



14 The Many Roads to False Confession

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The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate with specific cases examples that false confessions occur even in the absence of coercive interrogation techniques as a result of various factors including the psychological state of the suspect, the assumptions of the interrogators, and the circumstances of the case.

This presentation will consist of a discussion of several cases from the Chicago area where subjects gave confessions to murders, which subsequently obtained evidence showed that, in fact, these defendants did not commit. These cases suggest that many factors may lead a suspect to falsely confess even to such a serious charge as murder. Examples will include cases in which characteristics of the suspect appear to have been a cause of the false confession. This includes the infamous case of two young boys who confessed to the rape and murder of a little girl, but were later released when DNA evidence implicated another man. Other cases will show how mental deficiencies and personality defects of defendants may have led to their demonstrably false confessions.

Examples will also include a case where the assumptions of the interrogators and their single-minded pursuit of a particular theory led to a false confession. Because the suspect was the victim's boyfriend and the victim and the suspect had a history of fighting with each other, police assumed that he was guilty and repeatedly accused him. In doing so, they ignored other important evidence pointing in other directions. Their persistence ultimately led to a written confession, but that confession would later prove to be false when DNA testing showed the semen in the victim's anus and vagina matched the profile of a man who was awaiting trial on similar charges.

The circumstances in which the suspect finds himself may also lead to a false confession. This will be illustrated by a case in which a man called the police to get himself arrested because he was convinced someone was trying to kill him. He would later confess to murder in order to ensure he would be kept in police custody and not released to the streets where he was convinced he would be targeted for murder.

Finally, the presentation will examine the possibility that there may be a profile "serial confessor." That is, a person who, for their own psychological reasons, and with the encouragement of interrogators may confess to one or more crimes they in fact committed, but then continuing to confess to multiple crimes they did not commit. Illustrative cases will include a man who confessed to seven murders for which he was convicted and sentenced to death. His death sentence was later vacated when another man confessed to committing one of the murders (which was supported by evidence). Another man confessed to committing fourteen murders, but would later plead guilty to just one murder after prosecutors closely investigated the cases and found that the evidence did not strongly support many of his confessions.

False Confession, Police Interrogation, DNA Exoneration