



Pathology & Biology Section – 2004

G18 The Influence of Violence in the Media on Unusual Methods of Murder and Suicide

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After attending this presentation, forensic pathologists and crime scene officers will learn about the difficulties in detecting hidden homicides and that knowledge of the latest media releases is vital in crime scene analysis.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by describing to the forensic community the subtleties in signs of murder; addressing the need to be aware of the latest film releases; and addressing the need for an integrated scene analysis team.

There is a wealth of research about the influence of the media on violence, particularly homicides. Most recent reports show little or no correlation between crime and viewing habits. This has not stopped the calls for censorship of the media which may restrict freedom of speech.

The cases to be presented have been linked to a film in which there was an unusual method of causing death. The film showed the perpetrator encasing the victims in a film of plastic wrap causing asphyxiation. He then removed the wrap and the murders remained unsolved for a long period of time. Similarly subsequent concealment of the homicide method occurred in one case so that crime scene analysis would have been difficult if the recent release of the film had not been identified.

A teenage girl was found lying in an undisturbed bed in the bedroom of a house occupied by her boyfriend. She had two broken fingernails, a small bruise on the thigh and a few petechiae in her eyes. Not far from her head was a roll of unused plastic cling-type wrap while the remainder of the wrap was found in the garbage bin some distance away. At trial the perpetrator confirmed that he copied the method of murdering his victim after viewing the film.

In another case a woman was found with the plastic wrap around her head requiring intense crime investigation into the circumstances surrounding her death. After seeing the film, she used the method to kill herself. In a similar case suicide was thought to be the manner of death in a man who was found with wrap around his head and neck.

Each case will demonstrate the difficulty in scene analysis, the problems in excluding homicide and the need for an awareness of the latest film releases. There are features in each case that suggest that the deaths were due to homicide. Each case died after seeing the same film, utilizing the same method as shown in that film. The media has influenced the deaths in these cases.

Homicide, Media, Concealment