

# The Confessions of Innocent Men

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## *The Atlantic:*

Any good criminal-defense attorney will tell you to say four words if you are about to be arrested for murder: *I want a lawyer.*

This is simple advice and should be easy to remember during an interrogation, but not everyone recalls it under the pressure of police questioning. Some people make matters worse for themselves in the face of strong evidence by providing an alibi or identifying another person as the perpetrator. Many succumb to the wiles of homicide detectives and implicate themselves to some lesser degree in the crime, heeding the admonition that a partial loss is better than going down for the whole thing. Some accused people are tricked into confessing, and some confess to crimes they did not commit. A certain percentage, worn down by conscience or questioning or the simple desire to get the interrogation over with, provide a detailed and honest explanation for what they did.

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In his article “The Psychology of Confessions,” Saul Kassin, a professor of psychology at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, details three different categories of false confession: voluntary, compliant, and internalized. Voluntary false confessions are the best known, the most easily disproved, and perhaps the simplest to understand. They are prompted not by police behavior but rather by a need for attention or self-punishment. For obvious reasons, these confessions contain only facts known to the public; they surface in high-profile cases. The kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby garnered hundreds of such confessions.

Read the whole story: [The Atlantic](#)