

**Sexual Murder: Catathymic and Compulsive Homicides**

by Louis B. Schlesinger; Boca Raton, Florida,  
CRC Press, 2004, 391 pages, \$69.95

Denise C. Kellaher, D.O.

In *Sexual Murder: Catathymic and Compulsive Homicides*, Louis B. Schlesinger presents a nonexploitive view of sexual homicide that discusses the controversies in identification of these crimes and perpetrators. Schlesinger, a forensic psychologist and associate professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, provides a thorough historical background of sexual murder in the context of crime in general. He skillfully presents a discourse of forensic assessment and sexual murder classification, specifically distinguishing the catathymic and compulsive types. Finally, he ends with a well-written comprehensive presentation on the prediction of sexual homicides and the potential for intervention.

"Sexual murder" is not a clearly defined term among experts on this phenomenon. Whereas the definition of homicide as the willful killing of one human by another is straightforward, the definition of sexual homicide is rife with debate. Some experts prefer to see any murder in which sexual contact is explicit as a sexual homicide, whereas others confer this designation only when the perpetrator describes an internal feeling of arousal. Although Schlesinger does not provide his own definition of sexual murder, he does promote the need to understand these acts by examining the context of the crime and the psychodynamics of the criminal. He emphasizes how important it is for forensic examiners to review witnesses' statements, collateral history from family and employers, police reports, and autopsy findings before formulating expert opinion about the criminal's intent or accountability for an offense. Otherwise, examiners may arrive at distorted conclusions by relying solely on information obtained from inter-

views with the criminal and by focusing on "the presenting problem" as in clinical practice instead of seeking more reliable evidence from collateral sources.

Catathymic and compulsive murders are two distinct categories of sexually motivated murders. Catathymic murder is performed for an affective catharsis, fueled by an underlying sexual conflict in which the victim is perceived as a threat to ego. Typically, the victim stimulates feelings of sexual inadequacy in the perpetrator, yielding an explosive homicidal revenge followed by psychic relief. In contrast, compulsive murderers are driven by an internal irresistible urge to kill, providing a thrill comparable to that of sexual gratification. Whereas catathymic murderers typically do not repeat their acts, compulsive murders—also known as serial killers—have psychic insatiation. Thus they need

to repeatedly commit their characteristic acts of torture and sexual deviancy as a means of controlling their victims, which provides them with a sexual euphoria. Schlesinger uses multiple cases both to expound on the differences between these types of sexually motivated murders and to point out the often blurred distinction between them.

Schlesinger presents views of other researchers who have studied sexual murder and reveals whether findings have been substantiated clinically or empirically. In addition, he offers a reasonable way to predict possible future sexual murder by determining motivation for homicides already committed and assessing ten ominous signs, including a history of unprovoked attacks on females and animal cruelty.

I recommend this book to all clinicians of all disciplines. *Sexual Murder* is a guide for understanding—and possibly intervening against—these relatively enigmatic yet sensationalized people who inflict such substantial devastation on individuals, on communities, and on us all.

**Family Therapy as an Alternative to Medication: An Appraisal of Pharmland**

edited by Phoebe S. Prosky, M.S.W., and David V. Keith, M.D.;  
New York, Brunner-Routledge, 2003, 334 pages, \$34.95

William Vogel, Ph.D.

The editors of this book—David V. Keith, M.D., a psychiatrist, and Phoebe S. Prosky, M.S.W., a social worker—are highly experienced practitioners of family therapy. In their introduction, they state that they are "developing this book in an attempt to awaken broader awareness of the vision of symptoms-oriented psychotherapy in hopes of keeping it from being disappeared by the strong forces of the medical profession and the pharmaceutical industry."

Psychotherapies of all kinds, the authors argue, are filling a significantly diminished role in the mental health field because of the aggressive promotion of psychopharmacology. That promotion emanates from a number of sources. Prosky and Keith see this phenomenon as harmful to patients who are led to use medication to suppress symptoms such as anxiety and depression, which are often a result of interpersonal or intrapersonal conflicts, which should be resolved by psychotherapeutic means; when psychotherapy is used successfully, the symptoms are resolved rather than suppressed. The title of the book—

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*Family Therapy as an Alternative to Medication: An Appraisal of Pharmed—*is to be taken seriously. The authors see “family psychotherapy as (often) a (superior) alternative to medication.” The book’s many contributors explore all aspects of the problem in various chapters of the book, which deal separately with theoretical formulations, political issues (“the mechanisms behind the accelerating growth of pharmacological practices”), the problem from the viewpoints of clients, and clinical

illustrations (“systems-based practices or alternatives to the uses of medication”).

It is important to note that the book’s contributors are not hostile to medication per se; nor do they deny its usefulness. They argue instead against the rapidly growing use of a purely medical approach to resolving multifaceted, social, psychological, interpersonal problems that patients present. *Family Therapy as an Alternative to Medication* should be of interest to anyone in the health field.

the fiscal and legislative environment of Connecticut that set the scene for the financial hurdles the retreat’s founders overcame in bringing it to fruition, and suffered with through its history.

Subsequently, the author interleaves chapters about the more influential of the retreat’s early superintendents with chapters on “The Paradox of Curative Treatment” and “The Impoverished Insane.” The biographical chapters about Todd, Brigham, and Butler chronicle the medical culture and practices of the times, the strong European influences—that is, the work of Phillipe Pinel and the Tuke family—on their adoption of moral care as well as their personal histories, and successes and failures at the retreat. Of particular note are Todd’s claims of suspiciously high cure rates, Brigham’s early work in neuropsychiatry, and Butler’s success in moving the retreat forward in times of its greatest financial stress.

In the two nonbiographical chapters, Goodheart provides a window into the workings of the retreat through patient data and annual reports, letters from patients to family members (and vice versa), letters from family members to physicians, and petitions for treatment by the needy to the state government. Some major themes of these chapters are the biased view that women were more prone than men to insanity (well illustrated through copious letters and descriptions of treatment); societal and religious norms in identification and diagnosis of mental illness—for example, the belief that masturbation causes insanity; and the public health crisis faced by the state mid-century. Here Goodheart’s thesis gains focus, as his accounting of patients and their care demonstrates the strong religious beliefs of the retreat’s superintendents—however secularized they might have been—and their emphasis on personal salvation and self-control as curative.

Paramount in the promotion of moral care was the claim of high cure rates. As the physicians of the retreat

## **Mad Yankees: The Hartford Retreat for the Insane and Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry**

by Lawrence B. Goodheart; *Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 2003, 218 pages, \$34.95*

Jolee A. West, Ph.D.

*Mad Yankees: The Hartford Retreat for the Insane and Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry* details the formative years (1824 to 1868) of the Hartford Retreat for the Insane (now the Institute for Living) through examination of the professional lives and times of its first superintendent, Eli Todd, and a number of his successors—in particular, Amariah Brigham and John S. Butler. These men were all early proponents of “moral care,” which disavowed the use of shackles, chains, and dungeons and the perception of the insane as incurable, in favor of benevolent supervision and the goal of curing the acutely ill and providing long-term, humane care for the chronically ill. The retreat was founded by practitioners of moral care, and its history chronicles the dawn of modern psychiatry.

In *Mad Yankees*, author Lawrence B. Goodheart argues that the medical and psychiatric practices of the retreat’s founders were strongly motivated by civic duty, Christian stewardship, and belief in individual responsibility for salvation (and in turn, sanity). His thesis situates this

story within the complex social milieu of the second great awakening and the age of Jackson, when religious revivals elicited overwrought fits of devotion, benevolent societies abounded, and the common (white) man gained political and economic ground. Goodheart argues against the conclusions of Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* (1965) and Rothman’s *Discovery of the Asylum* (1971), which contend that the development of asylums and asylum medicine was motivated by the establishment’s desire for social control. Rather, he asserts, “Neither entirely medical nor exclusively punitive, the mental hospital was shaped by humanitarian concerns as well as hegemonic conventions.”

The book is organized into an introduction and six chapters, followed by a short epilogue. The introduction establishes the academic context of arguments about the general history of asylum medicine. The first chapter sets the historical context, detailing the post-Revolution history of Connecticut, the strong links between clergy and physicians during the early 19th century, the common medical practices of the times—for example, blood letting and blistering—and

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