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# Book reviews

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**Maudsley Discussion Paper No. 2. Disputed Confessions and the Criminal Justice System.** By Gisli H. Gudjonsson & James MacKeith. London: Institute of Psychiatry. 1997. 20 pp. £2.95.

This small booklet is the second in a new series of 'discussion papers' from the Institute of Psychiatry, London.

The series aims to address "important contemporary issues in psychiatry and mental health". The guidelines to potential contributors state that these papers "are intended to be read by the intelligent layman . . . they have to be topical, (and) although there must be two sides to an argument presented, they need not necessarily provide equally poised arguments . . . they should be sufficiently provocative to excite some interest".

Is this an invitation to join an admirable, innovative public education and publishing initiative, or a flatteningly prescriptive injunction to be controversial?

The abstract of this particular pamphlet announces that the volume "outlines the contributions that forensic psychology and psychiatry have made in recent years to the understanding of 'unreliable' confessions".

Both authors are leading contributors to new knowledge and the consequent new sophistication of assessment of 'false' and 'unreliable' confessions, and have substantially changed contemporary thinking about the proper practice of the law in such matters. The first author, Gisli Gudjonsson, is the author of a comprehensive book entitled *The Psychology of Interrogations, Confessions and Testimony* (1992) which describes in full the case histories which are summarised in this volume, and provides the research and conceptual basis for the accounts – especially of 'suggestibility' and 'adherence' as significant traits of personality – which are presented here. For example, reference is made to the Confait case of 1972 which concerned the false confessions and false convictions of three young men, and led – *pari passu* – to the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and its codes of police practice: *Précis* are given, too, of other by now infamous examples of miscarriages of justice, the 'Watford Four', the 'Birmingham Six', Eugin Ragship (Broadwater Farm Estate) and Judith Ward. In all these cases the authors, separately or together, played their significant and impressive parts in changing assumptive attitudes, and most importantly, in overturning

prejudicial judgements. Sadly, in most cases this was to happen only after long years of wrongful imprisonment and traumatisation with all the consequent deprivation of a psychological and social life.

The other side of the argument, however, is (apparently) to caution against the misuse of the 'improved scientific base from which experts can testify', by its inappropriate application or misuse by the legal profession in defence of their clients. "Yes, yes", this reader thought – and so, I think, would 'the intelligent layman': the authors have to temper their really interesting and humane work with such a commonplace anodyne, because, well, it is obviously true – but most of all because it is in the guidelines for these 'discussion papers'.

In fact, aside from a few brief references to these dangers and a caution against the obvious, that is, not to take the Gudjonsson Suggestibility and Compliance Scale Scores (Gudjonsson, 1992) as 'gospel' and out of the context of a case, we are spared the totally balanced article.

What is missing in this necessarily truncated overview in my view, is an adequate account of the relation of the complex issue of 'false memory' and related theoretical issues as a component of the 'false confession and testimony' debate. The authors follow a typology of: (a) voluntary false confessions; (b) coerced compliant false confessions; and (c) coerced internalised confessions. All three categories, but especially the first and third, cry out (in this writer's view) for theoretical psychodynamic development.

Verdict:

- (a) Pamphlets should be partisan; and 'discussion papers' of such prescriptive format are worthy, no doubt educative – as intended – but finally a bit dull. My association was to 'model answer' books for 'O' and 'A' levels!
- (b) This paper in particular is informative, well structured and can be recommended.
- (c) It may lead the reader to go to the bigger book – which is admirable!

## Reference

GUDJONSSON, G. (1992) *The Psychology of Interrogations, Confessions and Testimony*. Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

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**Inside. One Man's Experience of Prison.** By John Hoskison. London: John Murray. 1998. 211 pp. £15.99 (hb). ISBN 0-7195-5569-8

*Inside* is an autobiographical account of the author's experience in four prisons during an 18-month sentence he served from October 1995.

John Hoskison was a professional golfer who competed on the European Tour with some success, before becoming the professional at the West Surrey Golf Club in 1986. He describes prison life through articulate middle-class eyes, and throughout the book he expresses his frustration that prison is so often seen as a soft option. His time in two inner London dispersal prisons proved to be a sobering introduction, and he provides a graphic account of the squalid and brutal conditions in these overcrowded institutions.

*Inside* highlights some of the key problems currently facing the prison service, namely the epidemic of drug misuse, the high prevalence of mental illness and the high rates of suicide.

One of the themes throughout the 21 chapters of the book is the magnitude of the drug problem in the prison system, and what the author sees as the authorities' impotence and incompetence in dealing with this. Indeed, Hoskison claims that significant amounts of drugs are brought in by prison officers. He draws attention to the problems with the practice of mandatory drugs testing, especially the increase in heroin use which has followed as inmates turn away from the more readily detectable cannabis.

*Inside* is a compulsive and highly readable book, which I would strongly recommend to anyone who works in a prison. As psychiatrists we frequently assess inmates in prison, but very rarely do we venture beyond the relative calm and tranquillity of the health care centre. Hoskison describes in vivid, and often disturbing detail life on normal location. Such an understanding of the stark realities of prison life is essential if we are to comprehend the psychological problems inmates present with, and can only help to improve our ability to perform accurate assessments.

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