



Workshops - 2017

W9 Staged Crime Scenes: Crime Scene Clues to Suspect Misdirection of the Investigation

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn three new categories of staged scenes, with case examples of different types of crimes where staging is prevalent. Additionally, attendees will learn the “red flags” or common findings in staged scenes.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by introducing the distinct categories of staging based on the intent of the offender’s scene alteration. Ultimately, applying these categories may help in the quick recognition of scene alterations or staging.

In the course of their career, most detectives and forensic practitioners will come into contact with a staged crime scene; a scene that has been altered by the offender to either mislead a police investigation as to the true facts of the crime or for other reasons understood only by the offender. Staged scenes and “staging” are possible in nearly every type of criminal offense ranging from property crimes, such as arson and burglary, to violent crimes such as homicide, child abuse, or sexual assaults.

To better understand the dynamics and the general nature of “staging,” this workshop will introduce distinct categories of staged crime scenes based on the intent of the offender’s scene alteration. The ultimate goal of this workshop is to understand that the offender’s actions to stage a scene can actually be identified through common findings or “red flags” that are often found when scenes are altered. Further, that these same red flags may help in the quick recognition of scene alterations or staging, and based on new criteria may be divided into three separate and distinct categories. These categories are herein referred to as, primary, secondary, and tertiary.

The primary staged scene is intentionally altered or changed by the offender with criminal intent to misdirect a subsequent police investigation and can be further sub-categorized into two types: ad hoc, and premeditated. The ad hoc subtype is staged without forethought and planning, at the spur of the moment after the event has taken place, and is generally intended to deflect attention away from the offender and true facts of the crime. The scene is considered premeditated when the offender preplans the scene alterations in accordance with a preconceived scenario. Premeditated staging is often designed to focus attention onto the staging and false evidence. Ultimately, through primary staging the offender in effect creates a false reality that in his/her mind will successfully and with criminal intent, misdirect the police investigation.

Secondary staging involves the intentional alteration or manipulation of the crime scene or victim by an offender that is unrelated to misdirecting or diverting subsequent investigations. This is really a new category of staged scenes and would include such examples as posing the victim’s body into sexual provocative positions as found in sexual homicides or other elements of what is more commonly known as “staging” such as covering the face or body in what is generally often described as depersonalization. The perpetrator’s purpose in secondary staging is not to misdirect the investigation, rather it is often something that is psychologically “part and parcel” to the crime, such as demeaning the victim or demonstrating ultimate control over the victim.

The third category to be discussed and defined consists of noncriminal, accidental, or innocent alterations (i.e., changes to the original crime scene), generally by witnesses or family members, who find the victim and alter the scene without any criminal intent. An example would be a family member finding a loved one in an embarrassing



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position from an autoerotic misadventure and changing the scene to prevent embarrassment to the family. These types of alterations are better described as tertiary, and are best regarded as scene artifacts.

This workshop would have application to persons in forensic pathology, criminalistics, crime scene analysts, and criminal investigations. It introduces three new categories of staged scenes, provides case examples, and explains the “red flags” commonly encountered when confronted with a staged scene. The workshop culminates with case studies for each student to work through and identify the various “red flags” in real cases.

Primary Staging, Secondary Staging, Tertiary Staging