

## BOOK REVIEW

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### Review of: *Serial Offenders: Current Thought, Recent Findings*

**REFERENCE:** Schlesinger, Louis B, editor. *Serial offenders: current thought, recent findings*. CRC Press, Boca Raton, 2000, ISBN 0-8493-2236-7.

Based upon the stated assumption that recognizable serial offenders, who present greater risk than nonserial offenders, are on the increase in society, the authors, mental health and law enforcement professionals have attempted to correlate and understand the various types offenses and the offenders. The book is divided into three sections. The first presents current theory and thinking of serial offenders. The second addresses recent clinical and research findings. The third part considers unusual issues that include child offenses, clergy abuse, and survival victims of serial offenders.

In Chapter 1, the author asserts that serial homicide is a subset of sexual homicide. That is, once the perpetrator has committed multiple (no specific number) sex murders, with multiple locations and a cool off period between them, he has become a serial murderer. It is also asserted that serial homicide is predicated upon sadism, fantasy, and a compulsion to kill. Throughout the chapter, the author has chosen citations and case studies to suggest that all serial murderers are mentally unstable through psychogenesis, biological and/or social dysfunction. Therefore, in part, the perpetrators are mad, not bad, and may be subject to a variety of treatments. Unfortunately, the above descriptions do not explain the professional hit man or many other types of multiple killers, like for instance John Gotti. Also, what about the sexual killers who do not incorporate fantasy or sadism in the offenses? Although the above assumptions and thoughts were consistent with the work done in the 1970s, the work done since that time has demanded different conceptual framework structures that are not reported here.

In Chapter 2, the author produced a thoughtful discussion of "Child Sexual Abusers." For the most part the literature citations were adequate and significantly omitted some available poor studies! In Chapter 3, the discussion was "Serial Rape: An Evolutionary Perspective." This discussion was dedicated to arcane and theoretical abstractions without any significant linkage to the practices of rape. Consequently, the writing did not define "serial rape" or plumb any of the practical research literature. Chapter 4 discusses "Serial Arson: Repetitive Firesetting and Pyromania." While noting that "some" firesetting appears simple and without complex pathological underpinnings, the majority of the argument presupposes the latter. Although the author addressed the term's ar-

son and serial arson, the definition of serial arson appears vague and undifferentiated from descriptions of habituation, modus operandi, and/or routine behavior patterns. The literature review was adequate, but heavily weighted for selected "pathological" research.

Chapter 5 is titled "The Nonviolent Serial Offender: Exhibitionism, Frotteurism, and Telephone Scatologia." With a heavy reliance upon self-report research studies, the authors discuss paraphilias and related concerns. Given the implicit assumptions in self-report literature and lack of adequate and functional concepts, the authors did make a reasonable effort to discuss the subjects. However, the writing did not define "serial" or separate out the differences among an obsession, compulsion, and/or "choice behaviors." Instead, they trod down the weary road of assuming all deviance is centered in mental dysfunction and the catch-all phrase of depression. In Chapter 6, "Investigation of the Serial Offender: Linking Cases through *Modus Operandi* and Signature," the author produced the promised expectations and discussion with appropriate literature citations. In addition, there was good balance between the crime descriptors and the offenders that denoted a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at work. In Chapter 7, "The Predator's Brain: Neuropsychodynamics of Serial Killers," the author cites a number of studies that report various neurological distinctions among the studied subjects. When considering the past focus of attention of simplified explanations for the behavior, this author suggests a "unified field theory" that views human behavior on a continuum with variants. This chapter included a wide range of appropriate and relevant references. In Chapter 8, "Serial Stalkers: Recent Clinical Findings," the author adequately covered a number of aspects related to stalking and associated behaviors. As for the "serial" component, the author recognized that this description was heretofore an unknown classification and subject to interpretation. Certainly, in the future, it is hoped that a distinct meaning will be considered for "serial" which is separate from psychological constructs and jargon.

The title for Chapter 9 is, "Serial Burglary: A Spectrum of Behaviors, Motives, and Dynamics." Briefly, this chapter reserved a few words relating to nonpathological burglary. For the most part, the author considers burglary to be an overt manifestation of a mental dysfunction, substance abuse, organicity, and/or primary and secondary sexual deviations. Finally, the author refers to the necessity to understand the motivation of the offender. In brief, although it is acknowledged that the exploitative is common to both burglary and sexual assaults, this article does not seem to appreci-

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ate a number of burglars commit burglary offenses because it is an acquired skill . . . that earns an income! Finally, it is unfortunate that the author did not differentiate the word "serial" from repetitive behaviors, habituation factors, and choice options for the greedy. Chapter 10 is titled, "Men Who Sexually Harass Women." The text attempts to explain how and why men sexually harass women. A number of tests and statistics are included to make various points. There was no effort to link conceptually the word "serial" with the materials presented. Chapter 11 is titled "Infantophiles." This text offers definitions of serial and infantophiles. Also, it acknowledges many methodological problems with the limited research. Nevertheless, the text offers "research studies" and statistics that attempt to explain who and what is this type of offender. Unfortunately, the writing appears to assume as fact that the perpetrator recognizes the sexual dynamics and enjoys some type of penile tumescence. Therefore, they attempted to measure sexual arousal with various test protocols. Note: Despite the fact (confirmed by crime indicators) that many convicted and known sex offenders had focused upon the power exploitation aspect of the offense and were abhorred by the notion of penile tumescence and ejaculation, these significant issues were not addressed. As a consequence, the assumptions stemming from the data appears questionable. Again, there was almost total reliance upon the claims made in self-report.

Chapter 12, "Cleric Serial Offenders: Clinical Characteristics and Treatment Approaches," presents a number of problematic issues. Purportedly, Jewish and Christian clergy were to be included in the study. However, the author omitted any further information regarding sexual offenses amongst rabbis. Although some attention was spent with Protestant ministers, the majority of the writing concerned Catholic priests. Throughout the citations and discussion, the author offered significant behavioral characteristics of the offender and treatment recommendations. Interestingly, this chapter was written without the benefit or citation of a major subject contributor, K.V. Lanning, FBI, Behavioral Science Unit. Chapter 13 addresses "Female Serial Offenders." As indicated by the au-

thor, there is a paucity of credible research materials available in this area. Accordingly, the term "serial" is problematic for this area. Notwithstanding, the text of the writing adequately explores various theories and postulates regarding the female offender. Without surprise, the text confirms many poorly conceived assumptions and psychological explanations about female offenders that minimize their rightful claims for miscreant deeds. Chapter 14 concerns "Serial Offending by Children and Adolescents." The authors address six areas of juvenile offenses; including juvenile delinquency, arson, cruelty to animals, sex offenses, sadistic crimes, and serial murder. The text sets forth a number of studies and classifications with sub-sets of data. However, the interpretation of the data appears directed toward finding mental difficulties as the source of the behavior. In some instances, the text omits discussion of power interests, lack of boundaries, and a choice with negative outcomes. Often, the authors appeared willing to co-mingle findings concerning the offenses with the specific individual information relevant to the offender. Chapter 15 discusses "Survivors, Families, and Co-Victims of Serial Offenders." The text of this chapter appears conventional and unremarkable.

Although the collected authors of this book were apparently charged with the task of weaving a common cloth between mental health and crime professionals in understanding the serial offender, the text of many authors, not all, revealed a wide disparity of commonality. Unfortunately, many of the authors relied upon diagnostic criteria, designed to treat the individual, for the resource fund to understand the offense. Therefore, the text, like the citations, failed to differentiate between the offense and the offender. As a consequence, the appropriate research questions were not asked or answered. Sadly, without relevant concepts, frameworks, paradigms, the research will continue to burgeon with compound errors and thickets of misunderstanding.

Finally, this book is recommended to only those readers who have an extensive educational background and training within the literature and experience in criminal investigation, for there is some need to separate the wheat and the tare.