated.

## Participants

All participants (*N*=159) were recruited through the platform Prolific (prolific.com) based on specific requirements (e.g., over 18 years of age, and having English as a first language). No dropouts or exclusions were recorded. The sample included 87 females, 67 males, 2 non-binary/third gender, and 3 preferred not to say. The median age of the participants was 34.5 years (*M* = 37.9, *SD* = 13.4). Participants received compensation of £7.5 (approximately 95 SEK).

## Materials and Procedure

The present study focuses on two types of interviews carried out by the researchers, that is, interviews related to the mock crimes (*N*=159) and exit interviews (*N*=30), which were brief interviews concerning the participants' use of CISs.

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The material used for the experiment consisted of mock crime videos, a pre-interview questionnaire, interviews, exit interviews, a post-interview questionnaire, as well as a debriefing.

### *Informed Consent*

Participants were recruited to take part in an online experiment consisting of a mock crime with several events containing a considerable amount of detail. A short introductory text provided the participant with general information about the experiment, such as the purpose of the study (testing interviewing techniques for questioning criminal suspects or intelligence sources) and the experimental procedure. Participants were also given full information regarding confidentiality agreements (e.g., all information related to the study will remain confidential), and their rights as participants (e.g., participation is voluntary, and consent can be withdrawn) in accordance with Swedish law.

### *Pre-interview Questionnaire*

Initially, participants were asked to complete an online survey on the website Qualtrics (qualtrics.com). To mimic the circumstances under which the SoS approach is applied, the participants were instructed to convince the interviewer that they were innocent of any illegal activities. More specifically, the participants were urged to appear innocent in the interview, and in doing so, they could potentially be entered into a lottery to win an additional £40, should they be successful in convincing the interviewer of their innocence. In addition, participants were asked to rate the level of confidence that they felt in their ability to convince the interviewer of their innocence, as well as how motivated they were in doing so on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all confident/motivated and 7 = Totally confident/motivated). All participants were given five minutes to prepare for the interview.

### *Mock Crime*

Intending to create circumstances that could result in particularly lengthy interviews, the mock crime consisted of six different stages. Each introduction for the mock crime (regardless of condition) gave a brief overview of the experiment and the tasks at hand (e.g., participants are part of the political group 'SOS' and their mission is to stop a terrorist attack by stealing information about the mercenary at the Lepus Inc. building). Following the introduction, the participants were asked to watch two short video clips. Each video clip contained three mock crime stages, where one fictitious criminal act was depicted on each stage. The video clips showed a gloved person committing various crimes (e.g., burglary, theft, poisoning) and were all filmed from a first-person point of view. Participants were asked to visualize that they were the person committing the crimes depicted in the video clips.

In between the two mock crime video clips, the participants watched a third short video clip without any incriminating activity. Specifically, like the first two clips, the third one was filmed from a first-person perspective depicting the same gloved person, although this time the person performed non-criminal acts. This sequence was the "lay low stage" in the break room.

### *Interview*

After having watched the mock crime video clips, the participants were interviewed regarding their activities. All mock suspect interviews were carried out digitally through the online video meeting platform Zoom (zoom.us). All participants were interviewed individually using one out of the three interview conditions, all of which derived from the SoS approach: (1) *SoS-Standard*, (2) *SoS-Cooling Off,* and (3) *SoS-Diversion*. The participants were spread evenly across all three conditions (53 in each) and the six mock crime procedures, which meant that there were 18 different versions of the experiment that a participant could encounter. A

total of five research assistants conducted the interviews. In each interview condition, the participant was initially asked to (in as much detail as possible) provide a free recall about their activities at the Lepus Inc. building. The same additional video clip without any incriminating activity was watched in the middle of the mock crime procedures by all participants. In the middle of the mock suspect interview in the SoS-Cooling Off and SoS-Diversion conditions, the participants were asked about their activities and what they saw during the additional video clip. The interviewer did not ask directly about the events in the additional clip in the SoS-Standard (Open) condition. The interviewer asked the participant about matters not directly linked to their potential involvement in the crime in the "Cooling-Off" condition. This tactic had the purpose of keeping the suspect engaged by sharing information that is not self-incriminating, as well as having a "cooling off" period during the SoS interview. The tactic was also related to ensuring that the suspect felt confident in creating and maintaining a credible impression. Furthermore, in the "Diversion" condition, the interviewer questioned the participant about subjects that could lead to an alternate suspect. This tactic had the purpose of giving the suspect an impression of possibly "winning the game" by casting suspicion on someone else. In the "Open" condition, no specific type of questions or tactics were used.

Immediately after participants had completed the mock suspect interviews, the interviewer additionally conducted 30 brief and randomly assigned semi-structured interviews, so-called exit interviews, concerning the CISs that the participants had employed. Out of the 30 exit interviews, ten were deemed substantial enough for a Thematic Analysis (Cooling-Off: 4 participants, Diversion: 2 participants, and Open: 4 participants). The ten interviews were subjectively chosen based on the extent to which the participant elaborated on their approaches during the mock suspect interviews. Interviews where the participant gave short, plain, and meager answers were excluded.

The length of the mock interrogations varied between 3-44 minutes ($M = 19.08$, $SD = 7.95$, $Mdn = 18.32$). All interviews were video- and/or audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using the program Otter.ai (otter.ai) which is a speech-to-text transcription tool.

### Post-interview Questionnaire

After having finished the main interview or the exit interview, participants returned to the Qualtrics survey where they were requested to complete a post-interview questionnaire consisting of eight items. Initially, there were four statements concerning how well they think they performed during the interview (e.g., "*I am confident the interviewer believed I was innocent*" or "*It was difficult to convince the interviewer I was innocent*") on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree). Next, on a 7-point Likert scale, they rated how much the interviewer knew about their activities before the interview (1 = "Nothing at all" and 7 = "Everything") and how much new information they think the interviewer learned about their activities from the interview (1 = "Nothing at all" and 7 = "A substantial amount"). This was followed by the participants being asked to rate the interview and interviewer, and to what extent they felt engaged with the video clips in the study. Lastly, they filled out demographic information such as age and gender.

### Debriefing

A short debriefing took place after each completed interview where the participants were informed about the real purpose of the experiment and during which the experimenter answered potential questions from the participants.

## Data Analysis

### Coding of Interviews

The interview coding process began with listening to the transcribed interviews. The material was then dummy-coded (Yes = 1 and No = 0) according to an index. The index consisted of five different codes that were to be identified in the transcript. Examples of some of the coding identified in the transcript were whether the participant admitted to being in the break room, whether the participant mentioned the person collecting bin bags and whether they considered this person to be acting suspiciously. Aside from the codes mentioned, the number of words uttered by the participant during the lay low stage of the interviews were counted. Based on the type of interview condition (Open, Cooling-Off, or Diversion) the interviews generated less or more lengthy statements. However, some participants either did not admit to being in the break room or did not admit to entering the building. These statements were coded as 0.

### Analysis

The quantitative analysis was conducted in Jamovi (jamovi.org) version 2.3.21 using independent Welch's t-tests and chi-square tests of association. Welch's t-test was chosen instead of Student's as Welch's t-test is commonly preferred in analyses where the variances of two tested means from independent populations are not equal (Lu & Yuan, 2010). Furthermore, $d$ was calculated in Jamovi using the pooled SD for the two groups being compared. Participants were randomized into three conditions, each condition consisting of 53 participants, in which the *SoS-Cooling Off* and *SoS-Diversion* conditions were experimental, and the *Open* condition was the control condition. The study used three dichotomous variables, each containing two conditions: *Cooling-Off + Diversion*, *Open + Cooling-Off*, and *Diversion + Open*. The dichotomous variables were used for Welch's t-tests, as well as for the chi-square tests.

### Data Processing

The next step in the process was to process the interview material through a thematic analysis per Braun and Clarke's template, which includes six different steps: getting to know the material; creating initial codes; identifying possible themes; reviewing the initial thematization; defining and naming themes; and produce a report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). Initially, the material was read several times, relevant paragraphs in the text were marked and codes for each paragraph were formulated. Based on the codes, themes were formulated whose names and order were revised several times following the fourth step in Braun and Clarke's model (2006; 2021). Finally, the names of all the main and sub-themes were formed and then presented in the results section (see Appendix B for examples of codes). The transcript was coded primarily on a semantic level as the research question concerns what verbal counter-interrogation strategies the participants stated that they used.

### Thematic Analysis

The type of thematic analysis that followed was a reflexive one with an inductive approach. The reflexive type is characterized by the fact that the coding carried out is subjective (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021). The themes are constructed – they are not identified in an objective form – after codes have been formulated and the author has a central role in constructing the themes. The overall themes were then divided into sub-themes. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen as it allows for more open coding compared to other types of thematic analyses where the coding is more structured and where themes are formed at an earlier stage in the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

**Ethics**

First, the original data collection was conducted in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations concerning the ethical conduct of research with human subjects. Second, no information that could be used to identify any of the participants from the study was reported.

# Results

Results for the two research questions will be introduced in the following section. To begin with, the results of the Thematic Analysis which corresponds to the first question will be presented, followed by the reporting on the quantitative data analysis related to the second question.

**Thematic Analysis (TA)**

Out of the ten interviewees, nine participants stated that they had prepared strategies in advance. In addition, most of the participants used several different strategies during the questioning phase, and most participants shifted strategies once evidence was revealed. The analysis resulted in three overarching themes and two sub-themes below each main theme. The study's overarching themes, and their respective sub-themes illustrate recurrent and common main features in the CISs employed by the participants. To further exemplify the congruence, additional quotes for each sub-theme can be found in Appendix A.

*Theme I: Mental Preparations' Influence on Statements*

Participants were asked to share what they were thinking before the mock suspect interview began. They were also asked whether they prepared any strategies before the interview. Common features in the answers were speculative thoughts on the extent of the interviewer's knowledge. Another recurring feature was the desire to influence the direction of the mock suspect interview.

**Sub-theme I: Analytically Reflecting on the Events in Question**

When the participants shared their thoughts about the mock crime procedure, a pattern emerged showing that many had analyzed the sequence of events related to a specific crime, as well as their role in the situation. Some participants also reflected on their behavior in relation to the study's guidelines. Based on the guidelines and the participants' behavior in relation to them, they tried to determine what information might be either known or unknown to potential witnesses, and thus the interviewer. Through a brief analysis, the participants tried to determine what evidence the interviewer could be possessing, and in turn, what information the interviewer might be unaware of. In doing so, they attempted to view the crime from the interviewer's perspective and thus ascertain the extent of their knowledge.

> "I think in the table section, I was thinking, okay, you're sat around doing nothing, that seems a bit suspicious, especially if you're wearing gloves, and they want to know what you're doing so they might think that you've got an associate or you're in cahoots with someone, or you're waiting for someone to show up, and they never showed up, or there's some sort of time that you're waiting for. And all things that they could be thinking of, I'm there thinking of all these things that they could be considering that I'm considering. I was just trying to alleviate that." – Participant 134

One participant recounted that he used knowledge obtained from television programs. By applying this knowledge to the mock crime procedure, he tried to analyze how he might have been perceived by others. The strategy involves utilizing knowledge derived from fictional crimes and applying it to events in real life.

> "I watch a lot of TV. So we have a lot of things, when you enter confidently through the front of the building, it's harder for them to prove that you are actually up to no good, because nobody enters through the front because the cameras will see them. So I'm not going to knowingly enter with a camera seeing me if I'm going to do something bad." – Participant 6

### Sub-theme II: Steering the Interview in the Desired Direction

A few participants explicitly stated that they tried to influence the direction of the mock suspect interview. All of them mentioned that they attempted to share more information than what had been asked of them to influence where the conversation would proceed next. By sharing more information than what was asked of them such as specific details, or even mentioning another person who may be of interest to the investigation, they tried to entice the interviewer and thus draw attention away from topics that they wished to avoid. This can be interpreted as an attempt to distract or mislead, and to plant seeds in the hopes that the interviewer builds on the digressions.

> "I just started doing that. But I got a little better at it only in the sense that I had a little time to think ahead. I'm a really bad liar, so it's really hard for me, but I had a little bit of time to think ahead as to how I was going to explain it. Sort of trying to set myself up, because I knew what questions he was going to ask at some point. So I would just tell the whole story of entering the room because I knew he was going to ask. I would say, 'Well, I entered the room, and I did all this'. And they can be like, 'Okay, that's in line with what we thought' instead of him having to ask me every question. So I had more control over the narrative from the start if I just explained all the details." – Participant 106

## *Theme II: A Suspect's Account is Fluid*

Overall, the participants' answers indicate that almost all changed their statements during the interview. The adaptations were commonly brought about by the interviewer asking certain questions or by the revelation of pieces of evidence. In addition, most participants spoke about their striving to stay as close to the truth as possible in their statements, in an attempt to avoid potential incrimination or being perceived as guilty.

### Sub-theme I: Trim One's Sails to the Evidence

Almost all participants stated that they prepared a strategy before the interview began, only to have to change it once evidence against them was presented by the interviewer. Several participants declared that they tried many different approaches alternately to adapt to the new evidence allocated. Many mentioned that they had prepared one strategy before the interview and had not planned to change that strategy. However, when new questions were asked, they had no choice but to adapt their statement accordingly. By continuously adapting to the situation, whether it is to the evidence or explaining away any statement-evidence inconsistencies, the suspect may think that they are coming across as cooperative, and thus as if they have nothing to hide.

> "I wasn't going to but I wasn't certain what questions he was going to ask. I didn't know how or if he was going to say 'Oh, we have proof that you were in each place doing each thing'. So my first strategy was to deny, but then once I realized, okay, that's not going to work, I justified why I was doing each thing. So the first time or two I denied it. And then he could say 'Well, that isn't in line with what we saw'. Okay, so then I changed it to explain why I was doing each thing, but still within the story I had built." – Participant 106

## Sub-theme II: Fractions of Truth as Foundation for Evasions

Most participants reflected upon the difficulty with untruthfulness and dishonesty related to their statements. Many believed that lying complicates things, therefore it was better to maintain truthfulness to the greatest extent. Others simply told outright lies or denied they had ever been to the locations in question, while some utilized a combination of the two approaches. That said, several participants stated that they were reporting truthful details and events while fabricating or concealing other sensitive and incriminating information that could have cast an unkind light on them. A few participants mentioned that sharing truthful information made them feel confident about their statements or the situation, even though they at times reported forged facts. Thus, it is possible to reproduce some truthful information without exclusively serving a false account, which might give the impression of the suspect being credible.

> "Because I was telling the truth I was more confident with the interviewer because I was telling the truth, this is exactly what happened. I think when you know you're lying, you're a bit more on edge trying to remember 'Okay, what did I say?'. When you know you're lying, you have to try and remember everything you said. Because as police do, they will trip you up. And if you're not confident, you'll fall for the trip." – Participant 6

### Theme III: Employing Escape Strategies

During the interviews, all participants recounted their strategies. Two of the most frequently deployed strategies were to divert attention from themselves onto someone else and to pretend to either not know or to have forgotten about the events in question.

## Sub-theme I: Deflecting Their Guilt onto Another

Many participants mentioned that they took advantage of the situation they had been 'seen' in, by deflecting attention from themselves or placing the blame entirely on another person who was in the same place at the time of the crime. A few participants mentioned that by drawing attention away from themselves, they tried to divert the topic in the hopes that the interviewer would pick up on the lead and investigate someone else as a possible suspect. Some participants stated that they prepared this strategy before the interview, while others mentioned that it struck them in the moment that this could be an effective approach. By diverting attention away from themselves, for example by blaming another person or by casting suspicion upon someone else, they can temporarily avoid being questioned, which could serve as additional time for consideration.

> "When I saw it during the film, there was this guy who came in with a bag. And then he knocked over a box when he was in the break room, and he left with a large bin bag. And while we were talking about this in the interview, it occurred to me that this might be a useful way of distracting the story from me and trying to incriminate him instead, which made him look suspicious. So I sort of developed that on the hoof in the interview." – Participant 8

Another participant chose not to place the blame entirely on someone else. However, by providing extensive details about another person, he tried to create reasonable doubt that someone other than him could have committed the crime. In doing so, he was hopeful that the interviewer's attention would be led elsewhere.

> "What I tried to do, I tried to get as much detail about other people as I could. Because by giving details about them, it would take attention away from me. Absolute deflection. It's like, yeah, I saw him and he had two bags. What did they have two bags for? And purely just giving as much detail about it so that someone would then go 'Oh, well, let's go and have a look at that instead'. But yeah, just to try and push any kind of interest towards somebody else." – Participant 69

### Sub-theme II: With a Memory Like a Sieve

Several participants used strategies related to memory. More specifically, a few claimed in their statements that they 'did not know' whether they had been to the places in the mock crime videos, or downright claimed to lack memory regarding the events in question. Others tried to convince the interviewer that they were absent-minded or that they were not paying attention to the location they were in. By pretending to be scatterbrained, the participants attempted to avoid further questioning and not admit to something that could lead to possible incrimination.

> "As soon as he said about CCTV, I said to myself, 'Right, okay, I can't lie, I have to admit that I was in all the places that I was in'. My strategy then sort of changed to acting clueless and acting like a fumbling idiot that didn't know where she was, or what she was doing, and just seemed a bit loopy. Even though I wasn't that, I think it was trying to act in that character. Then maybe they think, okay, she's an idiot who just got lost and didn't know what she was doing. So that was then my new strategy. And I then realized that yeah, okay, I had to admit I was in all those places and think up on the spot of reasons for me doing those things. So that's all I could do really – why did I touch a computer? I don't know." – Participant 131

## Quantitative Analyses

### *Word Count*

Welch's independent t-tests were carried out to test which interview condition would generate the lengthiest statements from the participants. See Table 1 for descriptives for the three dichotomous variables.

The results showed that in the *Cooling-Off* experimental condition, participants gave significantly longer statements (i.e., 237 words) compared to the *Open* control condition $t$ (71.5) = -5.93, $p < .001$, $d = -1.15$, 95% CI [-1.59, -0.71]. The results also indicated that in the *Diversion* experimental condition, participants gave significantly longer statements (i.e., 196 words) compared to the *Open* control condition $t$ (76.3) = 5.44, $p < .001$, $d = 1.06$, 95% CI [0.62, 1.48]. However, there was no significant difference (i.e., 41 words) between the two experimental conditions of *Diversion* and *Cooling-Off* regarding which condition resulted in participants giving the lengthiest statements $t$ (103) = -0.83, $p = .41$, $d = -0.16$, 95% CI [-0.54, 0.22].

**Table 1**
*Descriptives for the word count during the lay low stage*

|  | Style | *N* | Mean | Median | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Word Count | Cooling-Off | 53 | 402 | 379 | 266 |
|  | Diversion | 53 | 361 | 344 | 236 |
|  | Open | 53 | 165 | 158 | 117 |

*Critical Information*

In addition to the t-tests, chi-square tests were carried out to test the hypothesis that participants will disclose more critical details in the *Cooling-Off* and *Diversion* conditions compared to the *Open* condition during the lay low stage. The interview conditions were treated as the independent variables and the variables for each piece of critical information were treated as the dependent variables.

### Being in the Break Room

The results showed that the *Cooling-Off* and *Diversion* conditions did not significantly differ with regards to participants mentioning whether they had been in the break room, $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 106) = 0.29, p = .59. The results also showed that the *Cooling-Off* and *Open* conditions did not significantly differ in terms of participants mentioning that they had been in the break room, $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 106) = 0.08, $p$ = .78. Lastly, the results showed that the *Diversion* and *Open* conditions did not significantly differ regarding participants mentioning that they were in the break room, $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 106) = 0.07, $p$ = .79. See Table 2 for proportions and frequencies for the binary coding.

**Table 2**
*Frequencies of participants mentioning being in the break room*

| | Being in the break room |
| --- | --- |
| Conditions | % Of participants (N=106) |
| Cooling-Off | 43,4% (n = 46) |
| Diversion | 41,5% (n = 44) |
| Open | 42,5% (n = 45) |

### Mentioning the Suspect

The results indicated that the *Open* and *Diversion* conditions did not significantly differ concerning participants mentioning the person carrying the bin bags, $\chi^2$ (1, $N$ = 106) = 2.56, $p$ = .11. See Table 3 for proportions and frequencies for the binary coding.

**Table 3**
*Frequencies of participants mentioning the suspect*

| | Mentioning the suspect |
| --- | --- |
| Conditions | % Of participants (N=106) |
| Cooling-Off | 41,5% (n = 44) |
| Diversion | 41,5% (n = 44) |
| Open | 34,9% (n = 37) |

### Suspect Acting Suspiciously

The results showed that there was a significant difference in proportions between the *Cooling-Off* and *Diversion* conditions and participants mentioning that the person in the mock video carrying the bin bags acted suspiciously, $\chi^2$ (1, $N = 106$) = 25.8, $p < .001$. In addition, the results also showed that the *Diversion* and *Open* conditions did significantly differ regarding participants mentioning that this person acted suspiciously, $\chi^2$ (1, $N = 106$) = 23.3, $p < .001$. See Table 4 for proportions and frequencies for the binary coding.

**Table 4**
*Frequencies of participants mentioning suspect acting suspiciously*

|  | Suspect acting suspiciously |
| --- | --- |
| Conditions | % Of participants (N=106) |
| Cooling-Off | 3,8% (n = 4) |
| Diversion | 26,4% (n = 28) |
| Open | 4,7% (n = 5) |

### Alternate Suspect Acting Suspiciously

The results showed that the *Open* and *Cooling-Off* conditions did not significantly differ with respect to participants mentioning that the alternate suspect acted suspiciously, $\chi^2$ (1, $N = 106$) = 0.12, $p = .73$. Only one person was coded as having done this. See Table 5 for proportions and frequencies for the binary coding.

**Table 5**
*Frequencies of participants mentioning alternate suspect acting suspiciously*

|  | Alternate suspect acting suspiciously |
| --- | --- |
| Conditions | % Of participants (N=106) |
| Cooling-Off | 0,9% (n = 1) |
| Diversion | 0,0% (n = 0) |
| Open | 0,0% (n = 0) |

## Discussion

### What verbal counter-interrogation strategies did the participants state that they used?

The first aim of the present study is to build on existing research concerning guilty mock suspects' self-reported use of verbal CISs. Regarding the first research question, it can be stated that based on the ten interviews upon which the analysis is based, the participants mainly used strategies related to mental preparations for the interviews, which apply to both analytical reflection on the events in question and steering the interview in the desired direction, to adapt one's statement to the evidence and to incorporate lies into a mostly truthful statement, as well as to use escape strategies. The results of the TA culminated in three overarching themes, with two sub-themes below each main theme.

Concerning the first aim, the general results of the exit interviews showed that out of the ten exit interviews upon which the TA was conducted, nine participants stated that they had prepared strategies in advance before participating in the mock suspect interview. As the present study solely focused on guilty mock suspects, no comparison between guilty and innocent mock suspects can be made. However, previous research has concluded that liars more frequently report having prepared some form of strategy or plan for an interview (Clemens et al., 2010; Hartwig et al., 2007; Strömwall et al., 2006; Vrij et al., 2010), compared to truth-tellers. Thus, the results of the present study can be explained in light of information management (Granhag et al., 2014). That is, due to lying being cognitively demanding and therefore entailing more complicated strategic reasoning, liars will resort to precomposed strategies to control what, and in which way information is being revealed, all the while suppressing critical details of the events in question.

Furthermore, most of the participants employed several different CISs during the questioning phase, and most participants shifted strategies once evidence was revealed. These results are in line with previous research, and thus further strengthen the hypothesis of the SoS approach that shifts in suspects' CISs are evoked due to the revelation of evidence (e.g., Granhag, 2010; Granhag & Luke, 2018; Luke & Granhag, 2022). As mentioned in preceding sections, the interviewer challenging discrepancies in the suspect's statement is what leads to a shift in strategy as a form of adaptation on part of the suspect (Granhag & Luke, 2018; Luke & Granhag, 2022). While providing a statement, guilty suspects must suppress critical information, not only due to the risk of admission in case critical details are uncovered, but also due to appearing more suspicious if they refuse to share anything and instead remain silent (Granhag et al., 2014). That said, one can speculate that the thought process of the participant was that it is better to adapt to the present circumstances and always have an answer or an explanation to the interviewers' questions (i.e., riposte), rather than not being able to explain one's actions or whereabouts. This could explain why many participants employed several different CISs during the mock suspect interview – certain CISs differ greatly from one another, but each has a specific purpose in counteracting the evidence and thus in maintaining one's perceived innocence.

Related to the study's first theme, the results showing that the participants prepared themselves mentally for the mock suspect interview correspond with an aspect within the causal model of CISs (Granhag et al., 2014). More specifically, many participants stated that they attempted to ascertain the extent of the interviewer's knowledge about the criminal events, which builds on former notions that suspects typically form hypotheses regarding the amount of information that interviewers hold related to them and the crime being investigated (Granhag et al., 2014). This reflective process both concerns what information the interviewer might already possess, and what information they may be unaware of.

Before participating in the mock suspect interviews, participants were instructed to spend five minutes in preparation for the task. Despite having spent only five minutes preparing themselves for the challenge, nine out of ten participants reported having prepared at least one CIS. With this in mind, it is possible to speculate on the outcome of a real-life interrogation where the suspect has days, weeks, or even months to "prepare" for the questioning. Perhaps the extent to which a suspect has time to prepare for an interview relates to how "well" they perform when it comes to sufficiently employing CISs and thus successfully withstanding an interrogation. In other words, attempting to appear credible, and in turn, come across as innocent. It is previously known that various terrorist organizations (e.g., Provisional Irish Republican Army and Al-Qaeda) have produced manuals that provide their members with guidance on how to behave if being interrogated (Alison et al., 2014; Clemens et al., 2013). These findings show that it is possible to train for an interrogation, but not necessarily that it is possible to do so well, as the training could be in vain. In addition to the analytical reflection, several participants recounted using tactics that concerned influencing the direction of the interview and thus striving to control the narrative by sharing more information than the interviewer had asked for. Similar results were found in the study by Alison with colleagues (2014) in which the suspects engaged in verbal communication with the interviewer, although their aim was to either change the topic of conversation by discussing unrelated topics or provide information that was already known to the interviewer. According to both the SUE technique and SoS approach (Granhag, 2010; Granhag & Luke, 2018), when the interviewer shares information (i.e., evidence), they do so to elicit inconsistencies in the suspect's statement. To control the narrative by sharing information that has not been requested and thus "being one step ahead" of the interviewer could be interpreted as suspects' thought processes concerning admitting to potential false information provided by the interviewer. By utilizing a strategy like the aforementioned, the suspect might be under the impression that they are minimizing the risk of such admissions and thus avoiding being caught in a lie.

Concerning the second theme, the results indicate that a suspect's statement alternates depending on the circumstances of the interview. All suspects continuously made changes to suit the new circumstances of the interviewer challenging their statement inconsistencies or revealing new evidence. These results can be related to the self-regulation theory (Carver & Scheier, 2012). That is, suspects' main concern is to be perceived as innocent, and by appearing cooperative and keep engaging with the interviewer, they believe that they are maintaining such an image. As per the participants' rendition (see illustrative quote below Theme II, sub-theme I), some claimed to have relied on their cover story to a great extent, while adapting to the information or evidence provided by the interviewer. Researchers have established that one of the most frequently employed verbal CISs is to "stick to one's cover story" (Clemens et al., 2013). Perhaps the cover story acts as a frame for the suspect's account, while the details and information provided by the suspect will be less or more fluid depending on how much of it is true. Statements that are far from the truth are difficult to maintain as lying is generally more cognitively demanding (Granhag et al., 2014) compared to telling the truth due to liars not being able to report from their memory (Clemens et al., 2013). As many participants resorted to giving statements that were far from what was indeed true, the participants might have struggled more to "stick with their cover story" compared to those who provided more truthful accounts.

Furthermore, the results related to the second sub-theme further expand on the notion that suspects commonly recount events while staying as close to a truthful statement as possible, while fabricating or denying certain details. These results are in line with previous research where it has been found that liars avoided sharing things that were not true (i.e., lies) and thus avoided the risk of being confronted with such false information (Hartwig et al., 2007). One could speculate that the aforementioned results point to suspects relaxing when they

recount parts or details of a statement that are truthful and that the truth aid in their confidence to then possibly fabricate certain information, as was explicitly mentioned by several participants (see Appendix A). When the fabricated information is integrated into the mostly truthful narrative, the suspect could adhere to the original timeline. By adhering to a timeline of events that took place, perhaps the suspect would also be given time to plan their statements. It could be that the suspect appears more credible when using this strategy, as certain specific, truthful details can be confirmed by the authorities, giving them the impression that other information provided by the suspect may have been truthful as well.

Lastly, the overall results for the third theme build on previous research concerning escape strategies, namely that liars may turn to strategies where they deny any involvement related to the events in question to conceal critical information (Granhag & Hartwig, 2008). Concerning the first subtheme, attempting to pin the blame on someone else could be interpreted as an escape strategy. That is, the participants tried to deflect attention away from themselves, divert the blame, or influence the interviewer to change the subject on their own accord. Some participants prepared this strategy in advance (ones that saw an opportunity to cast suspicion upon an alternate suspect based on the questions that were asked in the *Diversion* condition), while others stated that they reached this solution in the spur of the moment. This spontaneously induced response could be a sign that the strategy was elicited in the moment as a reaction to threatening stimuli. Research within the field of psychology has shown that escape strategies are fundamental responses when being exposed to threatening stimuli (Carlson et al., 2000). In this case, the threatening stimuli would be the risk of getting caught in a lie during a suspect interview.

As for the second subtheme, several participants employed strategies related to memory problems. Like the denial strategies mentioned in the preceding section, another dimension within escape strategies is avoidance. That is, avoidance strategies are those that guilty suspects use through which they are being vague regarding their whereabouts to conceal crime-relevant information (Granhag & Hartwig, 2008). The results of the second sub-theme can thus be interpreted in light of avoidance strategies. However, according to suspects' renditions, most avoidance strategies related to memory seem to have surfaced in the moment as a result of the pressure of being interviewed, compared to the denial strategies that many participants stated that they had prepared for. Much like denial strategies, avoidance strategies can be interpreted as a result of the person reacting to threatening stimuli, such as providing a free narrative as requested by the interviewer during a suspect interview (Granhag & Hartwig, 2008). Furthermore, the avoidance strategies that the participants reported correspond with the results by Alison et al. (2014). The authors identified "claiming to have a lack of memory" (p. 174) as a CIS employed by terrorist suspects.


## Which interview condition resulted in statements disclosing the most critical details during the lay low stage?

The second aim of the present study was to examine which interview condition (SoS-Cooling Off, SoS-Diversion, or SoS-Standard) made the suspects disclose the most critical details concerning the lay low stage in the mock crime procedure. The prediction related to the study's second research question was that participants would disclose more critical details in the SoS-Cooling Off and SoS-Diversion conditions compared to the SoS-Standard condition related to the mock crime video of the break room. There was a significant difference in proportions between the Cooling-Off and Diversion conditions (Diversion generating more critical details, 26.4% compared to 3.8%) and between the Diversion and Open conditions (Diversion generating more critical details, 26.4% compared to 4.7%) regarding participants

mentioning that the person in the mock video carrying the bin bags was acting suspiciously. In addition to the analysis regarding the disclosure of critical details, the results indicate that in the Cooling-Off and Diversion conditions respectively, participants provided significantly longer statements compared to the Open condition. The results thus confirm the study's hypothesis.

The overall results provide support for the effectiveness of the SoS-Cooling Off and SoS-Diversion variations when it comes to encouraging suspects to talk, which resulted in longer statements that disclosed the most critical details. More specifically, both the Cooling-Off and Diversion approaches seem to have been beneficial in getting the suspects to talk about the break room, which is also what the suspects were intended to do. In addition, some of the exit interviews seem to point to the participants taking advantage of the events that transpired in the break room to cast suspicion on another person (though few people directly stated that he was suspicious). Within the SoS framework, these findings are new. Together, they indicate that it might be possible for the interviewer to shift a suspect's strategy by giving them the opportunity to talk about other topics and thus attempt to divert attention elsewhere. Further, the results correspond to those of the Thematic Analysis, more specifically to sub-theme I of theme III under which these findings are elaborated on.

With the results of the two conditions in mind, one could argue that the length of the statements is not solely indicative of the effectiveness of the interview condition. To clarify, people may differ in terms of how they conduct a conversation. Some people may naturally be more elaborate in their statements, which could mean that their accounts will be more verbose compared to others'. This is an aspect that should be kept in mind when interpreting the results, as it could affect the length of a person's rendering and thus facilitate an explanation as to why some statements were considerably longer than others. Additionally, more elaborate statements may in turn result in the person accidentally revealing information that they meant to conceal in the first place. The results showing that the Cooling-Off condition generated longer statements overall, as well as statements containing more critical details in comparison to the other two conditions, could potentially be an indicator of this notion.

## Method Discussion

Concerning the exit interviews upon which the TA has been conducted, the length of the interviews was between 10-15 minutes. That being said, the exit interviews may be perceived as too short to constitute any content worthy of analysis. However, upon closer examination, one-third of the exit interviews were subjectively deemed substantial enough for analysis as they were indeed rich in content. On the other hand, more extensive, in-depth interviews examining the CISs employed by guilty mock suspects would be of great value as one could e.g., take a closer look at the thought processes behind their choices, i.e., how they think, reason, and strategize regarding the CISs they employ (Granhag et al., 2014). Regarding the overall length of the interviews, it is also worth noting the inexactness of the AI transcription tool (otter.ai). It is a helpful tool in that no manual transcription is needed, but it has affected the word count to some extent. The transcription tool did not generate the exact number of words uttered by the participants. As the focus of the word count concerned the lay low stage, the process of editing that particular part of the interview resulted in a relatively close number of words. However, if the word count had concerned the entire interview from beginning to end, one could speculate that this may have affected the overall results of the data analysis. Namely that the missing or extra words could lead to misleading results such as false significance.

Related to the exit interviews, a display of quotes from the participants in the results section gives the reader an insight into the interview situation. Having said that, a partial pre-understanding of CISs was present during the analysis of the exit interviews which may to a certain extent have influenced the results. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) discuss reflective objectivity and describe it as a reflection on one's contributions to the production of knowledge. Objectivity in this context entails the researcher being objective regarding the subjectivity, and aware as well as transparent regarding the prejudices that they inevitably possess, which affect the knowledge being produced. On the one hand, before beginning the analysis it was necessary to possess a certain level of knowledge of CISs, as the study's first aim specifically concerns CISs. The pre-understanding of CISs made it possible to discern patterns in the material which were consistent with both the SoS approach, and previously established research on CISs, and thus contributed to results reflecting such prior knowledge. On the other hand, this pre-understanding meant that the analysis was to some extent guided by confirmation bias (Silverman, 2020), meaning that the codes that were identified in the transcript corresponded with CISs and core components of the SoS approach, and therefore confirmed what I already knew. However, I remained critical of my prior knowledge before the TA was initiated and have sought an active and conscious relation to the pre-understanding during the analysis, considering having had a central role in the production of the result. Yet, the pre-understanding does not seem to have precluded the identification of other valuable information and is therefore not considered an obstacle.

## Limitations and Future Directions

One methodological limitation of the experiment, and thus the present study, is that no comparison between guilty and innocent mock suspects has been made. As both innocent and guilty suspects will be exposed to the approach in future real-life suspect interviews, it is crucial to conduct experiments in which comparisons between guilty and innocent mock suspects are made. As the SoS approach is in its nascent stage of development, further research should ensure that the approach is appropriate to utilize when interviewing innocent suspects. As stated by Luke and Granhag (2022), there is little reason to believe that the SoS approach would be putting innocent suspects at risk when implemented as intended. However, given the risk of potential false confessions, which is a concern with all interrogation strategies, future research should compare the influence on guilty and innocent mock suspects' CISs using the SoS approach. In addition, general research on CISs should investigate the underlying thought processes of both guilty and innocent suspects' choices of CISs. That is, suspects' cognitive processes of how they think, reason, and strategize when employing CISs is an area of research that is yet to be investigated (Granhag et al., 2014).

## Conclusion

The first aim of the present study has been to build on existing research concerning guilty mock suspects' self-reported use of verbal CISs. Concerning the first question, the results indicate that frequently used CISs were: adapting statements to evidence, providing majority truthful statements incorporated with lies, and employing escape strategies. Since the purpose has been fulfilled, I assess that the results will offer further guidance for future research on CISs employed by suspects in legal settings. The second aim of the study was to examine which interview condition (SoS-Cooling Off, SoS-Diversion, or SoS-Standard) made the suspects disclose the highest number of critical details during the lay low stage in the mock crime

procedure. Results concerning the second question show that the SoS-Cooling Off condition led to participants providing the longest statements disclosing the most critical details. By comparing the three interview conditions, it has been possible to further develop the SoS approach and thus contributing to interviewers' ability to obtain information during suspect interviews.

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# Appendix

Appendix A – Additional Quotes Illustrating Commonly Occurring Themes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Theme I: Mental Preparations' Influence on Statements** | Sub-theme I: Analytically Reflecting on the Events in Question | *"I was just calm because she asked what I was doing, what I saw. I said I was just sitting down relaxing, reading the newspaper, yes I was there because I knew that there were people there. So I knew that someone would have definitely seen me. All the other places there was no one really around, people on the stairwell, but not to know exactly where I had been so I knew there were no witnesses. In that break room people saw me, a lady smiled at me, the guy taking the rubbish looked in my face so I explained all of that because I knew people actually saw me there so it was easier to say 'Oh yeah, of course I was there. Yes, this guy did this, that woman did that."* – Participant 6 <br><br> ------------------------------------------------------- <br><br> *"Yes. So because I mean, people saw me and I did not read anywhere in the study where they said that I had a face mask on or some sort of, you know, a covering on my face. So it was a bear face. And the guy wearing black, I think I saw him twice in that room. So I was like, he probably would remember me if he were to see my sketch or my face somewhere."* – Participant 22 <br><br> ------------------------------------------------------- <br><br> *"Not, well, no, because I was sort of convinced. I've got my notes and all the notes I wrote for in the videos. And when he said, we've got fingerprints, I'm thinking that's not possible because I had gloves on. When he said, we've got eyewitness statements. I'm remembering every person that was in that video and not one person made eye contact with me. So I don't think it would have been prudent for me to change my statement as I went along. So I thought I'd just stick with what I'm saying."* – Participant 33 |
| | Sub-theme II: Steering the Interview in the Desired Direction | *"To maybe share more information than what was being asked of me. So he was asking questions, I can't remember if this is the stage I did this, but there were stages where he'd ask me a question, but I would give more* |

| | | *information than what I was being asked, to make it seem that I wasn't just given the bare minimum, to try and avoid shooting myself in the foot or sort of give the wrong information to make me seem guilty. So I thought I'd give more information than what he's asking me. It generally seemed like I'm a clueless person that was just 'Oh, there's nothing to hide here. I'm giving you as much information as I can remember'. /.../ But as I said, I was just acting confident, but at the same time keeping that characteristic to try and make you believe that I genuinely didn't have a clue."* – Participant 131 |
| | | -------------------------------------------------------- |
| | | *"Well, I think the hard part is that the deputy, they've got CCTV come in. So you have to be very restrictive about the way you defend yourself. Because if you're a 'shoot first, ask questions later' type of person, then your mouth is gonna run a bit too much. And you'll say, I did this, I never did that. Then they come out with 'Oh, but we saw you on the CCTV, and this is what you did and that never happened'. And then, like five minutes later, they come up with something else that you said you never did, but you did. So you have to be careful not to jump the gun, not to shoot first and ask questions later. So of course, you have to say something ahead of what the interviewer is saying. Because if you try to be a bit very muted and say, 'Oh, I did that', and try to be very restricted on what you say, then that can also work against you. You only want to confirm what's being confirmed. You don't really want to test the waters. So there's sort of that balance, which you have to strike."* – Participant 134 |
| **Theme II: A Suspect's Account is Fluid** | Sub-theme I: Trim One's Sails to the Evidence | *"It became apparent from what he was saying that there was evidence of wherever I'd been, so they'd obviously been tracking me through the building. I felt quite comfortable pretending to be a bit forgetful. I couldn't quite remember which floor I'd been on. And I'd come up with the story of looking for a friend because I thought that gave me a very good excuse to be all over the building. So I felt quite comfortable saying I was there going everywhere looking. And I was hoping that that might fit in with the CCTV evidence."* – Participant 101 |
| | | -------------------------------------------------------- |

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|---|---|---|
| | | *"I was thinking about whether to be honest to say that I've been to the actual places. And initially, I wasn't going to be, which is why I was sounding very hesitant at the very, very beginning. But then, I think after he acknowledged that there'd been a video that I'd been in that area or a witness, I thought, no, I need to be honest and actually say that I've been to those particular locations."* – Participant 11<br><br>-------------------------------------------------------<br><br>*"And then I just thought, well, obviously, I've done the wrong thing. And obviously, I've got to persuade them that I am innocent. So I thought, right, you've just got a kind of lie which creates a sort of false alibi /.../ So I thought that was my strategy. And the second I started lying, I realized that of course, he's got it all on CCTV. So that was the wrong strategy to go to. So I had to change midway."* – Participant 131 |
| | Sub-theme II: Fractions of Truth as Foundation for Evasions | *"Yes, public space. There's nothing suspicious about sitting there. So I could go in and just sit, and the other section where I didn't lie was where I was in the waiting area. I wasn't doing anything. I was just sitting reading a newspaper and there were people moving around. I wasn't doing anything funny. So I said 'Yes, I did go to the sixth floor, and I read my newspaper, and I waited for my friend. I still lied as to how I went there. But I did tell the truth about that."* – Participant 22<br><br>-------------------------------------------------------<br><br>*"Yeah, so what I basically did was, I've tried my best to be as honest as I possibly can. So I use things like, I really like reading. And once I've put into place about going into the bathroom, for example, well, then I'm looking around for a bathroom and you can use that over and over again. And I knew I'd be able to use that right up until I went into the changing room. Because then I've got a reason to go somewhere. And then once I've been to the bathroom, I've found my way up, and I was a little bit lost. I kind of put a plan that, initially, I was going to be looking for a bathroom, you know, going in for a bit of a look around for him for a bathroom. And then I just couldn't find my way out with all these corridors, it was very difficult. So I kind of put a bit of structure."* – Participant 69 |

| Theme III: Employing Escape Strategies | Sub-theme I: Deflecting Their Guilt onto Another | *"Well, I've made a mental note while watching the video clip that that might be something that would come in useful. But I actually made the decision on the spot during the interview itself when she asked about the break room. And I think I've decided at that point to mention this chap and try to make him sound like he was acting suspiciously and trying to shift the attention on to him and away from me."* – Participant 8<br><br>---------------------------------------------------------<br><br>*"Yeah, it was kind of tempting to try to, you know, put suspicion on this other guy. So that's kind of where the line of questioning was going. And I was sort of picking up on that a little bit and trying to think of if that's what I should do. I wasn't fully committed to that as a strategy, but I was sort of, so yes, in the sense. I was like, oh, you know, here's this. I didn't fully say 'Yeah, that guy' but I did sort of try to help divert suspicion onto this other person."* – Participant 106 |
| | Sub-theme II: With a Memory Like a Sieve | *"Well, I started playing a little bit stupid, to be honest. And I wanted to be immensely non-committal. Because that way, it's like, oh, I'm really sorry, I don't remember. But if I did, I might have done, you know, absent-minded and purely taking the fact that the law wasn't there for a purpose. So I wasn't really paying attention. So I may have done and I may not, I don't know. But just as if you told me what the room is and I'll tell you whether I was there, kind of thing."* – Participant 69<br><br>---------------------------------------------------------<br><br>*"I think that was the final strategy. And it became apparent from what he was saying that there was evidence of wherever I'd been, so they'd obviously been tracking me through the building. I felt quite comfortable pretending to be a bit forgetful. I couldn't quite remember which floor I'd been on. And I'd come up with the story of looking for a friend because I thought it gave me a very good excuse to be all over the building. So I felt quite comfortable saying I was going everywhere looking. And I was hoping that that might fit in with the CCTV evidence."* – Participant 101 |

# Appendix B – Examples of Coding and Thematization

| Excerpts from transcribed material | Codes | Theme | Sub-theme |
|---|---|---|---|
| *"I wasn't going to but I wasn't certain what questions he was going to ask. I didn't know how or if he was going to say 'Oh, we have proof that you were in each place doing each thing'. So my first strategy was to deny, but then once I realized, okay, that's not going to work, I justified why I was doing each thing. So the first time or two I denied. And then he could say 'Well, that isn't in line with what we saw'. Okay, so then I changed it to explain why I was doing each thing, but still within the story I had built."* | <ul><li>denial</li><li>analytical thinking</li><li>wasn't going to be honest – changed strategy based on evidence</li><li>changed strategy once they found out there was evidence</li><li>adapted story to evidence</li><li>pinning it on someone else</li><li>preparation</li></ul> | A Suspect's Account is Fluid | Trim One's Sails to the Evidence |
| *"To maybe share more information than what was being asked of me. So he was asking questions, I can't remember if this is the stage I did this, but there were stages where he'd ask me a question, but I would give more information than what I was being asked, to make it seem that I wasn't just given the bare minimum, to try and avoid shooting myself in the foot or sort of give the wrong information to make me seem guilty. So I thought I'd give more information than what he's asking me. It generally seemed like I'm a clueless person that was just 'Oh, there's nothing to hide here. I'm giving you as much information as I can remember'. /.../ But as I said, I was just acting confident, but at the same time keeping that characteristic to try and make you believe that I genuinely didn't have a clue."* | <ul><li>controlling the narrative</li><li>providing information before the evidence has been revealed to sound more truthful</li><li>analytical thinking</li><li>when you provide information upfront you seem like you're willing to share and that you're cooperative.</li><li>avoid incrimination</li></ul> | Mental Preparations' Influence on Statements | Steering the Interview in the Desired Direction |
| *"As soon as he said about CCTV, I said to myself, right, okay, I can't lie, I have to admit that I was in all the places that I was in, my strategy then changed to acting clueless and acting like a fumbling idiot that didn't know where she was, what she was doing, and just seeming a bit loopy. Even though I wasn't that, I think it was just sort of trying to* | <ul><li>shift of strategy</li><li>acting clueless, unknowing</li><li>thought of new strategy on the spot, tried to match the backstory to evidence</li><li>lying</li></ul> | Employing Escape Strategies | With a Memory Like a Sieve |

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|---|---|---|---|
| *act in that sort of character. So then maybe they think, okay, she's an idiot who just got lost and didn't know what she was doing. So that was then my new strategy. And I then realized that yeah, okay, I had to admit, I was in all those places. And think up on the spot of reasons for me doing those things. Like, why did I touch a computer? I don't know."* | <ul><li>complicates things</li><li>lying reveals stories made up on the spot</li><li>making up story to match with evidence</li></ul> | | |