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# **SERIAL OFFENDERS**

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**Current Thought,  
Recent Findings**

**Edited by**

**Louis B. Schlesinger**

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Louis B. Schlesinger, Ph.D.**



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# Foreword

As evidenced by the popularity of such “entertainments” as Robert Lewis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in late 19th-century England and Thomas Harris’ *The Silence of the Lambs* in late 20th-century America, few facets of criminal behavior capture the public imagination so tenaciously as serial murder, most particularly when sexuality also figures prominently as a governing motive. Each of these tales recounts a series of murders perpetrated by a physician in whom “the dark side” has rather inexplicably triumphed. From those fictional terminal points alone (and not to neglect the nonfictional *reportage* of Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* or Joseph McGinniss’ *Fatal Vision*), we can readily surmise that cleverly planned and brutally executed sequential homicides hold an endless fascination for the citizenry at large. When one adds journalistic accounts of the horrific slayings of a John Wayne Gacey, Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, the Hillside Strangler of Los Angeles, the Atlanta Child Killer, and the Gainesville Slasher in the U.S. or the Yorkshire Ripper in England, there is little mystery as to why many in the reading and viewing public have come to believe that serial homicide constitutes the rule rather than the very rare exception, thereby mistaking the exotic for the normative.

Indeed, to counter such erroneous beliefs, federal officials complained to *New York Times* writer Sara Paretsky that serial murders account for less than 0.40% (four tenths of one percent) of the homicides committed in the U.S. annually — or, in whole numbers, 84 of a total of 21,000. With 60 or more video channels available in many major cities, it is likely that at least 84 serial killings are depicted in any given *week* in the programs offered on the television screen. The reasons are not difficult to discern. The exotica of cleverly planned and brutally executed sequential homicides, with or without sexual motivation as an added bonus but with riveting descriptions of the deceptions and evasions without which serial offending would not become serial, are ever more engrossing than the usual, “garden variety” homicide, typified by the slaying of one motorist by another (with perhaps both mildly inebriated) in a dispute over who properly had the right of access to a parking place. Fictional or cinematic depictions of homicide as it is actually committed are likely to elicit no more than a long yawn among a viewing public seeking a thrill a minute, and so the mythology grows.

While skepticism about the ubiquitous entertainment focused on serial homicide is surely justified on the basis of the data, there is a downside risk that such skepticism may generalize across other categories of criminal behavior so that the exotic may become confused with the normative or prototypical. For their part, whenever scholars or clinicians concerned with understanding or altering the dynamics of criminal behavior focus on serial offending, prototypically it is the serial killer toward whom attention is turned.

Quite in contrast to the picture with regard to homicide, as the distinguished criminologist Alfred Blumstein demonstrated two decades ago in his groundbreaking

research on “career criminals,” it is highly probable that a very small proportion of all those who have ever been convicted of a criminal offense (perhaps as few as 6%) are responsible for a very large proportion (perhaps on the order of 55%) of all criminal activity. When one considers “property” offenses (burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft, embezzlement, etc.) in isolation from “violent” offenses (homicide, sexual assault, robbery, assault), the proportion of offenses attributable to repeat offenders increases dramatically.

If Blumstein is correct, it is thus paradoxically the case that serial offending indeed constitutes the rule rather than the exception in all categories of crime save homicide. That paradox becomes explicable only when we consider the rates at which apprehension, prosecution, and adjudication ensue when criminal offending is examined by specific category. Hence, the ratio between the incidence of homicide (which accounts for only about .2% of all crime reported nationally in a year) and subsequent apprehension (“clearance by arrest,” in the inimitable lexicon of federal criminal justice recordkeeping) of the offender begins to approach 1:1, while the ratio between the incidence of burglary (accounting for something over 22% of all crime reported nationally in a year) and subsequent apprehension is only on the order of 1:8. To turn the matter slightly, the probability that apprehension will ensue following homicide inches close to 100% (indeed, perhaps because most homicides are of the garden variety, in which the offender is readily identifiable), while the probability that apprehension will ensue following burglary tops out at approximately 12.5%. In other words, it is about eight times more probable that a homicide offender will be apprehended than a burglar will be apprehended.

If we grant Blumstein his conjecture, it would seem to follow that the majority of recidivating offenders, especially property offenders, are never apprehended, prosecuted, or sanctioned. Because we can only rationally assume that it is universally their goal not merely to accomplish the instant offense but further to escape sanction, we can only regard such offenders as successful. To that extent, the “successful” serial burglar or serial thief may exhibit levels of cleverness in planning and brilliance in execution not unlike those that characterize the serial killer who eludes detection long enough for his or her behavior to be properly categorized as serial offending.

And therein lies the core strength of the present volume, which, at its heart, addresses the interplay between the exotic and the normative but does so beyond the confines of a single category of criminal behavior. Louis B. Schlesinger has brought together in a single source and, to the knowledge of this writer, for the first time spare and original analyses of serial criminal offending *across* types and categories of crime, with particular attention to offender and victim groups not often the focus of serious scholarly or clinical inquiry. In his Introduction, Dr. Schlesinger announces that the intent of this work is “to present current and inclusive information on serial offending in a clear and straightforward manner” in order to provide “in-depth understanding.” That he and the contributors to this volume have brilliantly satisfied that intent is everywhere evident.

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# Introduction

Although the adjective “serial” has been used only recently to describe individuals whose crimes are repetitive, such offenders have been present since antiquity. In pre-modern times, when several bodies of brutally mutilated women were found in a particular area, the attack often was attributed not to a person but to the workings of a supernatural force, such as a werewolf or vampire. And, throughout the centuries, there have been numerous recorded cases of individuals committing multiple rapes or other repetitive antisocial acts, such as arson, peeping, or lewdness. There are also countless examples of offenders who served lengthy prison terms and then, when they were released or paroled, went on to commit the exact crime for which they were incarcerated.

Thus, repetitive-compulsive offenders, particularly those who repeat their crimes in a ritualistic manner, have vexed mental health professionals, law enforcement, and society for decades. What do we do with such individuals? How do we protect society from repeat offenders, and how do we prevent such individuals from behaving in this manner to begin with? Can these people be treated or cured? In the early 1950s, programs for the repetitive-compulsive (usually sexual) offender were established in almost every state; by the 1990s many had been abolished. In the meantime, the problem has not vanished. In fact, although crime in general has declined in the past decade, there is considerable evidence that many serial crimes may actually be increasing. Nevertheless, the courts, law enforcement officials, and the general public now tend to view such behavior not as evidence of a clinical disorder (with common signs, symptoms, course, and prognosis) but solely as a criminal problem where little distinction is made between the offender and the offense. Moreover, this purely legal approach deals only with the overt manifestations of the act. Many individuals who commit an offense that is sexual in nature may do so out of social, situational, or impulsive motives. Such individuals may not truly be serial compulsive-repetitive offenders whose crimes are an outgrowth of psychogenesis. Conversely, many overtly nonsexual offenses, such as arson and burglary, may have been sexually motivated but are never classified as such legally. The purely legal approach also fails to take into account the degree of dangerousness posed by the offender or the likelihood that the offender will repeat the criminal act or commit a related but more heinous crime. An offender without a psychogenically driven compulsion may present relatively little danger to society, whereas a sexually motivated burglar, for example, might eventually commit a sexual homicide.

The topic of serial offenders has clearly captured the interest of mental health and criminal justice professionals. However, these professionals often have failed to share the scientific knowledge they have accumulated about such offenders, and also have neglected to apply that knowledge in an effort to bring about an informed public policy. For too long, professionals in different disciplines worked independently of

one another; mental health professionals rarely interacted with law enforcement and rarely informed legislatures of the state of knowledge about a particular type of criminal behavior. In the area of serial offenders, information is often scattered in different professional publications, such as journals of general and forensic psychiatry, clinical and forensic psychology, sociology, criminology, police and forensic science, criminal justice, and law.

*Serial Offenders: Current Thought, Recent Findings* represents a modest attempt to remedy this problem. A group of leading clinicians and researchers in the field, encompassing different professions and different points of view, have contributed chapters on various aspects of the serial offender. Divided into three general sections, this volume covers current theory and research on traditional serial offenders and also describes certain special populations and unusual aspects of serial offenders.

Part I presents current theory and thinking on serial offenders. Its five chapters cover serial homicide, child molestation, rape, arson, and the nonviolent serial offender. All provide new information and new perspectives on some traditional problems. Part II, on recent clinical and research findings, begins with a chapter on criminal investigative profiling — an area familiar to law enforcement but undervalued by the mental health community. As the chapter demonstrates, this approach has elicited a tremendous amount of information about the psychodynamics and psychopathology of serial offenders. Chapter 7 covers an important topic about which very little has been written — namely, neurobiological approaches to understanding serial offenders. Serial stalkers, and those individuals who develop pathological attachments toward others, are explored thoroughly in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 discusses the serial burglar — contrasting social, situational, and sexually motivated burglaries and their consequences. The final chapter in Part II is on serial sexual harassment, a topic frequently omitted in discussions of the serial offender.

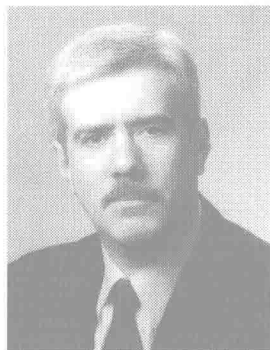
The five chapters in Part III focus on several unusual aspects of serial offending and on special populations of offenders: female and adolescent serial offenders, the syndrome of infantophilia (attraction not to children but to young infants), serial offending by the clergy, and, finally, the victims and survivors of the serial offender.

*Serial Offenders: Current Thought, Recent Findings* is not just another book on forensic practice, or a compendium of traditional sex offenses, or a critique of subtle methodological nuances of various research studies. The intent is to present current and inclusive information on serial offending in a clear and straightforward manner. It is hoped that this volume will provide the reader with an in-depth understanding of the serial offender, a phenomenon that has been present for centuries but whose complexities we are only now beginning to unravel.

**Louis B. Schlesinger**

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## About the Editor



**Louis B. Schlesinger, Ph.D.**, is Associate Professor of Psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. He is a Diplomate in Forensic Psychology of the American Board of Professional Psychology and served as president of the New Jersey Psychological Association in 1989 and as a member of the Council of Representatives of the American Psychological Association from 1991 to 1994. Dr. Schlesinger was the 1990 recipient of the New Jersey Psychological Association's "Psychologist of the Year" award, as well as a recipient of the American Psychological Association's Karl F. Heiser Presidential Award

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## *Dedication*

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*This book is dedicated  
to my son Gene*

“The history of human civilization shows beyond any doubt that there is an intimate connection between cruelty and the sexual instinct; but nothing has been done towards explaining the connection, apart from laying emphasis on the aggressive factor in the libido. According to some authorities this aggressive element of the sexual instinct is in reality a relic of cannibalistic desires — that is, it is a contribution derived from the apparatus for obtaining mastery, which is concerned with the satisfaction of the other and, ontogenetically, the older of the great instinctual needs. It has been maintained that every pain contains in itself the possibility of a feeling of pleasure. All that needs to be said is that no satisfactory explanation of this perversion has been put forward and that it seems possible that a number of mental impulses are combined in it to produce a single resultant.”

—Freud (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*)

“Anyone who has once experienced this power, this unlimited control over the body, blood, and spirit of a man like himself, a fellow creature, his brother in Christ — anyone who has experienced the power to inflict supreme humiliation upon another being, created like himself in the image of God, is bound to be ruled by emotions. Tyranny is a habit; it grows upon us and, in the long run, turns into a disease. I say that the most decent man in the world can, through habit, become as brutish and coarse as a wild beast. Blood and power intoxicate, callousness and vice develop; the most abnormal things become first acceptable, then sweet to the mind and heart. The human being, the member of society, is drowned forever in the tyrant, and it is practically impossible for him to regain human dignity, repentance, and regeneration. One such instance — the realization that such arbitrary power can be exercised — can infect all society; such power is seductive.”

—Dostoevsky (*The House of the Dead*)

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# *Part I*

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## *Introduction to Part I*

The five chapters in this section discuss current theory regarding various types of serial offending. In Chapter 1, Louis B. Schlesinger presents serial homicide from a historical perspective, beginning with the seminal contributions of Richard von Krafft-Ebing. Dr. Schlesinger then describes three components present, in varying degrees, in all serial homicides: sadism, fantasy, and a compulsion to kill. Also highlighted in this chapter are the significance of voyeurism and fetishism in the etiology of sexual murder; postmortem paraphilias, including cannibalism, vampirism, and necrophilia; personality characteristics of serial murderers; and several theories of causation. Dr. Schlesinger argues that serial murder must be recognized as a clinical disorder with a biopsychosocial etiology, as opposed to simply a criminal problem. He believes that such recognition will stimulate further scientific interest, research, and thinking in this important area.

In Chapter 2, Sharon K. Araj reviews and updates current thinking on the serial child abuser, whose acts may range from viewing, exhibitionism, touching, fondling, and oral sex to all types of intercourse. The empirical studies described in this chapter enhance our knowledge of demographic, social, and personality characteristics of child sexual abusers and help us understand the offender's thinking and behavioral patterns. Professor Araj includes a number of illuminating case examples and also mentions some recent trends — among them, child abuse via the Internet. The chapter concludes with a discussion of treatment, prevention, and necessary legislative action.

In Chapter 3, anthropologists Craig T. Palmer and Randy Thornhill offer a unique evolutionary perspective on serial rape. Such a perspective, they believe, can provide a more complete understanding of the serial rapist. The authors argue that a profound re-evaluation of the popular view that rapists are not motivated by sexual desires is necessary. Professors Palmer and Thornhill certainly do not regard rape as an

evolutionary inevitability; in fact, their theory provides a framework for identifying environmental factors that contribute to rape. An understanding of these factors, they point out, can lead to prevention of its occurrence and repetition.

Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive review of serial arson and pyromania. In this chapter, Mary Mavromatis discusses various theories of repetitive firesetting, including sexually motivated pyromania and nonsexually motivated repetitive arson. Also discussed in this chapter are female and child firesetters, the prognostic significance of repetitive arson and its relationship to serial murder, investigative profiling, treatment issues, and biological and sexual motives for firesetting. Although classic pyromania, with overt sexual dynamics, may not be a common phenomenon, Dr. Mavromatis argues that it is a legitimate, valid, and useful diagnosis that helps us understand one class of potentially very dangerous serial offenders.

The final chapter in Part I, by Richard B. Krueger and Meg S. Kaplan, covers three nonviolent serial offenses: exhibitionism, frotteurism, and telephone scatologia. These seemingly less dangerous paraphiliac offenses frequently escalate to more aggressive forms of serial acting-out behavior and therefore can be instrumental in identifying or deterring future aggressive offenders. The chapter begins with definitions and then provides an overview of epidemiology and etiology of these behaviors. Drs. Krueger and Kaplan next discuss the meaning of multiple paraphilias among sex offenders, adolescents who engage in such acts, offender and victim characteristics, and treatment issues, with a goal towards prevention.



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# 1 Serial Homicide: Sadism, Fantasy, and a Compulsion To Kill

*Louis B. Schlesinger*

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Although there is no universally agreed-upon definition of serial homicide in all its particulars (Keeney and Heide, 1995; McKenzie, 1995), the majority of researchers, investigators, and clinicians view serial murder as sexually motivated and as basically a sub-type of sexual homicide (e.g., Geberth and Turco, 1997; Grubin, 1994; Lunde, 1976; Myers et al., 1993; Ressler et al., 1988; Revitch and Schlesinger, 1981, 1989; Warren et al., 1996). Sexual homicide becomes serial when multiple victims are involved, usually in multiple locations, with a cooling-off period between murders.

Homicides with distinct manifestations of genitality are easily detected as sexual, as are cases where the offender's "control of his victim, and her pain and humiliation, become linked to his sexual arousal" (Grubin, 1994, p. 624). However, as Schlesinger and Revitch (1997) point out: "Not all sex murders and assaults ... are of the type where sexual motives are overt and obvious. In many cases, the sexual dynamics are covert, not recognized by the authorities, and frequently rationalized and denied by the offender as well" (p. 203). Contrary to popular belief, erection, ejaculation, and intercourse may not accompany the violent act or murder; instead, the brutal and murderous assaults may serve as substitutes for the sexual act (Revitch, 1965).

The ambiguity of the definition of serial homicide, along with problems in detecting covert sexual dynamics in some cases, complicates efforts to determine