

Autoerotic Deaths

Practical Forensic and
Investigative Perspectives



Anny Sauvageau
Vernon J. Geberth



Practical Aspects of Criminal and Forensic Investigations Series

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Autoerotic Deaths

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Investigative Perspectives



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Preface

Autoerotic Deaths

Practical Forensic and Investigative Perspectives is the result of a meticulous collaboration and friendship between a former New York detective and homicide commander, who is now an international homicide and forensic consultant, and an experienced forensic pathologist, who is the chief medical examiner of Alberta and an internationally recognized authority on asphyxial death. This book is the result of a unique combination of the knowledge and experience of a dedicated murder cop who has seen it all and that of a passionate scientist whose research in the field has modernized the concepts around autoerotic deaths. The two authors have enjoyed multiple conversations during which the new data of the science met the concrete examples of case studies. This is what this book is all about: presenting a scientific modern view of autoerotic death, with case illustrations.

Autoerotic Deaths: Practical Forensic and Investigative Perspectives will become the benchmark and “best practice” model for professional death investigations involving autoerotic deaths because it will provide practical and conventional information based on scientific research and case experience from the field with a wide variety of exquisite case histories.

Throughout this textbook, we reference additional resource information as well as case examples of the application of various tactics, procedures, and forensic techniques along with full-color illustrations, explanations, and tables to assist the reader in understanding the dynamics of autoerotic deaths.

In Chapter 1, a historical context of the evolution of the concept of sexual asphyxia and autoerotic death is presented. The appearance and development of the phenomenon is followed from the early nonscientific reports in the French literature and the whorehouses of London, through the early scientific reports (1947 to 1980), the golden age of the wide development of the field mainly under the team of Hazelwood (1981 to 1990), to the turning point of a revolutionary paper by Byard and Bramwell (1991) and the modern era that followed.

In Chapter 2, the definition of autoerotic death is presented, along with the pitfalls in the application of the term *autoerotic*: (1) to label a death autoerotic even though the manner of death was not accidental, (2) to label a death autoerotic even though the sexual asphyxia was not solitary, and (3) to become confused concerning the concept of an escape mechanism. The incidence of autoerotic death is reviewed, and the best practices in approaching these deaths are discussed.

In Chapter 3, the death scene characteristics are explored. As the main clues to the autoerotic nature of a death are at the scene, this chapter is particularly important. The most

common scene features are exposure of genitals, pornography, nudity, cross-dressing, and bondage.

The methods of autoerotic deaths are explored in Chapters 4–6. The most common method of autoerotic death is hanging (explored in Chapter 4), followed at some distance by asphyxia by plastic bags and chemical substances (Chapter 5). Unusual methods are presented in Chapter 6: electrocution, overdressing/body wrapping, foreign body insertion, and atypical asphyxia.

Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the atypical victims of autoerotic deaths: the female victims, the non-white victims, the teenager, and elderly victims.

We would like to particularly thank Mark Benecke, international forensic research and consulting, for his contribution to Chapters 4 and 5 and Brian Wilson, director of production, Medicolegal Art (Atlanta, GA) for his exquisite medical drawings and illustrations.

Autoerotic Deaths: Practical Forensic and Investigative Perspectives presents a complete analysis of all aspects of autoerotic deaths. Our goal was to develop a comprehensive resource text that could serve as a practical guide for those involved in the investigation of such deaths. We hope readers will appreciate the combination of theory and practice, with this unique combination of the most up-to-date science presented in parallel to a more practical, down-to-earth case history format.

Anny Sauvageau and Vernon J. Geberth

About the Authors

Anny Sauvageau, MD, MSc, Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta, Canada

Dr. Anny Sauvageau started her career as a forensic pathologist in Montreal in 2002. In 2009, she moved to Alberta, Canada, where she was named deputy chief medical examiner in 2010 and chief medical examiner in 2011. She is an associate clinical professor at the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary and a well-known world expert on asphyxia. She received her medical degree from the University of Montreal in 1996 and was board certified in anatomical pathology in 2002. She has a founder designation in forensic pathology from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in recognition of her significant contribution to the development of this new specialty in Canada. From 2007 to 2012, she was vice president of the Forensic Pathology Examination Board of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. She is also one of the founders and the program director of the residency program in forensic pathology at the University of Alberta. She is the author of more than 75 papers in peer-reviewed forensic journals and a much sought-after international speaker. She is the founder of the Working Group on Human Asphyxia and the cofounder of the International Network for Forensic Research. Her innovative approach toward forensic research has significantly improved the understanding of the pathophysiology of hanging and other types of strangulation.



Vernon J. Geberth, MS, MPS, BBA, Lieutenant Commander (Ret.) NYPD, Practical Homicide Investigation® (<http://www.practicalhomicide.com>)

Commander Vernon Geberth is a retired lieutenant commander of the New York City Police Department with over 40 years of law enforcement experience. He has an undergraduate degree in business administration and holds dual master's degrees in forensic psychology and criminal justice. Commander Geberth is a graduate of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) National Academy and is also a Fellow in the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS).

Lieutenant Commander Geberth is the author of *Practical Homicide Investigation: Tactics, Procedures, and Forensic Techniques*, now in its fourth edition and recognized in the law enforcement field as “the bible of homicide investigation,” and the *Practical Homicide Investigation Checklist and Field Guide*, which is considered by professionals an essential prerequisite in conducting proficient death inquiries. Commander Geberth is also the author of *Sex-Related Homicide and Death Investigation: Practical and Clinical Perspectives*, Second Edition, which is considered the framework textbook on sex-related murder.

Commander Geberth is a nationally renowned lecturer, author, educator, consultant, and expert witness on the subject of death investigation. He has appeared on numerous local, national, and international television programs to answer questions on the subject of murder and provide insight, analysis, and commentary with respect to all aspects of homicide and death investigations. Geberth has been referenced as a media consultant on myriad national major cases across the United States and Canada. Over 65,000 members from over 8,000 law enforcement agencies have attended Geberth’s Practical Homicide Investigation seminars.

In his seminars, Geberth focuses on advanced tactics, procedures, and forensic techniques and presents equivocal death, suicide, and missed investigations as well as serial murder investigation and the application of abnormal psychology to the investigative process.

Acknowledgments

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chapter one

Autoerotic death

Historical context

Sexual asphyxia in fiction

Long before becoming of forensic interest, erotic asphyxia had been described in fiction. The Marquis de Sade depicted erotic strangulation and hanging in his book *Justine*, published in 1791:

He seizes my arms, binds them to my side, then he slips a black silken noose about my neck; he holds both ends of the cord and, by tightening, he can strangle and dispatch me to the other world either quickly or slowly, depending upon his pleasure. "This torture is sweeter than you may imagine, Therese," says Roland; "you will only approach death by way of unspeakably pleasurable sensations; the pressure this noose will bring to bear upon your nervous system will set fire to the organs of voluptuousness; the effect is certain. ... Therese, it's the rope that's waiting for me. ... I am as firmly persuaded as I can possibly be that this death is infinitely sweeter than cruel; but as the women upon whom I have tested its initial anguishes have never really wished to tell me the truth, it is in person I wish to be made acquainted with the sensation. By way of the experience itself I want to find out whether it is not very certain this asphyxiation impels, in the individual who undergoes it, the erectory nerve to produce an ejaculation; once convinced this death is but a game. ... You will do to me everything I did to you; I'll strip; I'll mount the stool, you'll adjust the rope, I'll excite myself for a moment, then, as soon as you see things assume a certain consistency, you'll jerk the stool free and I'll remain hanging; you'll leave me there until you either discern my semen's emission or symptoms of death's throes." ... We take our stations; Roland is stimulated by a few of his usual caresses; he climbs upon the stool, I put the halter round his neck. ... I do so; his dart soon rises to menace Heaven, he himself gives me the sign to remove the stool, I obey; would you believe it, Madame? nothing more true than what Roland had conjectured: nothing but symptoms of pleasure ornament his countenance and at practically the same instant rapid jets of semen spring nigh to the vault. When 'tis all shot out without any assistance whatsoever from me, I rush to cut him down, he falls, unconscious, but thanks to my ministrations he quickly recovers his senses. "Oh Therese!" he exclaims upon opening his eyes, "oh, those sensations are not to be described; they transcend all one can possibly say."