

CASE REPORT

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Complex Autoerotic Death with Full Body Wrapping in a Plastic Body Bag

ABSTRACT: Autoerotic deaths are normally classified as accidental deaths occurring during individual, and usually solitary, sexual activity in which a device, apparatus, or prop used to enhance sexual stimulation of the deceased somehow causes unintended death. The most common methods of autoerotic practices are asphyxia by hanging, ligature, plastic bag, chemical substances, or a mixture of these. However, atypical methods such as overdressing/body wrapping have also been reported. In fact, overdressing/body wrapping is so rare that it is implicated in only 1.5% of published cases. Although plastic bags are often implicated in autoerotic deaths, there has been only one previous case that involved a plastic covering the victim's body from head to toe. We here report the case of a 34-year-old man who died due to asphyxia, secondary to body wrapping in the largest and most complex plastic bag ever involved in a published case of autoerotic death.

KEYWORDS: forensic science, autoerotic death, autoerotic asphyxia

Autoerotic deaths are normally classified as accidental deaths that occur during individual, and usually solitary, sexual activity in which a device, apparatus, or prop used to enhance the sexual stimulation of the deceased in some way causes unintended death (1,2). The most common method of autoerotic practices is asphyxia by hanging, ligature, plastic bag, chemical substances, or a mixture of these (2). However, atypical methods have also been reported: electrocution, overdressing/body wrapping, foreign body insertion, and atypical asphyxia (chest compression, inverted suspension/abdominal ligature, immersion/drowning, and smothering) (2).

We here report the unusual case of an autoerotic death with asphyxia secondary to body wrapping in a full plastic body bag of the victim's own construction.

Case Report

A 34-year-old Caucasian man was found lifeless by his partner inside the apartment that they shared. The front door was locked, and there were no signs of forced entry. The victim was clothed only in his underwear and was lying on his back, completely enclosed from head to toe within a large plastic bag. The plastic bag had been made by the victim out of a large plastic sheet folded in two, which was then sealed on three sides, two from the outside and one from the inside, using duct tape. The bag measured 1.35 × 2.46 m (53 × 97 inches) and was pierced by four tubes and a black wire (Fig. 1). Of the four tubes, only one with the smallest diameter opened both to the inside and outside of the bag. This tube was found resting on the chest of the victim, near his face. The outer openings of the other three tubes were obstructed by duct tape (Fig. 2). Thus, once enclosed within the bag, the victim could only obtain oxygen from the air outside of the bag by breathing through the tube of 1 cm in diameter. This tube was too narrow

and too long to allow for sufficient gas exchange with the outside air.

The black wire that was found piercing the bag was attached inside the bag to headphones. It was plugged into a nearby computer, which showed a sadomasochistic website on its screen. There were also numerous photographs of nude men next to the computer and throughout the apartment.

Additionally, inside the bag, a pair of red boxing gloves and a role of duct tape were found (Fig. 3). A knotted red plastic bag that contained an uncapped aerosol can of leather and suede protector was also found next to the victim, inside the larger plastic bag.

An autopsy revealed pulmonary edema but no traumatic lesions. Additionally, there was no evidence of any pre-existing medical conditions. The victim had a blood alcohol level of 119 mg/100 ml and traces of the hydrocarbons Naphta and Varsol were detected in his blood.

The cause of death was determined to be asphyxia due to oxygen deprivation in association with nonlethal levels of hydrocarbons. The manner of death was accidental, in the context of an autoerotic practice.

The victim had a history of autoerotic activity, although his partner claimed that the victim had never used a bag of this magnitude before. In the past, the bags had covered only his head or his head and torso. The victim was seeing a psychiatrist but suffered from low self-esteem, had sadomasochistic tendencies, and had been participating in sadomasochistic activities with a group of friends that he met on the Internet. He had been drinking more and more heavily during the months prior to his death.

Discussion

Overdressing/body wrapping is an unusual method of autoerotic practice. In a review of the literature from 1954 to 2004, this method constituted about 1.5% of all reported cases of autoerotic deaths (2). In fact, only six such cases were found in this thorough literature review and since then, no other cases have been reported.

Johnstone and Hunt (3) reported two cases of men who asphyxiated while involving in overdressing/body wrapping autoerotic

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FIG. 1—Body of the 34-year-old man in a home-made plastic bag. One of the sides that had been sealed from the outside is opened on the picture. A black wire is also noticeable inside the bag.



FIG. 2—Outer openings of three of the four tubes: two are obstructed by tape, while one is opened for air. The fourth tube is not shown on this picture.



FIG. 3—Right lateral view of the victim's body in the bag showing a pair of red boxing gloves.

activities. The first man was a 23-year-old schoolteacher who was found dressed in a plastic mackintosh, beneath which he wore three cotton skirts and a raincoat, followed finally by a large plastic bag. Holes had been cut into the bag, allowing for the passage of the man's neck and arms. Seminal fluid was found beneath the victim's

garments. He also wore a plastic raincap over his head and had placed a plastic sheet over his face, into which he had cut holes for his eyes and mouth. Finally, motor grease covered the victim's cheek and eyes, also occluding the mouth and nose. The cause of death was asphyxia. The second case described by Johnstone and Hunt (3) involved a 43-year-old engineer who was found enclosed from head to toe within a thin, plastic garment bag that measured 1.8×1.2 m. His death was also due to asphyxia.

In 1985, Minyard (4) reported a case of autoerotic death that involved the use of a large plastic sheet. A 34-year-old Caucasian male wrapped his entire body with large plastic sheets from a warehouse at his place of employment. The plastic sheets were a clear visquine and clung tightly to the man's body. He used a snorkel apparatus to breathe through while wrapped in the plastic, but he asphyxiated when the snorkel fell from his mouth.

Two years later, Eriksson et al. (5) described the autoerotic death of a 60-year-old man who died of hypoxia, possibly in combination with hyperthermia. The man had rolled himself up with 14 blankets, which were partially sewn together. The man's arms and hands were above his head, and his penis was found inside a plastic bag, beneath the blankets.

In 1993, Madea (6) reported the case of a 56-year-old man who was found dead in a head-down position, hanging in a sack that was suspended from a board. The victim was dressed only in a blue plastic bag that had been cut up to look like a woman's dress. After a thorough investigation, it was determined that the victim had actually been standing upright on a chair until it was disturbed. At that point, he was pulled into a head-down position by gravity, and despite that there was no evident morphological cause of death, asphyxia by a head-down position was suspected.

Finally, Byard et al. (7) presented the case of a 46-year-old man who had clothed himself in a dress, female undergarments, and seven pairs of stockings. His underwear had been cut, revealing his genitalia. His body was found outdoors, and he was found to have died of hyperthermia, caused by a combination of the excessive clothing and a high environmental temperature. The victim had also been taking the drug Benztropine, which is an antiparkinsonian agent that may have an atropine-like effect which could cause hyperthermia in hot weather (7).

Of the above cases, only one of them involves the victim being completely sealed within a plastic bag. In this case, which was reported by Johnstone and Hunt (3), the plastic bag was completely unaltered by the victim prior to its use. In the case that we report here, the plastic bag used by the victim was entirely of his own fabrication and was much more complex than any of the bags described in the above six cases. As explained in the case report, the bag had been made by folding a large piece of plastic in two and had been sealed from the outside by duct tape on two sides. The third side had also been closed with duct tape, but from the inside. The victim had also installed an intricate system of tubing that relayed the air on the inside of the bag to the exterior, although only one of these tubes was open to both the inside and outside of the bag at the time that the body was discovered. Additionally, the plastic bag used in the case reported here is the largest one ever used in a published case of autoerotic death. Finally, the presence of chemical gases in the victim's blood makes this case even more unique, as the asphyxiation of the victim may have involved both rebreathing and asphyxia by chemical gases.

Although it is difficult to elucidate the motivation to wrap oneself entirely in plastic, Johnstone and Hunt (3) suspect that the people that are involved in overdressing or body wrapping practices have a strong desire to be enclosed or confined. This may reflect a wish of the individual to return to the womb, although this is most

likely a subconscious fantasy. The victim described in this case report was known to be a troubled individual with a medical history that involved depression and alcoholism, and he may well have held this fantasy of returning to the womb.

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