



Psychiatry & Behavioral Science Section - 2016

15 Made Up by Makeup — Pretense of an Offense

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After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware, with the assistance of clinical pictures, of the existence of a special case of victim role staging. Claiming a criminal offense by using painted-on injuries is an exceptional case and is rarely seen. Attendees will be sensitive to such scenarios and may integrate this knowledge into their daily routine.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by creating an awareness of criminal offense-staging using artful make-up skills. This case highlights the psychiatric aspects in forensic medicine and demonstrates the importance of an interdisciplinary approach.

Introduction: Self-inflicted injuries are a common topic in the field of forensic medicine. In particular, the differentiation of these injuries from those incurred by a third party is crucial; however, self-painted injuries created with makeup, which entail misleading the medical staff and the administration of justice, seems to be a rarity. To date, no such case can be found in the literature.¹

Case: A 26-year-old female filed a complaint against unknown individuals after she had supposedly been robbed a few hours previously. She reported that two unknown men unexpectedly strangled her as well as punched and kicked her in her face and body before stealing money from her. Later, the forensic clinical examination was ordered by the police and prosecutor.

The woman showed subjective symptoms, such as tenderness of the head and torso, and objective symptoms, such as numerous diffuse, red-violet skin discolorations of the face, neck, torso, and extremities. The discolorations had the appearance of bruises. Yet, because of a noticeably pasty skin appearance resembling normal makeup application, the forensic expert removed the makeup from the pertinent regions of the body. As a surprising result, all discolorations could be eliminated and, therefore, the “injuries” were discovered to be made up. Actual recent or fresh injuries, such as bruises, could not be found. Thus, indications for a third-party interference did not exist. According to the findings of the psychiatrist, emotionally unstable personality traits may be possible factors for this victim’s role staging. Furthermore, police investigations disclosed frequent reports against unknown persons filed by the same woman in the past. Toxicological analyses did not reveal any foreign substances in her blood or urine samples.

Conclusions: The reported case represents a rare type of victim role staging and misleading of medical staff and the administration of justice. There are some similarities as well as certain differences to the previously described aspects of self-inflicted injuries.^{1,2} From a forensic and psychiatric perspective, parallels to the Munchausen syndrome can be drawn and indications of emotionally unstable personality traits can be found.³ The present case creates awareness of the option of this type of staging and also demonstrates the need for an interdisciplinary approach.

Reference(s):

1. Möllhoff G., Schmidt G. “Self-inflicted injuries”--psychiatric, forensic and insurance aspects (I). *Versicherungsmedizin*. 1998;50(6):226-31.
2. Eckert W.G. The pathology of self-mutilation and destructive acts: a forensic study and review. *J Forensic Sci*. 1977;22(1):242-50.
3. Canogullari G., Ulupinar E., Teyin M., Balci Y. A forensic case of Munchausen’s syndrome. *J Forensic Leg Med*. 2007;14(3):167-71.

Self-Inflicted Injuries, Victim Role Staging, Forensic Psychiatry