Special Aspects of Crime Scene Interpretation and Behavioral Analysis

The Phenomenon of “Undoing”

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SUMMARY

A careful reconstruction of the sequence of events and the assessment of offender behavior are playing a more important role in unsolved homicide cases. The method of behavioral analysis was developed in the United States. It is defined as a complex information-processing system for the purpose of enabling an overall view of a given criminal case and of supporting the casework in ongoing investigations. The analytical process is of central importance for further deductions (e.g., offender aims, organized/disorganized components of offender behavior, escalation). Undoing is a special form of offender behavior representing a symbolic reversal of the crime. This special form of personation occurs at a crime scene when there is a close association between the
offender and the victim or when the victim represents someone of importance to the offender.

**Key Words:** Behavioral analysis; homicide investigation; undoing; personation; modus operandi; signature; staging; posing; forensic pathology

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Crime scene analysis may lead to different ways of interpretation and classification of a crime investigated. Additional information can be obtained by methods of behavioral analysis where an overall view of the criminal case is provided and conclusions regarding the underlying motive(s) can be drawn. Behavioral analysis in unsolved homicide cases is playing a more important role in the field of police work. The method of behavioral analysis was developed in the United States and further developed in different European countries in the late 1980s. Today, it is routine practice for police agencies to perform analytical procedures in unsolved homicide cases in close cooperation with experts from different fields, such as psychiatry, psychology, and forensic pathology. This analytical process should not be confused with offender profiling.

The forensic pathologist investigating the death scene and examining the victim's body will most often contribute valuable information to a careful reconstruction of the sequence of events at the scene of a crime. Without establishing the pathological features of a given case in detail, it will be extremely difficult to assess the offender's behavior.

In behavioral analysis, one differentiates between *modus operandi* and *personation*. The exact discrimination between these terms is of significance regarding the assessment of offender behavior. *Modus operandi* refers to behavioral patterns of an offender for the purpose of successfully completing the offense. The term “personation,” on the other hand, refers to behavior that indicates the offender’s emotional needs. If the same behavior is repeated in a series of offences, this is called *signature*.

This chapter focuses on the so-called phenomenon of undoing (“undoing-behavior”), which can be regarded as a special form of personation. Undoing represents the symbolic reversal of a crime by the offender.

2. **Case Reports**

Four cases from the Institute of Legal Medicine at the University of Hamburg, Germany, investigated between 2000 and 2003, that illustrate the phenomenon of undoing are presented here.