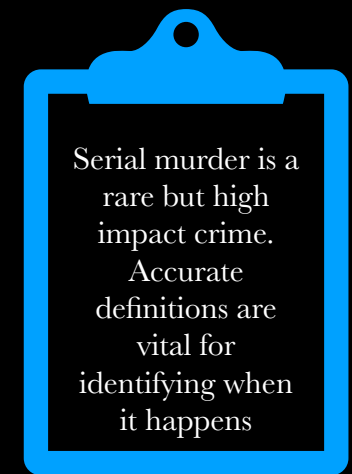
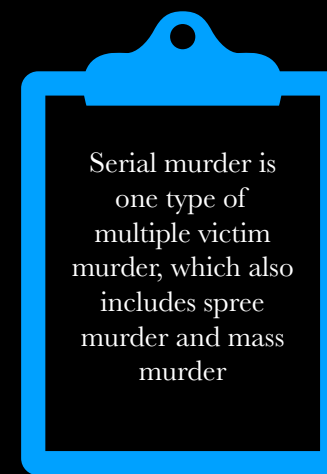
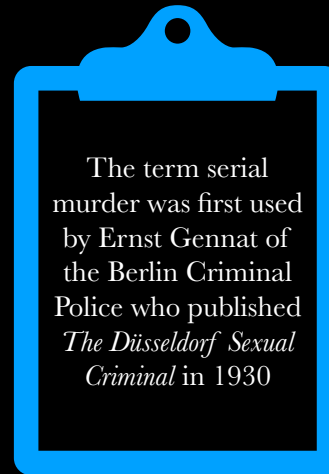


Problems in Defining and Conceptualising Serial Murder



1...2...3



Case Linkage



Cooling-Off Period



Motive



The Proposed Definition



The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation have been central in defining serial murder since the 1970s.

Originally using a victim count of three, in 2008 this was revised to two victims for a series to be identified.

Some definitions include up to five or six victims.

While some authors argue we shouldn't focus too much on the actual numbers, this is the most basic consideration for identifying when a series has occurred and so it is critical to be consistent.

Case linkage refers to the process of linking two or more known offences which are believed to be the work of the same offender.

This can be achieved if the offender confesses to their crimes, if there is physical or forensic evidence such as DNA, or when an expert provides a behavioural linkage.

However this is achieved, linking the crimes is vital in the identification of a series.

The cooling-off period was first introduced into definitions in 1986 by US FBI agents.

This was identified as a period during which the offender was not committing offences and also emotionally disconnecting from the offences.

The main issue with the cooling-off period is that it is a value judgement placed on another's behaviour by external observers.

In reality, we do not and cannot know what a serial offender is doing while they are not committing their crimes.

The motive for a crime is the physical or psychological need that drives behaviour.

Motive is not necessary for a criminal prosecution, but any investigation where it is not established would be considered incomplete.

Motive is poorly understood and can therefore be difficult to establish.

Sometimes only offenders truly understand the motive for the crime.

Based on an extensive examination of the literature we propose the following components for our definition:

1. There must be two or more victims.
2. The offences must be committed by the same person/s
3. The offences must be separate with a non-offending period between offences
4. The offences must have been reliably linked
5. The motive is for personal gratification