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Getting Away with Murder: The Mass Media's Role in Staging Crime

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Title: Getting Away with Murder: The Mass Media's Role in Staging Crime

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Abstract. This article describes a problem created by the mass media and confronted by criminal-investigative analysts at crime scenes at which murder seems to have been perpetrated.

Criminal investigative analysts attempt to study a crime scene--e.g., the putative scene of a murder--and related data to develop useful information about alleged perpetrators for the benefit of investigators, the entire criminal justice system, and the general public. Analysis includes studying (1) the life of the victim(s), (2) basic information--e.g., ballistics, blood types--developed by law enforcement's forensic specialists, (3) police reports, and (4) the nature of the crime itself: (a) the nature of injuries, e.g., the type, number, size, and placement of wounds if any; (b) likely methods of arriving at and leaving the crime scene; (c) degree of risk in performing the crime; (d) degree of organization and premeditation seemingly manifested by the perpetrator(s); (e) motive, and (f) dynamics, e.g., what seemed to have occurred at the crime scene. Through such analysis a list of characteristics is developed that might pertain to the perpetrator(s). The list may include habits, traits, demographics, degree and nature of socialization experiences, and likely behaviors engaged in before and after the crime. Hopefully, this list may guide law enforcement personnel in their investigation and help lead to accurate identification, successful apprehension, appropriate adjudication, and adequate management of the perpetrator(s).

One significant problem in all of this is that some perpetrators may stage aspects of the crime to mislead analysts and investigators about vital aspects of what occurred. In the past, this staging was less of an issue because savvy analysts and investigators would know what to expect for various kinds of crime, while the perpetrators would not--especially perpetrators who lacked significant criminal experience. However, because of the creation and dissemination of various entertainment products--e.g., "cop" movies--what to expect for various crimes is becoming more and more widely known--especially as experts sign themselves on as consultants to producers and directors of such entertainment.

In fact, as entertainment--like economics--becomes ever more globalized, experts on various crimes are being created on both sides of the line between Good and Evil. Staging crimes is becoming easier, and the adage that crime does not pay ever more bankrupt. (See Annon, J.D. (1995.) Investigative profiling: A behavioral analysis of the crime scene. *American Journal of Forensic Psychology*, 13, 67-75; Douglas, J.E., Ressler, R.K., Burgess, A.W., & Hartman, C.R. (1986.) Criminal profiling from crime scene analysis. *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 4, 401-421.) (Keywords: Control, Perception Management, Profile, Typology, Violence.)