

CRIME SCENE PHOTOGRAPHY REQUIREMENTS OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSIS

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This paper reflects on current approaches to crime scene photography described in numerous photographic publications but also includes the observations and suggestions of profilers and photographic examiners who analyze these photographs for behavioral and forensic evidence.

For purpose of criminal investigative analysis (profiling), it is important to record much more than those areas in which acts of violence took place. Photographs can be instrumental in recording the victim's lifestyle and personality; the topography and socioeconomic conditions surrounding the crime scene; and much more which is important to any investigator or analyst who is unable to visit the crime scene.

When photographing violent crime scenes, the aim should be to record a maximum of useful information which will enable the viewer to understand where and how the crime was committed. The term "crime scene" refers not only to the immediate locality where the crime took place, but adjacent areas where important acts occurred immediately before or after the commission of the crime. Long range, medium range and close-up photographs should be taken to enable the viewer to gain a clear concept of where each object or area interrelates to another. Aerial photographs are particularly important in serial rape or murder investigations since they geographically link crime scenes together.

Overlapping photographs should be taken of the exterior of the crime scene to show its locale in relation to the rest of the neighborhood. Place the camera on a tripod or hold it steady at eye level so the horizon line is constant for each shot. The photograph can be cut and pasted together to create a panoramic view of the scene. Also photograph any crowds which gather at a crime scene and the license plates of vehicles parked in the vicinity, since the killer may still be in the area observing the investigation.

The point of entry and exit should be shown in such a manner that the marks of force will be shown clearly. A scale should also be visible but never place a suspect tool into the tool mark because it may alter the evidence.

When photographing the interiors of room with a 35mm camera, use a normal lens (45mm to 55mm) in stead of a wide angle lens. A wide angle lens creates distortion, especially when close up photographs are taken. (the distance between objects appears to be greater than it actually is).

The camera should be held with a vertical format and overlapping photographs should be obtained. A vertical format insures that the scene will be observed from the top of the

walls to the floor. Once again, a composite photograph can be created. Photograph every room in the residence but overlapping photographs need only be taken at the crime scene itself.

Interior photographs should depict the conditions of the room, articles left at the scene, trace evidence such as cigarette butts, tool marks and impressions of shoe prints. The location of fingerprints should be photographed and in all instances, some notation should be made in the photo log or on the photograph explaining what the photograph is showing.

Signs of activity prior to the occurrence, such as the telephone receiver off the hook or wires cut, playing cards orderly stacked or scattered, TV and lights turned on, food in cooking stages, coffee cups, drinking glasses or liquor bottles, time watch and clock stopped should be recorded on film. In general, articles apparently in use immediately prior to the commission of the crime or which appear to have been disturbed from their customary position should be photographed.

During a rape investigation, the purpose of the photographic record is to record information on signs of any struggle at the scene where the attack occurred, or indications of the victim's effort to resist attack; such as bruises, black and blue marks, torn clothing, etc. Bite marks should be photographed using oblique lighting, with and without a measuring device at the crime scene and also the morgue.

In a rape-homicide investigation, infrared ultraviolet photography of the body may detect latent bite marks since hemorrhaging can occur in tissue under the skin. The location of foreign hairs and fibers, biological fluids and stains should be depicted. If alive, permission from the victim to photograph her body should be obtained and if the victim was a minor, written permission from the parent or guardian. It is recommended that the victim's physician be present when such photographs are made. Blood spatter on walls should be photographed with the lens parallel to the stain so that directionally (the direction the blood flowed can be determined).

In sexual exploitation of children cases, every room in a suspect's residence should be photographed even if no physical evidence (such as photographs or video tapes) are found during a crime scene search. Chances are the suspect has concealed this material at another location. Rarely will these photographs be discarded since they represent a trophy or remembrance of the conquest. When these photographs are recovered, they may be compared with the crime scene photos to prove they were taken in the suspect's dwelling.

Occasionally, a suspect will place his own camera on a tripod and by using a cable release, will photograph himself with his victims. Usually, he will compose the photograph so his face is not seen. However, if the photograph is sharp enough, the suspect may still be identified through body characteristics such as scars, marks, wrinkles, etc.

In death due to asphyxia as a result of a hanging, doubt sometimes exists as to whether the occurrence is murder, suicide, or an accident. Photograph the original position of the body to help in determining the manner of death. Overall view of the body and rope should be taken at torso and foot level. Show the height of the body above ground; a murderer usually tries to raise the body completely, while the suicide victim frequently never gets his feet off the ground and is sometimes found in a sitting position or half-prone position. Photographs should be made to show the relative position of any object, such as a chair or stool, which appears to have been kicked from under the feet of the deceased.

Subjects for close-up shots are the knot, its size, type and location on the neck; depth and location of the grooves in the neck; black-and-white marks around the edge of the groove (here, color film is especially helpful); signs of violence about the neck, suggesting prior strangulation; protrusions of the tongue, binding of hands and feet, etc.

In drowning cases, the body is usually the sole object of interest. But did the deceased actually die of drowning or was he thrown into the water after death from some other cause? The photographic operation should be directed towards those facts which will help to resolve this question. Color film is exceptionally useful here since many of the significant clues may be matters of discoloration. Photograph the whole body, both from the position of standing observer and from the ground level. The latter view will show any distention of the body. Close-ups should include any foam about the mouth; wounds, peculiar markings, bruises, or unusual discolorations; articles, such as seaweed, grasped in the hand; and any rope or wire bindings. Many of these views can be made at the morgue before autopsy.

The videotaping of crime scene has become common practice in many jurisdictions, however, it should never replace still photography. Common errors committed when videotaping a crime scene include panning the camera rapidly, poor focusing and lighting and improper use of the zoom feature of the cameras. The cameraman should describe on tape each room and view of the crime scene and insure that other investigators and crime scene technician are silent during the taping.

If done properly, crime scene photography greatly assists the profiler in developing a psychological and behavioral profile of the offender.