The Defects of the Situation:
A Typology of Staged Crime Scenes

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A staged or simulated crime scene is the physical manifestation of deception. It involves the deliberate alteration of the physical evidence by the offender to simulate events or offenses that did not occur for the purpose of misleading authorities or redirecting the investigation (Geberth, 2006; Turvey, 2008). This thesis examined 141 staged homicide scenes from Australia, USA, Canada and the UK to determine elements common amongst these crimes, victim and perpetrator characteristics, and offender aims. The goal was to identify red flags indicating staging. The cases were analyzed using a descriptive analysis and multi-dimensional scaling to identify themes in the data. Common characteristics include: multiple victims and offenders; blunt force or strangulation being the cause of death; a previous relationship between offenders and victims; victims being discovered in their own home by the offender; items being disrupted in the scene but not necessarily removed; the body or weapon being arranged; evidence being cleaned up or destroyed; and no alibi being established. Staged scenes were separated by type, and staged suicides, burglaries, sexual homicides, accidents, car accidents and self-defense homicides were examined to assess the proposed typology. It was determined that while each type of scene displays differently with separate indicators, the main differences surround whether the offender was attempting to stage a legitimate or illegitimate death.

The findings are relevant to forensic pathologists and medical examiners, police, and legal professionals as they allow for determinations to be made regarding what constitutes a staged scene and what indicators exist. These findings contradict the previous literature on staged scenes and beliefs about common characteristics. The results suggest a lack of sophistication, where simple staging behaviours were not utilised despite the credence they would have offered the facade. This is the first empirical study to examine a large international sample with advanced methodologies.
Declaration

This thesis is submitted to Bond University in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This thesis represents my own original work towards this research degree and contains no material which has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at this University or any other institution, except where due acknowledgement is made.

Claire Ferguson
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