

Centre for the Study of Emotion and Law Annual Lecture

CSEL are delighted to welcome Gísli Gudjónsson as our special guest at our 2020 Annual Lecture



The battle for justice in cases of false confession: an international perspective.

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This Lecture will focus on the development of the science behind the understanding of false confessions from the 1980s onwards and discuss the impact it has had on the outcome in some landmark miscarriage of justice cases in the UK, USA, Israel, Norway and Iceland.

The early conceptualization of Hugo Münsterberg in 1908 laid the foundation for understanding different types of false confession, but tangible theoretical developments and empirical evidence base did not emerge until the 1980s. However, in the 1970s two miscarriage of justice cases, one in the USA (18-year-old Peter Reilly) and another in the UK (The 'Confait' case), influenced science and practice. The Reilly case influenced the conceptualization of internalized false confession. In the Confait case, the exoneration of the three young people convicted of manslaughter in 1972 was followed by the implementation of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) in January 1986, which has substantially reduced the risk of false confession. In the 1980s the main obstacles to preventing and correcting miscarriages of justice involving confession evidence was that people found it hard to believe that anyone would confess to a serious crime of which they were innocent and the science behind false confessions was in its infancy. This changed considerably after the acquittal of the 'Guildford Four' in October 1989, a case that opened the gate to other miscarriage of justice cases involving disputed confessions. An important part of the early battle was to change negative attitudes and misconceptions by educating police officers, lawyers, and judges about the growing evidence base of false confessions and the need for improved police interview training and practice. There is now a substantial evidence base for the science of false confessions. This Lecture will demonstrate the crucial link between clinical forensic practice (i.e., the evaluation of cases) and science. Real-life cases lead to the development of research questions, the development of relevant psychometric tests, and the collection of empirical data relevant to the evaluation of new cases.



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