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An Era of Enquiry and Development

I was born in Reykjavík in the early hours of 26 October 1947, following my identical twin brother Gudmundur, who had been born an hour earlier. We were constant companions and in our late teens were actively involved in athletics and talked about joining the police. Some of the men we were training with were police officers. We were looking for an exciting and challenging career and the idea of keeping Reykjavík ‘safe’ appealed to us. Unlike Gudmundur, who spent 40 years as a policeman in Iceland and became a Chief Superintendent in the Office of the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, I did not become a career policeman. I had strong cravings to travel abroad and explore different opportunities. Part of the reason was that I wanted to establish my own identity and independence, because throughout our childhood and adolescence we were usually referred to as ‘the twins’ and I did not like it. In addition, I had developed a thirst to learn and went to study in England. The intention was always to bring back that knowledge to Iceland. I loved my country of origin and still do.

At first, I was aiming for a career in commerce, being influenced by my grandfather and father who had both been businessmen. In 1971 I began to study economics at Brunel University. I had the opportunity of attending some classes in psychology and law, which I found more interesting than economics. I developed a keen interest in the observation, understanding, and measurement of behaviour and changed to psychology while in my second year.

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The four-year sandwich degree course at Brunel University, which was conveniently situated for Heathrow Airport with direct flights to and from Iceland, enabled me to combine my academic studies with practical placements relevant to psychology and law, each one of six month’s duration. These included my working as a deputy warden in a young offenders’ hostel in Bristol (1972), a uniformed police constable with the Reykjavík Police Department (1973), and a counsellor with the Reykjavík Social Services Department (1974). I then worked as a detective with the Reykjavík Criminal Investigation Police during the summers of 1975 and 1976. These ‘work placements’ were instrumental in my wanting to become a forensic psychologist and in developing a keen and lasting interest in the psychological processes and factors relevant to offending, police interviewing, and false confessions.

I was particularly interested in understanding offending behaviour and this formed a part of my BSc dissertation (Gudjonsson, 1975, 1982). My study was conducted in Iceland and 30 years later my dissertation became influential in a public enquiry into alleged abuse in a care home for behaviourally disturbed youngsters, called ‘Breidavík’ (Spano, Sigurdsson, & Gudjonsson, 2016). In 1975, my findings had raised serious concerns about the persistent offending of the majority of the 72 boys from Reykjavík who had been placed in Breidavík in the period 1953 to 1970. Undoubtedly, largely due to the negative findings from my study, which the Social Services kept confidential, Breidavík was closed down permanently (see Chapter 13). One of the participants in my study was Saevar Ciesielski, the alleged main perpetrator in connection with the disappearances of Gudmundur Einarsson and Geirfinnur Einarsson in 1974.

After graduating in social sciences (psychology major) in 1975 with a first class honours degree, I was offered a place to study criminology at the Institute of Criminology (University of Cambridge), which interested me greatly, but I made the pragmatic decision that a better career plan was to enrol in an MSc clinical psychology training programme. After attending an interview, I was offered a place at the University of Surrey, which I accepted. This was based on my belief at the time, and confirmed by my later experience, that clinical training is the best foundation for the practice of forensic psychology (Gudjonsson & Young, 2015). The late Professor Lionel Haward, the father of forensic psychology in Britain (Haward, 1981), was the head of the clinical psychology course at the University of Surrey and he further inspired my interest in forensic psychology. This led to his supervising my PhD on lie detection and to our writing a book together about the development and practice of forensic psychology (Gudjonsson & Haward, 1998). My clinical training involved applying psychological principles and theory to a range of clinical problems.
I collected data for my MSc dissertation in clinical psychology while working as a detective in Reykjavík during the summer of 1976. At the time, the Gudmundur and Geirfinnur investigation, which was briefly outlined in the Introduction and will be discussed in detail in Part II of this book, was at its peak and four of the suspects in the cases participated in my research into lie detection. In addition, at the request of the police, I conducted a ‘real-life’ lie detection test on Gudjón Skarphédinsson on 31 December 1976, who had seven weeks previously become a suspect in the disappearance and alleged murder of Geirfinnur (see Chapter 17 and Gudjonsson, 2017).

**MY EARLY RESEARCH ON LIE DETECTION**

In September 1975, after returning to England from my work as a detective in Reykjavík, I commenced clinical training at the University of Surrey. Soon I had to find a research project which would meet the course’s criteria but could be conducted in Iceland during the summer of 1976 where I was going to work full-time as a detective to fund my studies, as I had done the previous summer. Then on 14 December 1975, I read an article in the *Sunday Times* about the work Alan Smith had been conducting on ‘lie detection’ in the UK. Alan was based at Powick Hospital, where he had begun work in September 1971 (Smith, 2011). In December 1972 Alan had gone to Washington on a five-day training course on lie detection using the ‘Psychological Stress Evaluator’ (PSE), a machine developed by three former US Army intelligence officers. According to Alan:

They had expertise in polygraph lie detection and in electronics, and wished to produce a better type of lie detector. By analysing the voice, the whole process would be recorded for analysis (together with any confessions) and there might even be occasions when it could be done covertly ... over the phone.... The original [PSE] version used a multispeed reel-to-reel tape machine to record the interview, which was fed into PSE equipment.... The operator played each of the subject’s replies at slow speed into the PSE, which used a heat pen on a rolling paper strip to draw a voice chart. This showed the voice electronically in terms of its fundamental frequency activity, and the aim was to detect a microtremor in the voice.... A stressed voice will therefore cease to show any modulation, and the PSE chart will show straight or square patterns.

*(Smith, 2011, p. 56)*

The *Sunday Times* article demonstrated the use of the PSE as a lie detector in the case of a man called George Davis, who had been convicted of robbery at the Ilford branch of the London Electricity
Board in April 1974, and there was at the time a big campaign to clear
his name after his appeal failed in December 1975 (Smith, 2011). The

\textit{Sunday Times} headline was ‘Lie detector okays George Davis alibi’.

On 8 April 1976 Alan gave a 10-minute speech in the House of Commons
about the results from the George Davis case. One of those attending the
presentation was Michael Heseltine, a Member of Parliament, who later
became the Secretary of State for the Environment. In May 1976, the
Home Secretary Roy Jenkins exercised his royal prerogative of mercy
and freed Mr Davis because of serious doubts concerning his conviction.

The work Alan was doing with the PSE was getting a lot of attention
in the UK. He was contacted by the solicitors of both Peter Hain, who
spent 11 hours in police detention on 24 October 1975 being wrongly
accused of snatching money from a cashier at Barclays Bank in Putney
(Hain, 2012), and John Stonehouse, a British politician, who in 1974
had unsuccessfully faked his own death. In neither case did Alan think
it was appropriate to use his new PSE machine to assist with their
cases. In the case of Stonehouse:

\begin{quote}
His solicitor rang me and asked if I could help, but I couldn’t see how lie
detection could be applied even if you believed that it worked. It seemed
that Mr Stonehouse was more or less willing to admit that he had
behaved in various illegal ways, but he wished to demonstrate that his
motivations were good and honest ones. I excused myself on the grounds
that this is technically not feasible.
\end{quote}

(\textit{Smith, 2011, p. 71})

What is important from Alan Smith’s experience with the PSE is the
public’s naive belief about the accuracy of lie detectors and how they
are seen as the ultimate tool for determining the veracity of suspects’
accounts. At the time, a similar misconception also centred on the use
of ‘truth drugs’ to elicit the truth in criminal cases, a procedure that
has been demonstrated to have no validity (Gudjonsson, 1992a;
Gudjonsson, Kopelman, & MacKeith, 1999).

While having Christmas with my parents and brother in Iceland in
1975, I kept thinking about the \textit{Sunday Times} article and was mulling
over the possibility of doing research into lie detection. ‘Surely this
could be conducted in Iceland’, I kept telling myself. ‘What about test-
ing whether offenders are better at beating the lie detector than clergy-
men?’ These are two extreme groups and I reasoned at the time that
clergymen with their religious beliefs and strong moral sense would
find it difficult to beat the machine, whereas offenders, who are used to
lying, might have weaker consciences. This kind of experiment had
never been published before and I thought it was innovative and might
throw up interesting findings, which it did!
Unknown to me at the time, during my Christmas vacation in Iceland in 1975, Saevar Ciesielski and Erla Bolladóttir were being interrogated by the police in connection with Post and Telecommunication fraud and became implicated in the Gudmundur and Geirfinnur cases, and three further suspects, Kristján Vidarsson, Tryggvi Leifsson, and Albert Skaftason, had now been arrested and were beginning their lengthy solitary confinement prior to trial; their nightmare was beginning. I did not know that the following summer most of them would be participating in my research.

Upon returning to university in England after the Christmas vacation, I wrote to Alan Smith to ask him about training courses in the UK on lie detection. I was keen to be properly trained in the use of the polygraph before I conducted my MSc research project. Alan replied to my letter on 15 January 1976:

In reply to your questions, I do not know of any training courses in the UK. There is at least one private investigation business which uses lie detectors, but they do not welcome enquiries. Nor do I know of any police facilities of this kind. The USA would be the place to go for specific training.

My MSc Dissertation

I took up Alan’s offer to visit him to see his PSE machine. He impressed me by his skill and enthusiasm; here was a real scientist at work, I thought. I did not know that a year after his letter to me, he would be analysing the microtremor in Gudjón Skarphédinsson’s voice when asked questions about the disappearance of Geirfinnur Einarsson (see Chapter 17).

I was disappointed that there were no training courses on lie detection available in the UK. I enquired about courses in the USA but these were time consuming and costly. In addition, the most widely used polygraph at the time was the Lafayette, a portable machine which measured blood pressure, respiration, and galvanic skin response (GSR) (Reid & Inbau, 1977), and it was too costly for me to purchase. I settled for a compromise with regard to my MSc dissertation: no training course and a simple meter measuring the GSR. This obviously limited the type of experiment I could conduct and the generalizability of the findings to real-life cases. I knew that research could not involve asking people about their crime. It would need to involve either a ‘mock crime’, where half of the participants are asked to commit a designated ‘crime’ and then try to conceal it during a lie detection procedure, or card tests (participants pick a numbered card out of a pack, note what is written on it, and then deny that they know it for each card in turn).
Conducting a ‘mock crime’ experiment was impractical because most of the offenders were in custody, so I decided on simple card tasks.

The participants were to be asked to ‘lie’ about a card they had picked and their date of birth. My research was accepted at the University of Surrey and was supervised by Dr Jeremy Thorpe, Epsom District Hospital, and Dr Sandra Canter from the University of Surrey. Neither supervisor was an expert on lie detection, but they turned out to be helpful supervisors. After submission, the examiners concluded:

This piece of work has been well organized and is well reasoned and presented. It could be regarded as an adequate pilot study, having both theoretical interest (e.g. for Eysenck’s theory of the biological bases of personality and Davis’s conditioned response theory) and possibly some practical implication in the light of Peter Hain’s recent ordeal by identification parade.

The supervisors’ reference to the Peter Hain case is particularly interesting both in terms of the date and his cognitive processes while in police custody. Hain had spent his childhood in South Africa and was an anti-apartheid activist who went on to become a British Cabinet Minister and served 12 years in the Labour government. In his autobiography (Hain, 2012), Hain describes spending 11 hours in police detention on 24 October 1975, being accused of snatching a bundle of five pound notes from a cashier at Barclays Bank in Putney, London. After the guilt-presumptive interrogation, he was locked up in a cell for the rest of the day during which time ‘a confusing swirl of thoughts increasingly mesmerised me as the long hours dragged by, nothing happening, no explanations, nobody to speak to’ (p. 97). He went on:

I began to wonder whether perhaps I had done it. Perhaps I was a bank robber? For a moment I considered the possibility that I had ‘flipped’ – but then what had I done with the money I was supposed to have stolen?  
(Hain, 2012, pp. 97–98)

Hain’s case, which involved a high profile Old Bailey trial in 1976 where he was acquitted of the robbery, illustrates the vulnerabilities to ‘memory distrust’ during presumptive questioning and solitary confinement, which is a powerful factor in making a false confession (Gudjonsson & MacKeith, 1982).

The main aim of my MSc study was to investigate to what extent responsivity to lie detection on card tasks (i.e. failure to lie successfully regarding a number picked prior to the procedure and the denial of the participant’s month of birth) was related to personality factors and whether offenders would respond differently to other groups of citizens.
The hypothesis was that offenders would prove ‘better liars’ than policemen or clergymen. This was the first study to compare the responses of these three groups of participants. I measured skin resistance to a mild electric current during the administration of the card tasks and measured the change from baseline when the participants were denying each card in turn. The tasks were as follows:

Number task. The participant was asked to pick one card from a pile, write down the number he/she had picked, and while wired up to the machine deny each number presented to them in a random order: ‘Did you pick number ...?’ The numbers used in the experiment (3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 14, and 16) were presented twice in order to eliminate order effects and so increase the validity of the findings. A textbook on interrogation methods by Reid and Inbau (1977) had recommended the use of this test with suspects prior to the administration of the formal lie detector test, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the machine in detecting their lies.

Month of birth task. The participant chose a card representing his/her month of birth from cards of all months of the year. Six cards were subsequently put aside and the participant was required to place the chosen card with the remaining cards, leaving a total of seven cards as in the number task. The participant was asked, ‘Were you born in ...?’.

Word task. The participant had to pick out a card from a list of words: table, house, candle, light, paper, chair, and bag. The procedure was the same as for the number task.

For the purpose of the experiment I had purchased an Omega 2 Meter in a nice mahogany case, which cost £69 (plus VAT), and was advertised as ‘a new versatile skin resistance meter designed to advance existing techniques’ and was mainly aimed at therapists using it for biofeedback during therapy; the idea was that as patients became more relaxed during therapy they would show increased skin resistance as measured by a needle moving more slowly across a meter scale (i.e. the change in ohms from the baseline). In contrast, the PSE machine Alan Smith had purchased cost over £1,000 at that time (Smith, 2011).

I was able to recruit four different groups of participants – uniformed police officers; detectives; clergymen; and offenders – 12 in each group. As far as the offenders were concerned, there were eight suspects of murder and four who had allegedly committed serious thefts. All the murder suspects were tested while in custody and four of the suspects in the Gudmundur and Geirfinnur cases were included: Erla Bolladóttir, Tryggvi Leifsson, Kristján Vidarsson, and Saevar Ciesielski. All participants were friendly and cooperative. Each examination lasted for over an hour. Saevar took the longest to complete the test, because he
wished to share his wisdom about lie detectors and expressed great interest in them. Within a week, I was asked to perform a real-life lie detection test on Saevar, which I suspect was at his instigation (see Chapter 13).

While doing the experiment, some of the prison officers in the Sídumúli [Holding] Prison, where most of the tests on the ‘offenders’ were conducted, asked whether they could try to beat the machine, and they were much impressed by the machine’s ability to ‘detect lies’. At the time, the police had virtually taken over the prison as their work base for the Gudmundur and Geirfinnur investigation. My lie detection research was generating a great deal of interest among the police and the prison officers. Almost half of all the detectives in Reykjavík took part in my lie detection experiment.

Table 1.1 gives the results of the efficacy of the machine in detecting lies for the three card tests. The overall detection rate in the experiment was 85%, which impressed me. The word task gave the worst overall results (77%), and the month of birth task the best (92%). With regard to the different groups of participants, rates were 94% for clergymen, 92% for the uniformed police officers, 83% for the detectives, and 72% for the offenders. With such powerful findings it was easy to become overconfident in the effectiveness of lie detectors. However, real-life detection is not as straightforward as these simple card tests might suggest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number task</th>
<th>Month of birth task</th>
<th>Word task</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clergymen</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
<td>34 (94%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniformed police</td>
<td>11 (92%)</td>
<td>12 (100%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
<td>33 (92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detectives</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
<td>30 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders</td>
<td>9 (75%)</td>
<td>10 (83%)</td>
<td>7 (58%)</td>
<td>26 (72%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total detection</td>
<td>42 (87.5%)</td>
<td>44 (92%)</td>
<td>37 (77%)</td>
<td>123 (85%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Gudjonsson (1977).
As a consequence, in November 1979, almost four years after the publication of the article in the *Sunday Times* of Alan Smith’s work with the PSE, I was asked to perform lie detection tests on a number of celebrities in an office of the *Sunday Times*; there was a great deal of background noise and the participants had been offered a hospitality drink beforehand. I was worried that the noise and alcoholic drink might undermine my findings. After all, Isabel Hilton, and Harold Evans the editor of the *Sunday Times*, wanted me to prove that I could detect lying in nine out of ten people as I had claimed in my recent article in the *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*. My level of performance anxiety was high and afterwards I went to a pub myself for a drink, to settle my nerves, where Isabel Hilton proved a calming influence. The people I tested included the celebrity chef and liberal politician Clement Freud, playwright and screenwriter Michael Pertwee, Winston Fletcher, who was a leader in the advertising industry, clergymen Lord Donald Soper, actor Derek Nimmo, and actress Francesca Annis. The results were published in the *Sunday Times* on 25 November 1979 demonstrating the effectiveness of the procedure in detecting lies. I detected lies in four of the participants on both tests, but failed to detect the lies of Derek Nimmo and Francesca Annis on one of the two tests. Francesca Annis beat the machine on the number task and Derek Nimmo the month of birth test. When Isabel Hilton asked me about the failure to detect the lies of Annis and Nimmo, I commented, ‘It could mean that in their profession they learn to simulate and control bodily reactions.’

Isabel Hilton and Harold Evans also took the test and both failed to lie successfully. Ms Hilton concluded her article by stating: ‘Since I did not lie successfully the reader may assume this story is as true as I can make it.’

Prior to completing the lie detector test, Clement Freud, the grandson of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, told me that he had taken several lie detector tests before and had always ‘beaten the test’ and this occasion was not going to be any different. He was full of confidence and approached the test with fierce competitiveness. Yes, I felt intimidated by his behaviour and celebrity status, but I was determined not to show it and carried out the procedure with confidence and determination. He failed both the number and month of birth tasks. After the procedure, Freud was very quiet and left the room more humbly than he had entered. Perhaps failing the lie detector test made him realize he was not such a good liar after all.

I also tested an even more difficult celebrity, who must remain nameless in view of the fact that he never completed the experiment and did not feature in the article. He was a journalist and broadcaster known
for his relaxed bonhomie. However, this was not evident during the experiment. He looked very anxious before and during the procedure and kept sipping his alcoholic hospitality drink. After the number task, he wanted to know the outcome of the test before we proceeded to the month of birth task. I told him he had picked the number 14, which was correct. He then began to accuse me of having been hired by the *Sunday Times* to discredit him. I kept reassuring him that this was not the case but he kept arguing with me. After a while I terminated the experiment and politely showed him out of the room.

About 17 years after the *Sunday Times* lie detection experiment, I was giving evidence in a criminal trial at the Old Bailey. After leaving the witness box and walking out of the courtroom, I was followed by Derek Nimmo, who said, ‘Sorry, don’t I know you?’ He had forgotten that we had met in 1979 but he recognized my appearance and voice and wanted to know where he had encountered me previously. I reminded him of our meeting at the *Sunday Times* experiment and he laughed when I told him that he had not been a perfect liar, having failed to beat the machine on one of the two tests. He said that he knew the trial judge who had invited him to attend court for interest’s sake. A few years later I heard that Derek Nimmo had died at the age of 68, a sad loss indeed.

**BRITISH PSYCHOLOGICAL SOCIETY COMMITTEES ON LIE DETECTION**

During my clinical training and the early years of my clinical career I was enthusiastic about the use of the polygraph for lie detection purposes and had confidence in its effectiveness. This was to change. Following the Geoffrey Prime spy case in the early 1980s, the UK government announced its intention to undertake pilot studies of the use of polygraph tests for the purpose of security vetting. In the meantime, the British Psychological Society (BPS) set up a committee on the effectiveness of the polygraph, chaired by Professor Anthony Gale. The published report concluded that the use of polygraph tests for lie detection purposes in the context of criminal investigation, security vetting, and personnel selection was problematic and contrary to the spirit of the Society’s Code of Conduct (Gale, 1988).

The government review on the polygraph was conducted by Levey (1988), who concluded that:

1. ‘Laboratory studies on the polygraph suggest that its accuracy as an instrument of detection is not high enough to meet conventional psychometric standards’. (p. viii)
2. ‘The most puzzling feature of the polygraph literature is the discrepancy between the modest accuracy observed in the laboratory and the high levels reported in the field’. (p. viii)

3. ‘It is a simplification to assume that real-life detection of misdemeanours is more accurate than laboratory detection of games and play-acting’. (p. 63)

Levey (1988) emphasizes the importance of population differences:

Gudjonsson (1979), for example, comparing Icelandic clergymen, policemen and offenders found a detection rate of 94 per cent among clergymen, but only 72 per cent among offenders. Reassuringly, the police sample fell significantly closer to the clergymen than to the criminals. The point to be observed is that the experimental literature has tended to neglect serious considerations of its sample population.

(pp. 62–63)

From Levey’s comment, it seems that this Icelandic study made a unique contribution to knowledge in terms of highlighting possible, and sometimes expected, population differences. This made me feel that the project had been worthwhile.

In 2004, the BPS commissioned a second committee to review the scientific status and the application of the polygraph, including clinical forensic applications (British Psychological Society, 2004, p. 7). The report’s main conclusions were:

1. ‘Most published research on polygraph deception detection has been concerned with its possible use in criminal investigations. The results of better quality research studies demonstrate that while the correct classification of deceivers can sometimes be fairly high, incorrect decisions about who is or is not being deceptive occur at rates that are far from negligible’.

2. ‘The use of the polygraph in employment and security screening is not justified by the available research evidence’.

3. ‘The use of the polygraph in the clinical setting, with specific reference to its use with sex offenders, has received too little research attention’.

4. ‘More research is needed on other possible methods to detect deception, honesty and integrity’.

5. ‘Over confidence in the ability of any procedure designed to detect deception can have serious consequences, especially if the deceivers are few among many non-deceivers’.

I was a member of both the BPS committees on the use of polygraph for lie detection purposes (Gudjonsson & Young, 2015). I lost some confidence in the value of the polygraph for lie detection in real-life cases in the mid-1980s after reviewing the evidence with the first
BPS committee and I had become concerned about the ways it was sometimes used by American investigators to elicit confessions (Gudjonsson, 1992a). In my early career I testified in an American military case that involved an alleged offence in the UK, in which a serviceman had confessed to the murder of his friend after failing a polygraph test (Gudjonsson & Lebegue, 1989). It had the hallmarks of a false confession (i.e. presumption of guilt by his interrogators and persuasive interviewing; very poor recollection of the event by the suspect; grief over losing a close friend; and my testing showed him to be highly suggestible and compliant). I testified and the serviceman was acquitted. Similar abuse of the use of the polygraph to extract confessions has been reported in other American cases (Kassin, 2007).

ONWARD AND UPWARD

After completing my clinical training in September 1977, I was appointed as a ‘basic grade’ clinical psychologist at Epsom District Hospital in Surrey. By then I was in a serious relationship with Julia, who was at the time the head of art therapy at Netherne Hospital in Hooley. We married in February 1979 and Julia has always been wholeheartedly supportive of my work. We had met in October 1976 while I was on a clinical placement at Netherne Hospital and we soon began courting. Julia was a single mother with two adorable daughters from a previous marriage, Rowena and Rhiannon, aged 7 and 6 years, respectively, who like their mother were intellectually gifted with a loving nature. Our relationship changed my plan to return to Iceland after my clinical training. In fact, after the exciting and challenging summer of 1976 as a detective, I had considered going back to the Reykjavík Criminal Investigation Police after completing my studies in England. I had enjoyed my time as a detective immensely and liked the police officers with whom I had worked.

I worked in Epsom for just over two years. In January 1980, I was appointed to a lecturership in psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, which at the time was a part of the University of London, but later merged with King’s College London. I had an honorary contract to provide a clinical forensic service at the Maudsley and Bethlem Royal Hospitals. In the autumn of 1980, I was appointed to the newly established medium secure unit at the Bethlem Royal Hospital in Beckenham, where I became the head of the clinical/forensic psychology services and remained there for 32 years. In 2000 I was promoted to a professor of forensic psychology at King’s College London.
It was during my early clinical career that I was able to apply psychological theory to a range of forensic cases, including psychogenic amnesia, blood injury phobia, suggestibility in a police interview, and disputed confessions (Gudjonsson, 1992a). My interest in suggestibility, and its concept as an individual differences variable, arose in 1980 from my involvement as an expert witness for the prosecution in a case of an intellectually disabled woman who had been the victim of a gang rape (Gudjonsson & Gunn, 1982). At the time I was aware of Loftus’s (1979) experimental work into memory and suggestibility, but I found no test of suggestibility that could be applied to the performance of victims, witnesses, and suspects during police questioning and during cross examination in court. In early 1982 I decided to develop such a test, the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale (GSS 1), which in 1987 was followed by the parallel version (GSS 2) and in 1989 by the Gudjonsson Compliance Scale. The validation of the GSS was mainly conducted in the 1980s and 1990s, accompanying a detailed model of interrogative suggestibility, published in 1986 (Gudjonsson & Clark, 1986), which unlike Loftus’s experimental work focused on the role and measurement of individual differences in suggestibility.

Extensive research has been conducted into the Scales and their application (Gudjonsson, 1983, 1984a, 1989a, 1992a, 1997, 2003a, 2010b, 2013, 2014; Gudjonsson, Vagni, Maiorano, & Pajardi, 2016). There have been two rigorous independent reviews of the Scales. The first review was completed by Grisso (1986) about the early development of the GSS 1, which led to the development of the GSS 2, and a more recent review in Buros’s Mental Measurement Yearbook (Janoson & Frumkin, 2007).

The idea of constructing the GSS 1 came to me in early 1982 (see Chapter 3). I wanted to develop an experimental test, like a mini-interrogation, which was subtle and with which people would not know that their susceptibility to suggestion was being measured. I was familiar with the Wechsler Memory Scales and thought that a similar narrative to that used to measure immediate and delayed recall would provide the foundation for the Scale. It had to measure the two basic components of ‘interrogative suggestibility’, the susceptibility to give in to leading questions, labelled ‘Yield’, and giving in to interrogative pressure, labelled ‘Shift’. I completed the construction of the Scale one Sunday afternoon and the following week I tested it out on a few of my colleagues and found that it worked exactly as I had hoped. I then collected empirical data on the Scale.

The scales have been translated into many different languages and are used internationally for research and forensic purposes. They measure vulnerabilities to being misled during questioning and
cross-examination and not false confessions directly. They typically form one important part of the forensic evaluation in cases of disputed confessions (DeClue, 2005; Frumkin, 2016; Frumkin, Lally, & Sexton, 2012; Gudjonsson, 2003a).

My interest in false confessions commenced while serving as a detective with the Reykjavík Criminal Investigation Police. As discussed in the Introduction to this book, the year of 1975 was a turning point when I became aware of the risk of false confession. A few years later, while working at the Institute of Psychiatry in London, I met a forensic psychiatrist, James (‘Jim’) MacKeith, who described a couple of cases where similar memory distrust had occurred during interrogation at English police stations. We decided to present our findings at The Stockholm Symposium on Witness Psychology, which was organized by Professor Arne Trankell between 16 and 19 September 1981. The title of our presentation was ‘False admission, psychological effects of interrogation. Ethical, clinical and research implications. A discussion paper’.

Many eminent scientists attended this conference including Ray Bull, Graham Davies, Helen Dent, Lionel Haward, Astrid Holgerson, Elizabeth Loftus, David Raskin, Max Steller, Udo Undeutsch, and Daniel Yarmey. This was one of the first conferences to bring together researchers from several countries working on the psychological aspects of witness testimony.

Jim and I introduced the term ‘memory distrust syndrome’ as a general description of the phenomenon (Gudjonsson & MacKeith, 1982), which subsequently became embedded in the scientific literature as a valid and useful concept (e.g. Schacter, 2007; Van Bergen, 2011; Van Bergen, Jelicic, & Merckelbach, 2008, 2009). The High Court’s acceptance of memory distrust syndrome as a valid descriptive concept in cases of disputed confessions is found in the case of Andrew Evans in England and Birgitte Tengs in Norway (Gudjonsson, 2003a).

CONCLUSIONS

My interest in the psychology of false confessions dates back to my work as a detective with the Reykjavík police. I was lucky that in the early 1970s the Reykjavík Uniformed Police and the Criminal Investigation Police had begun to employ teachers and university students as policemen during the summer vacation (Jónsson & Gudjónsson, [Gudmundur] 1997). There is no doubt that working as a uniformed police officer and then as a detective shaped my future professional
career and provided me with an insight into human behaviour and legal processes that proved invaluable in my work as a forensic psychologist.

According to Blackburn (1996), Lionel Haward ‘pioneered the application of psychology to legal questions in this country [the UK]’ (p. 7) and this was the position I started from in the early 1980s. The court cases I worked on often raised issues that led to research questions. I wanted answers and conducted the relevant research, which then generated a scientific knowledge base that could be used to apply psychology to other relevant legal issues. The focus was primarily on identifying psychological vulnerabilities associated with the outcome of police interviews, as well as understanding the impact of custody and certain interview techniques on the reliability of confessions. I soon discovered that science and practice were closely intertwined. Observations from cases can lead to the development of a theory, which can then be empirically tested and hopefully provide a better understanding of a particular phenomenon, such as risk factors relevant to false confession. Scientific principles can assist with the development of psychological tests that can be used in forensic practice. Although such developments are rare, they do happen and can impact hugely on practice (Gudjonsson, 2003a). Blackburn (1996) identified the development of the GSS 1 and GSS 2 as an exceptional contribution to forensic psychology.

In the 1970s and 1980s the admissibility of expert psychiatric and psychological evidence was restrictive, because following the judgement in the case of Regina v. Turner in 1975 there had to be evidence of the defendant’s mental illness in order for expert evidence to be admitted in court. The reasoning was that ‘Jurors do not need psychiatrists to tell them how ordinary folks who are not mentally ill are likely to react to the stresses and strains of life’ (Fitzgerald, 1987).

According to Fitzgerald (1987), the evidence of psychologists was particularly problematic because they were typically focusing on cognitive processes, emotional reactions, and mental development of people who did not have a mental disorder. Fitzgerald concluded:

It is, therefore, important that lawyers and psychologists begin the process of challenging the approach to psychologists’ testimony which sees the science of psychology as merely a subdivision of psychiatry in order to change it to one which insists instead on the expertise of psychologists being valid for the interpretation of the mental processes and experiences of all human beings to judges and juries. Otherwise, the courtrooms will continue to be deprived of the whole area of scientific expertise which can make a valuable contribution to the determination of the issues of such aspects as reliability and suggestibility.

(p. 44)