



D36 Staging a Crime Scene: The Intentional Manipulation of the Scene to Divert Attention Away From the Killer

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This presentation will demonstrate the ability to determine the elements involved in staging a crime scene by the killer.

Test: The act of staging a crime scene is very rare. It occurs in less than two-tenths of one percent of all murder scenes. "Staging" is the purposeful alteration of the crime scene. It consists of manipulating the elements of the scene to make it appear to be something it is not. Staging has been widely written on and has been accepted by the courts as a definable characteristic of a crime scene. The basis of staging is to direct an investigation away from the person who stages the crime scene, because the person feels he or she would be a likely target of the investigation. Staging may be as simple as the owner of a car setting his car on fire to collect insurance and reporting his car as stolen. In another example, in 1974 convicted murderer Tony Fernandez bludgeoned his wife to death. To cover up the murder and prevent the notice of a crime, he placed her body behind the steering wheel of their motor home and pushed it over an embankment, hoping to make the murder look like an accident to redirect the investigation. Another motivation for preventing detection by staging is altering a murder scene to look like a burglary or robbery gone awry. Staging a murder scene requires the killer to spend time after the victim's death arranging things in a certain way. The person who stages a crime scene does so based upon experiences and perceptions of how certain crime scenes should look. These actions go beyond the actions necessary to commit a murder.

In the murder of Lisa Carlson, the crime scene was staged. The purpose of the staging was to direct suspicion away from the identity of the perpetrator by making a murder look like a "burglary and/or rape gone bad." A multitude of factors describes the killer's efforts to stage this murder scene. First, the most egregious staging factor is the discontinuity between the actual cause of death and staged crime scene. The two are not reconcilable. For three gunshot wounds, one to the body and two to the head, without any percussive violence, is albeit a conceptual motive of power, control and problem resolution. Conversely, the victim is staged in a setting that pretends to portray a sex murder through the use of sexual paraphernalia, sex videos, disarrayed pants, and covered genitalia to sate the primary needs. In this case, there is no evidence of percussive touching of the victim, until after the killing, the perpetrator manipulated the body for staging of a greater and different type of murder. Again, by the lack of antemortem, perimortem, and/or postmortem percussive activity on the body of the victim, the perpetrator inadvertently exposed the fraudulent attempt to disguise the original simple motive and executed plan. Notwithstanding, it should be clear that a wandering psychopathic sex-killer would not be concerned with staging and/or focusing the law enforcement attention elsewhere. In fact, the manner of death in this case is clearly an issue of ending the victim's power and control. Of course, this would only be true for those who she had the ability to resist.

Second, Lisa Carlson was not shot in the position she was found. She had been moved to that position after being shot. Typically, murder victims are discovered in the position where the death producing injuries occur, and their killers are unconcerned about how the victims are found. The victim was moved to her final resting place. The victim has been pulled back to her position on the couch. The killer grabbed the victim's sweater causing it to bunch and enabling the killer to pull the victim to her place on the couch. The victim could not have caused the bunching to occur.

Third, after the shooting, the victim's pants were pulled down. This occurred by someone standing at the victim's feet, pulling on the pants, thus causing the pants to turn inside out. There is no credible evidence that shows the victim could have pulled her own pants down in that position.

Fourth, blood spatter evidence demonstrates that the victim was fixed in place after the shooting and then moved. In order for the hair swipe to occur on the couch, the victim's hair must accumulate blood for a period of time. After this, then the blood swipe from the hair could occur. Additionally, the swiping blood pattern on the victim's inner arm is evidence that her right arm came in contact with her hair while being pulled back to her final resting place.

Fifth, the blood transfer evidence on the sexual device indicates that the device was placed there after the shooting. There are sweeping blood transfer stains present on the cord and device that occurred while they were being positioned. Also, the device was placed in her left hand, but she is right-handed.

Sixth, the blanket found on top of the victim was placed there after she was shot and the transfer stains had occurred on the sexual device and cord.

The number of blood stains on and around the victim contrasts with the neatness in the application of the placement of the victim, sexual device, and blanket. The body was moved from the position that it was in prior to the blood spatter patterns to the position it was found at discovery.

Seventh, the ransacking of the chest of drawers in the victim's bedroom was a solitary event, not consistent with ransacking done in the normal burglary case. It was not consistent since there was no other



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ransacking done in other rooms with valuables obviously present. Also, there was no apparent loss of any valuable items. Traditionally, televisions, video recorders, and computer equipment would have been moved or removed. But these items appeared untouched and were not disturbed.

Additionally, more inconsistencies in the ransacking were present. The drawers were removed from the chest of drawers. One drawer was not overturned and another blocked the removal of a drawer from the second and third level of the chest of drawers. The blocking drawer would have been thrown out of the way by a curious burglar. The contents of these drawers were not gone through in a typical manner. One drawer was just pulled out and set on top of other contents, but not overturned. The bottom drawers did not appear to ever have been opened. In burglary crimes, when there is rifling through drawers, contents are usually disturbed, even dumped out or strewn about. But in this case, there was no noticeable disturbance of the contents of one drawer that was removed from the chest. Only drawers containing items belonging to Lisa Carlson were rifled through in the house.

Finally, the telephone answering tape was tampered with. There was an expectation there would be a sequence of messages that were left on the tape. It was detected that two messages overlap, and this could only occur if someone tampered with the tape recording.

A killer's method of operation contains those actions that are necessary to commit a murder. Whatever this killer did beyond committing the murder, such as moving the victim from the place she was shot to her final resting place, placing the on/off switch to the electronic dildo in her wrong hand, placing a blanket over her lower torso after smearing blood on items and clothing under the blanket, leaving drawers open with atypical burglary and theft disturbance, manipulating the tape on the victim's telephone messaging machine, and either not removing anything or removing only small items with other typical burglary loot in plain sight ready for the taking, was the killer(s) highly personalized effort to stage the scene.

Staging, Profiling, Modus Operandi