

**Project title:** Alibi Believability: The Impact of Salacious and Self-Incriminating Details

**Project leader:** Dr. Melanie Sauerland

**Function:** Assistant professor

**Collaborators:** Dr. Anna Sagana, Dr. Alana Krix

**Proposal (250 words):**

**Introduction:** If you become a suspect in a police investigation, even if you are innocent, you have to convince investigators about your innocence. Sometimes the only evidence to corroborate a suspects' innocence consists of an alibi. Unfortunately, alibis are not considered strong evidence for someone's innocence by legal evaluators and decision-makers. Research on alibi credibility, though still nascent, has identified alibi consistency and the source of an alibi (motivated other, non-motivated other, physical evidence) as important predictors of alibi believability (see special issue on alibis in *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*; Sauerland, 2017). We also know that self-incriminating details (concerning a different crime) on or the inclusion of salacious details in an alibi can increase its believability under certain conditions, whereas sometimes such disclosures can have negative effects.

**Objectives:**

In this project we will:

- investigate the effect of self-incriminating details on alibi believability and evaluators' impressions of suspect guilt;
- establish conditions under which salacious and self-incriminating details increase vs. decrease alibi believability;
- study other factors that may moderate the effect, e.g., the timing of disclosure.

**Setting and Methods:**

Experimental laboratory studies; survey; field study/experiment

**Impact:**

Alibi research is still in its infancy. This project will contribute to the slowly growing data base in this field and help develop and test a theory of alibi evaluation. Our findings will inform legal decision-makers about possible biases in evaluating the credibility of alibis. Identifying bias will allow the legal system to take precautions and will eventually lead to policy changes.

**Requirements candidate:** Highly motivated student with good English communication skills and proactive and resolute attitude.

**Keywords:** alibis, alibi believability, memory, interrogation, police investigation, inconsistency

**Top 5 selected publications:**

**Sauerland, M., Mehlkopf, S., Krix, A. C., & Sagana, A.** (2016). Deceiving suspects about the content of their alibis: Consequences for truthful and untruthful suspects. *Journal of Forensic Practice, 18*, 143-154. doi:10.1108/JFP-10-2014-0042 (cited twice)

**Sauerland, M., Sagana, A., & Sporer, S. L.** (2012). Assessing nonchoosers' eyewitness identification accuracy from photographic showups by using confidence and response times. *Law and Human Behavior, 36*, 394-403. doi:10.1037/h0093926 (cited 28 times)

**Sauerland, M.**, Schell, J. M., Collaris, J., Reimer, N., Schneider, M., & Merckelbach, H. (2013). "Yes, I have sometimes stolen bikes": Blindness for norm-violating behaviors and implications for suspect interrogations. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, *31*, 239-255. doi:10.1002/bsl.2063 (cited 12 times)

**Sauerland, M.**, Schell-Leugers, J. M., & **Sagana, A.** (2015). Fabrication puts suspects at risk: Blindness to changes in transgression-related statements. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, *29*, 544-551. doi:10.1002/acp.3133 (cited twice)

**Krix, A. C.**, **Sauerland, M.**, Lorei, C., & Rispens, I. (2015). Consistency across repeated eyewitness interviews: Contrasting police detectives' beliefs with actual eyewitness performance. *PLoS ONE*, *10*, e0118641. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0118641 (cited 11 times)