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An Appetite for Crime: Case Studies of Cannibalism and the Criminological Theories that Explain It

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An Appetite for Crime: Case Studies of Cannibalism and the Criminological Theories that Explain It

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Senior Capstone

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Abstract

One of the most important aspects of studying crime is identifying how and why certain crimes happen. There are several questions one should ask: Why did this event happen? What caused this to happen? How could it have been stopped? Criminologists use various theories to seek the answer to these questions regarding diverse types of crimes from petty crimes, such as stealing a pack of gum to major, violent crimes, such as cannibalism, the latter of which will be analyzed here. The goal is to prevent these crimes from happening in the future by identifying why they are happening now. In this paper, I hypothesize that the same theory, or theories, can explain the crimes of different cannibals. To test this, I use Jeffery Dahmer, Idi Amin, and Issei Sagawa, three men famous for their acts of cannibalism, as case studies. Various sources, from books to articles to movies, were analyzed to produce brief biographies of each man, discussing events from early childhood into adulthood that could have contributed to their crimes. Then, I use this biographical information and analyze it against three traditional theories: Hirschi's Social Bond Theory (1969), Agnew's General Strain Theory (1989), and Aker's Social Learning Theory (1977). When looking at these three men, it becomes clear that though the number and demographic of their victims differ, the various theories explain all three men's actions. Similar life events and personality traits contribute to an increased chance of criminogenic behavior, and their motives for murder and cannibalism prove to root in similar places.

Keywords: Cannibalism, Jefferey Dahmer, Issei Sagawa, Social Bond Theory, Social Learning Theory, General Strain Theory

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Introduction

Cannibalism, or the consuming of human flesh, is arguably one of the most shocking crimes that one could commit. Even in the world of criminology, cannibalism poses a unique level of disgust and horror. The bizarre nature of this crime is what drives the desire to understand it. In this paper, I will use three mainstream criminology theories to look at the cannibalistic actions of three different cannibals: Jeffrey Dahmer, Issei Sagawa, and Idi Amin, to see if their actions can be explained using the same theories, or whether their cannibalism, though similar on a surface level, comes from different root causes. I chose to use Agnew's 1989 General Strain Theory, Akers' 1977 Social Learning Theory, and Hirschi's 1969 Social Bond Theory because they are mainstream criminology theories that can be used to explain different types of crime, including cannibalism.

I have chosen three men to serve as case studies because they represent three varieties of murderers who all engaged in acts of cannibalism. Idi Amin was a ruthless dictator and mass murderer from Uganda who was responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of people, and whose reign was filled with horrific reports, including the consumption of human flesh (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977) and the desecration of human bodies, even after they had been murdered (Kyemba, 1977). Issei Sagawa is a Japanese murderer who has openly admitted to the shooting and cannibalizing of his friend Renée Hartevelt yet is a free man who profits from his sick past (Vice Meets, 2016). I will also be looking at Jeffrey Dahmer, perhaps the most well-known on this list. Dahmer is a famous American serial killer who was responsible for the death of seventeen young men, and who engaged in acts such as serial murder, necrophilia, and cannibalism (Durdin Smith, 2003). Though the crimes of these men differ on a surface level, I hypothesize that the underlying feature of cannibalism will allow the same criminology theories

to explain their crimes.

Historically, cannibalism itself is not exceedingly rare, with the event going as far back as humankind has been recorded, though the motive behind cannibalism varies from culture to culture, and over time. In ancient times, some cultures would engage in acts of cannibalism during funeral rituals in a form of respect for their loved ones (Fox & Levin, 2005). An act that may seem outlandish to people now has not been as taboo in other cultures historically. Though some acts of cannibalism can be seen purely as aggressive and wanting to take ownership of someone, it is also the case that it is sometimes committed as an act of love (Sagan, 1981). “Affectionate cannibalism” is when one person eats someone after they have passed on to keep that person with them longer. It is a way of maintaining pieces of someone after they have passed away (Fox & Levin, 2005).

At times, people have had to engage in acts of cannibalism to survive, and it usually involves necro-cannibalism or eating someone who has already died from other causes. A well-known example of this is the Donner Party, a group that was stranded in the snowy mountains with no resources for survival in the winter of 1846-1847. They were forced to eat the flesh of those who had died to stay alive (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). Others, however, engage in this act simply out of a sadistic desire. For those, the act of cannibalism is not done out of the need for survival, but instead, out of a pure craving to consume another human being. They cannibalize others to take control of someone in an attempt to keep them from leaving or to keep permanent possession of them (Fox & Levin, 2005). Those are the people criminologists should seek to understand.

Though much research has been done into cannibalism, there is little research using a criminological approach to understand the cause of cannibalism itself. Few studies seek to

explain what could increase the likelihood someone will commit acts of cannibalism. This is in part because cannibalism, even among the worst criminals, is an exceedingly rare occurrence, appearing in only a small percentage of murderers (Watts, 2021).

Methodology

To conduct these case studies, various types of sources were utilized in researching the details of these men. To craft a complete biography, it was important to get as much information as possible from childhood into adulthood. Building as complete a picture as possible makes it easier to look at the criteria for each criminology theory to see if those theories can help explain their cannibalism. A common theme across these three men is the reliability of the information offered. Information is conflicting in different sources as stories have been told over and over.

Idi Amin was a bit challenging to piece together a case study because so much information about his life is unknown due to poor record-keeping in Africa during his lifetime. Even basic information such as his birth date is reported differently in different publications (e.g., Melady T. & Melady M., 1977; Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). His case provided a unique challenge of trying to find the “correct” happenings when there were several variations of one story offered. Because he never wrote an autobiography or authorized anyone else’s biography, finding completely verified information for Amin was a bit harder.

In Japan, Issei Sagawa has gained almost a celebrity status, which makes biographical information about him easily accessible. However, the challenge posed when looking for information regarding Sagawa is determining what is truth and what has been sensationalized by both the media, and Sagawa himself, to help drive profits. Due to his well-known status, there are many interviews where Sagawa himself talks about his crime, making it easier to piece

together not just what happened, but why.

One of the most famous names in the world of criminals is Jeffrey Dahmer, who was found guilty of the vicious murders of seventeen men (Durden Smith, 2003). The difficulty with Dahmer is not finding information, but instead, it is narrowing what is out there down to just what is useful, and what is truthful. Hollywood has taken Dahmer's story and embellished it, thus making some of the information less reliable than other sources. Because of the shocking nature of Dahmer's crimes and people's desire to understand him and his actions, countless pieces of work have been published about him from journals to books, to movies to graphic novels. There is no shortage of information out there.

For our three theories being used, publications were read to identify what these theories are, who developed them, and when. This involves publications by Hirschi, Akers, and Agnew themselves, as well as publications from their colleagues, and others who have used their theories as a basis for their research. This allows us a deeper understanding of what these theories are, and how they differ from other theories. It also allows one to analyze whether the cannibalistic acts of these men fit the criteria for these theories. These three theories were chosen because of their use in mainstream criminology, and their ability to explain the actions of various types of criminals, from petty criminals like shoplifters to violent criminals, like murderers.

Case Study 1: Idi Amin

“The Butcher of Uganda,” Idi Amin, is notorious for his brutal behavior as a political leader. Reports of his crimes are hard to fathom, telling stories of the hundreds of thousands of deaths he was responsible for as regime leader. Many life details are difficult to verify regarding Amin, including whether he truly engaged in acts of cannibalism, but what has been recorded

paints a dark picture of a violent, dangerous man who would stop at nothing to prove his power and authority (e.g., Malady T. & Malady M., 1977). Milton Obote, the former president of Uganda once called Amin “the greatest brute an African mother has ever brought to life,” (Guweddeko, 2011). Though he has an intriguing political career, that will not be the focus of this paper, instead, I will focus on the crimes he committed, both confirmed and reported.

From his start, Idi Amin possessed a certain element of mystery, with even his true birth date remaining unknown to this day. It is believed, however, that he was born sometime between 1924 and 1925 in Koboko, Uganda. Amin told people he grew up poor, having to work at a young age to support his family, but it’s unknown whether this is true, or if it was just something he said to relate to the working class more (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977). His father left when Amin was young, with reports that he questioned the paternity of young Amin, so he grew up with his mother, living with other relatives for brief periods (Guweddeko, 2007).

When Amin was growing up, education was not a priority for him. His attendance in school was very sporadic, and even when he was in attendance, his performance was very poor. This did not stop Amin, however, and he was cunning and possessed wit that helped him get ahead, even without formal education (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977). While he did not succeed academically, Amin saw a great deal of success in his boxing career and his military career. Amin entered the British King’s African Rifles in 1946, where his massive size and low education levels were seen as a benefit (Keatley, 2003). Amin stood at 6’ 3” and weighed 230 lbs., and he was able to use his size to his advantage to rise through the ranks. Amin was one of only a handful of soldiers from Uganda who were promoted to a status akin to an officer before Uganda gained its independence (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). When Milton Obote became the Prime Minister in 1962, Amin served under him until a military coup d’état in 1971 when

Amin took over as leader of Uganda (Durden Smith, 2003). Once he took power, there was nothing he could not get away with.

Responsible for the death of hundreds of thousands of humans, Amin is arguably one of the worst war criminals that the world has ever seen, pushing him out of the realm of serial killer into something more specific to criminals with as much power and authority as he had: war criminals. The most accurate estimate possible from the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva reports that the number is no lower than 80,000 lives dead at his command, with the numbers likely being closer to 300,000. Another estimate from organizations with help from Amnesty International puts the number closer to 500,000 (Keatley, 2003).

Due to his social and political status, Amin was able to commit crimes without any legal repercussions for decades before he was finally ousted and forced to flee from Uganda. Anyone deemed an enemy could be massacred by Amin or his men, with his State Research Bureau having the license to kill anyone they wanted. There were so many killings committed by Amin and his soldiers that the French Embassy complained about the noise of constant gunfire; Amin's solution was to switch to a quieter form of murder: having prisoners bludgeon each other to death. It is described that groups of people were gathered together for various reasons, all of which were false reasons that served as a purpose to get people into a group. They would then be shot, bayoneted, crushed by tanks, or blown up by grenades that were thrown into crowds, and if people tried to report these atrocities, they would be killed as well (Durden Smith, 2003). People were held in prisons for no reason, and they were tortured, abused, and murdered by the masses. Some prisoners who were not killed by Amin committed suicide because it was a better alternative to the treatment by Amin and his men (Wall, 2016).

Although reports of his cannibalism are hard to confirm, the 1981 film *Rise and Fall of*

Idi Amin is represented as being based on real events, and it portrays Amin as engaging in acts of cannibalism and the keeping of the decapitated heads of his enemies in his freezer. He is also reported to have told various people that he had eaten human meat, but that he did not care for it, stating it was “too salty” for him (Wall, 2016; Orizio, 2003). There are also reports of his mother holding a spiritual position within her tribe, with Amin engaging in ritualistic cannibalism as part of her ceremonies (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977). With the sheer brutality of his crimes being confirmed, the cannibalism reports are not doubtful, but it is important to reinforce that no acts of cannibalism were conformed with complete authenticity.

It may seem as if Amin is out of place on this list due to the sheer volume of his crimes and the fact that many crimes were committed under his command, not just by his hand. A death count of 300,000 dwarfs anything murder count by even the most active of serial killers, and instead categorizes him as not just a mass murderer, but a war criminal. However, it is important to include political leaders who have committed atrocities that resemble those of serial killers because the men, as will be shown here, share similar traits. Criminological theories tend to analyze crimes committed by smaller groups that are themselves often marginalized while ignoring the violence that can occur on transnational levels by political leaders (Michalowski, 2009). As said by Atkinson & Pino in 2003, “atrocities committed in war and serial offending, for example, involve similar behaviors, including torture, rape, the belittling of victims before killing them, and the keeping of trophies such as the body parts of the depersonalized victims” (p. 232). Many of the horrific actions committed by Amin while he served in his political position are the same horrific actions that are committed by murderers that lack the political authority to get away with their crimes, such as Jeffrey Dahmer, who had to pay the legal consequences for his crimes.

Case Study 2: Issei Sagawa

Issei Sagawa, “The Kobe Cannibal,” was born on April 26, 1949, in Kobe, Japan. He was born to wealthy parents who took great care of him, always putting his needs first (Suzanne, 2021). Due to a fall down the stairs, his mother went into labor early and delivered Sagawa prematurely (Durden Smith, 2003). When he was born, he was so small that his father could hold him in the palm of his hand, and his small stature remained with Sagawa his whole life. As an adult, he stood at only 5’ 6” and weighed less than 100 lbs., something he was self-conscious of. He suffered from many health issues as a baby but was able to regain his health by his toddler years (Morris, 2007). In a 2016 interview, Sagawa told *Vice News* that his childhood was truly the greatest time in his life and that he looks back on it fondly. In the same article, he recalls being spoiled by his mother, who often babied him due to his frail state, as well as playing games as a child. One game that stands out as particularly eerie is one in which his uncle would pretend to be a monster who would catch him and his brother and pretend to lower them into a pot to cook them as soup. Sagawa recalls this game both exciting him, as well as scaring him, and starting his interest in eating people (Durden Smith, 2003). This fantasy was further propelled by his favorite childhood book, *Hansel, and Gretel*, in which two young children get eaten by a witch (Suzanne, 2021). From an early age, Sagawa possessed thoughts of cannibalism, and over time those thoughts grew into an undeniable desire to consume human flesh.

Another contributing factor to Sagawa’s distorted sexual fantasies was the lack of knowledge about sex or sexual activity as a whole. In a 2016 interview with *Vice Meets*, Sagawa details the story of his childhood sexual experiences and the confusion that follows. He states that when he got his first erection at an early age, he was unsure as to what was happening, and he was afraid he was sick. Unsure what was wrong, and unsure how to fix the problem, Sagawa

turned to bizarre measures to “remedy” his problem, including having his family dog lick his penis until his erection went away. In this interview, Sagawa recalls his event and states that this was one of his first inclinations that his sexual desires were not normal and did not reflect the same things as those around him. His desires were different and dark.

Issei Sagawa’s first attempt at cannibalism occurred in 1973 when he was a student at Wako University in Tokyo (Suzanne, 2021). He followed a woman home and broke into her house with a desire to eat her buttocks. Instead, he woke the sleeping woman who fought back, a task that proved to be rather easy due to Sagawa’s small stature. She called the police, and he was arrested and charged with attempted rape, but his father was able to offer financial compensation to the family of the victim in exchange for them dropping the charges, so nothing Sagawa faced no real legal repercussions (Suzanne, 2021).

As he experienced in his adolescence, Sagawa struggled to make friends in college, and after inviting classmates to a party he was throwing, a young woman named Renée Hartevelt was the only person to show up. This sparked a friendship between the two and they continued to spend time together (Morris, 2007). After a while, Sagawa began to have a desire to eat Hartevelt, wanting to possess some of the strong traits that she held Sagawa believed he lacked personally (Vice Meets, 2016). Sagawa desired to possess a Western woman in all ways possible due to his fetishization of Western women, and he believed the best way to do this was to eat them (Morris, 2007).

Issei Sagawa attempted to kill Hartevelt once, but he got too scared; he then tried another time, but the gun he was using jammed and did not go off (Suzanne, 2021). However, on June 11th, 1981, an unsuspecting Renée Hartevelt went to Sagawa’s apartment under the guise of practicing poetry, and in the middle of reading a poem, she was shot in the back of the neck and

killed by Sagawa (Vice Meets, 2016). The act of murdering excited Sagawa so much that he first passed out, then when he woke up, he had sex with her dead body before continuing on to the acts of cannibalism (Durden Smith, 2003). Unprepared and unfamiliar with the butchering process, Sagawa first attempted to eat Hartevelt with his bare teeth, but they were not strong enough to bite through her flesh. He then tried to use a knife, but it was not sharp enough, so he had to leave Hartevelt in his apartment to go to the store to purchase another knife (Vice Meets, 2016).

Sagawa began to eat Hartevelt, starting with her buttocks and breasts, then moving onto her thigh and other body parts, eating some of her flesh cooked, and other flesh raw; he took photographs along the way (Suzanne, 2021). Sagawa continued to cannibalize various parts of Hartevelt over the next two days, using various preparation methods. Once Hartevelt's body started to decompose, Sagawa knew it was time to get rid of it, and on the 13th of June, he placed Hartevelt's dismembered body into two suitcases with the plan to go to the park and dump them in a lake (Morris, 2007). Sagawa struggled beneath the heavy weight of the suitcases and drew a lot of attention to himself, and in a panic, he left the suitcases in a crowded area of the park instead of disposing of them in the lake, as originally planned. Curious onlookers opened the suitcases, and the police were immediately called (Durden Smith, 2003).

Sagawa's very public and obvious disposal of Hartevelt's body, along with his easily identifiable physical features resulted in his quick identification and arrest (Durden Smith, 2003). When he was arrested, there were pieces of Hartevelt in his fridge, being stored for later consumption (Vice Meets, 2016). Acts such as these are hard to comprehend and deserve the worst of punishment, however, Sagawa has managed to evade all legal repercussions of his crime due to a bizarre series of legal loopholes (Howe, 2021).

In France, Sagawa was deemed incompetent to stand trial due to his mental status, so charges were dropped. However, after a while, France grew sick of the negative attention Sagawa was drawing, so they deported him to Japan, and authorities in Japan deemed him to be mentally sane (Vice Meets, 2016). Because French authorities had dropped his charges, records were sealed, thus leaving the Japanese government with nothing to charge Sagawa with. Because of this, he has been living as a free man since August 12 of 1986 when he was able to check himself out of a mental hospital (Suzanne, 2021). It is worth noting that Issei Sagawa's deportation to Japan, which led to his freedom, was done so under an agreement that his father played a large part in, both politically and financially (Durden Smith, 2003).

Though Sagawa has not engaged in cannibalism since his release, as far as anyone knows, he openly discusses his desire to eat someone again. In a 2016 interview with *Vice Meets*, Sagawa discusses his desire to engage in cannibalism again before he dies. He has also expressed certain methods of preparation he would like to use, such as sukiyaki or shabu-shabu style (Vice Meets, 2016). Sagawa suffered from a stroke in 2013, and he now lives under the constant care of his older brother, Jun, who also confesses to having sadistic desires like his brother's (Alm, 2018).

Case Study 3: Jeffrey Dahmer

Serial killer culture has found its place in America, with some serial killers being household names. One of the most well-known is Jeffrey Dahmer, or "The Milwaukee Cannibal," guilty of some of the most horrific and grotesque crimes imaginable. Though cannibalism is often associated with serial killers, Dahmer is the only man on this list who fits the definition of a serial killer. For someone to be considered a serial killer, they must murder two more people over time, in two separate locations, and often there is a similar methodology in

killings (Atkinson & Pino, 2014).

Jeffrey Dahmer was born to Joyce and Lionel Dahmer on May 21, 1960, in Milwaukee Wisconsin, and was raised in a middle-class home with his parents (Durden Smith, 2003). He was their first child and would be joined by a younger brother a few years later (Backderf, 2012). Though nothing stands out as particularly traumatic about Jeffrey Dahmer's upbringing, there are reports that his childhood was not what one may consider ideal; his father worked as a chemist and was away at work a lot, not spending much time with Dahmer or his younger brother. His mother was a housewife, but due to her poor mental health, she struggled to keep up the house or be a present mother to her children (Backderf, 2012). Joyce and Lionel Dahmer's marriage was not a healthy one, filled with constant arguing, and they divorced in his teen years, causing even more complications (Backderf, 2012). This divorce left Dahmer feeling as though his mother had just abandoned him and his father had abused him (Fox & Levin, 2005).

In his adolescence, Dahmer did not have many friends at school, and even those he acquainted himself with did not consider themselves to be close friends. As a teen, he was beaten up by a group of boys, an event that left him feeling helpless, vulnerable, and scared of interacting with others (Ressler & Schachtman, 1997). Dahmer had weird mannerisms, which served as a form of entertainment to his classmates who were often laughing at him rather than with him at school (Backderf, 2012). While most serial killers have pretty good social skills, able to lure people in with their charm (Fox & Levin, 2005), Dahmer tended to push people away. Even the friends he did have in middle school and in the early years of high school considered him a mere acquaintance and kept some distance from him out of fear (Backderf, 2012). This fear was well deserved as Dahmer often engaged in concerning behavior as a child: dissecting animals, dissolving them in acid, or skinning them (Ressler & Schachtman, 1997). He would also

routinely drink alcohol during his senior year of high school, missing many days of school; though he would go to school, he would stay outside and drink and not attend classes (Backderf, 2012). Though he attempted social events, such as senior prom, in which he took a date but then left her to go to drink instead and spent little to no time with her at the prom itself, by the end of school, he had managed to completely detach himself from everyone (Backderf, 2012).

After his parent's divorce, his father had moved out, leaving the house and children to Joyce, and almost immediately after Jeffrey graduated from college, Joyce moved to another state, taking his little brother with her, and leaving Jeffrey alone in the house to fend for himself (Backderf, 2012). He was not supposed to tell his father that he was in the home alone so that Joyce could continue to receive her monthly payments from Jeffrey's father (Durden Smith, 2003). At a critical time in Dahmer's life, when he was struggling with negative thoughts and the inability to process them, his parents abandoned him and left him with his disturbing thoughts (Backderf, 2012). It was shortly after this that Dahmer committed his first murder, free to do so under the umbrella of isolation. Though his original intention was not to murder him, Steven Hicks became Jeffrey Dahmer's first victim after he was taken home from a bar and murdered with a dumbbell once he tried to leave (Bertram, 2021).

After his first murder in 1978, he took an eight-year break before murdering again. Once he picked back up, he then committed one murder in 1986, two in 1988, one in 1989, four in 1990, and eight in 1991 before he was caught (Ressler & Schachtman, 1997). Though he did not eat his initial victims, he reports that he started eating flesh about halfway through his murders and started cutting meat and storing it for later in his last few murders (Turner, 2020). Before murdering his later victims, he also attempted to drill holes into their heads, and inject acid into their skulls in an attempt to make them into "sex zombies" that would be under his control,

however, these attempts proved unsuccessful and always resulted in the death of his victims (Durden Smith, 2003).

On the 22nd of July 1991, Tracy Edwards went to Dahmer's apartment with him under the premise they were going to hang out and have some beers. Dahmer had intentionally given Edwards' friends' the wrong address so he could get Edwards alone. It is reported Edwards was apprehensive about the photos of naked men that Dahmer had hanging from his living room walls, but this was not enough to cause him to leave initially (Fox & Levin, 2005). Soon, however, Dahmer started to get scarier, threatening to eat Edwards' heart out while placing a knife on Edwards' throat (Fox & Levin, 2005). Edwards escaped Dahmer's apartment and ran down the street asking for help, still wearing handcuffs (Durden Smith, 2003). Officers Rolf Mueller and Robert Rath assisted Edwards and they were led to Dahmer's apartment, but they were not prepared for the carnage they encountered inside the apartment.

Jeffrey Dahmer was sentenced to 15 life sentences in 1992, a total of 936 years (Durden Smith, 2003). Though he was offered protective custody, after a while he decided to enter the general population, though he faced considerable risk due to his quasi-celebrity status and the heinous nature of his crimes. In November of 1994, Dahmer was killed by another prisoner, Christopher Scarver, after being beaten to death with a metal bar (Bertram, 2021).

Social Bond Theory

Travis Hirschi's (1969) social bond theory offers arguably the most promising explanation for the acts of all three men. When reading about Amin, Sagawa, and Dahmer, one can easily identify the fact that their social bonds were weak starting from a youthful age. Though each man had stronger bonds in certain areas, they all had enough alienation from

society to tarnish any sort of connection they would have had to that society. According to Hirschi's (1969) Social Bond Theory, humans are naturally drawn to deviant behavior, and it is the social bonds that they construct throughout their lives that steer them away from committing crimes. Social bonds create social norms, and over time people grow to feel a certain obligation to follow those social norms that one may feel if they have bonded to society; the lack of bonds leaves one "free to deviate" (Hirschi, 1969).

When those bonds are not created, or if they are created but then later destroyed, the risk of deviant behavior increases (Hirschi, 1969). A man who was once married, but then later divorces his partner will face a higher chance of committing a crime once the bond he had created prior is severed. Broken bonds can damage one's "superego," which increases their overall criminogenic nature (Hirschi, 1994). The overall strength of the bond is important as well; if an individual has bonds, but they are very weak, they may not be strong enough overall to be effective. "The more weakened the groups to which the individual belongs, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognizes no other rules of conduct than what is founded on his private interests" (Hirschi, 1969, p. 18). This means that it is not just the mere presence of a bond, but also the strength of that bond that matters.

According to Hirschi (1969), there are four main elements of a social bond: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Attachment refers to the overall social relationship that one shares with other individuals, including relationships with teachers, parents, and friends. These relationships can encourage positive behavior due to the creation of strong social bonds. Commitment is referring to the time, energy, money, etc. that someone has already invested into something, in this case, their societal relationships. The more someone has invested in their relationships, the more they stand to lose if those affiliations deteriorate. Involvement is just as it

sounds, the overall level of involvement one has within their community. Hirschi believes that the more involved someone is, the less likely they are to deviate from standard behavior, both due to the lack of time and the desire to keep society at its current standard. Perhaps the strongest of Hirschi's elements is belief, in the sense that one's belief system can be so deeply rooted that it influences their everyday action without them even thinking about it. The stronger belief someone has in a set of social standards, the less likely they will be to deviate from them (Wickert, 2022b).

When one thinks of the fact that these men have contributed their acts of cannibalism to wanting to possess someone forever or have them around forever, it suggests that their acts of cannibalism could be attributed to their lack of social bonds; their cannibalism serves as an attempt to create bonds that could not be broken, as twisted as the effort may seem to someone on the outside. Often, cannibals are seen to have taken possession of their victims after they consume them, and the murder and cannibalism stop that person from being able to leave (Fox & Levin, 2005). Consuming someone removes the feeling of alienation because now the other person is truly a part of them. Whereas they may have once felt very alone, the act of cannibalism allows them to experience some sort of a connecting relationship with another person.

Idi Amin lacked social bonds from a young age, with his attendance in school being sporadic and his relationship with his parents not being a close one. It is believed that Amin did not know who his biological father was, or, if he did know, it is not believed that they had any sort of real relationship with each other (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977). In his sense, he lacked both the important parental and teacher bonds that Hirschi discussed. As far as friendships, Amin did not want to just be a member of his society, he wanted to be at the top of things. The only

acceptable position for Amin was at the top of the power ladder, one saying “I do not want to be controlled by any superpower. I myself consider myself the most powerful figure in the world and that is why I do not let any superpower control me” (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977, p. 17). This desire to be at the top worked well for Amin when it came to a successful military career and later political career, though it did not allow him to create very tight social bonds. His military success came at the cost of his social relationships.

When looking at the main bonds presented by Hirschi: attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief, Amin did not have personal relationships that would have allowed those bonds to have been built. As a military leader, he didn't hold loyalty to the men who held loyalty to him, killing anyone who turned against him. He also gave the soldiers who worked under him unlimited power to torture or kill anyone whom they see fit (Kaufman, 2003). This shows that he did not have attachments to those he worked with, nor commitments to those who had committed themselves to him. In his personal life, this lack of attachment and commitment is apparent as well, with the fact that he had multiple wives, and the reports that he had his fourth wife, Kay Amin, murdered and dismembered (Biography.com, n.d.). Amin's involvement in his community was to his own benefit; he used those around him to climb necessary social and military leaders in order to rise to his position as leader of Uganda, but he ruled as a tyrant, not as an involved leader who engaged in positive relations with those who lived in his state. Amin's belief system consisted of spiritual beliefs that stemmed from his tribal roots. After a sorcerer told Amin he risked assassination if he traveled without his sons, he always took one of his sons with him; they could often be seen wearing their own small set of military fatigues as well (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977). Where his belief system was strong, the parts he focused on the most were the steps he could take to further ensure his safety and advancement. According to

Hirschi, Amin's lack of bonds, except for those which only existed to propel him in his career path, all contributed to the acts of cannibalism that likely occurred.

Issei Sagawa reports that he did not have a lot of friends growing up and that people thought he was abnormal and stayed away from him (Vice Meets, 2016). As a schoolboy, he was described as a loner who kept to himself and did not often express what he was thinking or feeling. Though he did well in school, he did not have friends and could usually be found alone (Morris, 2007). Sagawa states that he felt he did not fit in with his schoolmates, and his dark thoughts made that divide even worse. He recalls feeling as if he came from another planet, a planet of cannibals, and he crash-landed on earth where he now has to live, the only one of his type (Vice Meets, 2016). This indicates that Sagawa was not involved in his community, attached to his community, nor did he believe he was even a part of the same community, all of which illustrate his lack of Social Bonds (Hirschi, 1977). Throughout his childhood, he lacked those social bonds between himself and his teachers and classmates, causing him to be more detached.

This isolation carried over into Sagawa's adulthood, where he did not have many friendships or social bonds, even as a grown man (Morris, 2007). This shows that he lacked involvement within the social groups around him, an element in the Social Bond Theory. Sagawa's bond with his parents stayed steady, though his father's willingness to continue to help his son get out of legal trouble proved to make his relationship with his son a somewhat toxic one, with his money serving as an enabling tool (Durden Smith, 2003). Even with his one friend and schoolmate, Hartevelt, the bond that Sagawa felt with her was not enough to stop him from killing her. Sagawa later expressed that perhaps if they had eaten dinner just once more together that he might not have killed her (Vice Meets, 2016). He also believed that his cannibalism of

her was truly “an expression of love,” and saw his consumption of her flesh as an intimate act rather than a horrific act (Durden Smith, 2003, p. 48). Sagawa’s ability to murder and consume his only friend displays his lack of attachment, a key bond in Hirschi’s theory (1969).

Jeffrey Dahmer lacked any real bonds with anyone, whether that be friends, family, teachers, etc. “He was the loneliest kid I had ever met,” said an acquaintance from his adolescence (Backderf, 2012, p. 33). From a young age and into adulthood, Dahmer was rejected by almost everyone and felt as if he lacked any real human connection at all, so he turned to murder and cannibalism to have a sense of companionship and closeness to someone (Masters, 1985, as said by Fox & Levin, 2005). In his adolescence, he struggled to create bonds, and by the time he had barely graduated high school, he had severed any weak social connections he had managed to form throughout schooling, indicating a lack of attachment and commitment. As his school acquaintance put it, “his dad had moved out, his friends had written him off, high school, where he was at least surrounded by people was ending, and now even his mother was leaving him behind. His isolation was complete (Backderf, 2012, p. 165). This isolation proved to be extremely dangerous for those who encountered Dahmer. As far as involvement, Dahmer lacked involvement in any sort of group, an important part of the Social Bond Theory (Hirschi, 1969).

Dahmer’s lack of social bonds contributed to his ability to depersonalize his victims, which in turn contributed to the depravity of his crimes. He had so few bonds with society that he didn’t see other people as people in the same way that others do (Ressler & Schachtman, 1997). In his attempt to create a “sex-zombie”, he drilled holes into the skulls of men, and injected acid into their brains, allowing Dahmer to do whatever he wanted to do to them (Fox & Levin, 2005). Dahmer explained in an interview that he was able to do what he did because he depersonalized his victims and saw them as less than human (Inside Edition, 2018). His struggle

with his homosexuality made it easier to distance himself from his victims, due to their homosexuality. He was also able to utilize his victim's minority status to ease his guilt; most of his victims were Black or Asian and according to Dahmer, this made it easier for him to dehumanize them (Fox & Levin, 2005). Dahmer's twisted belief system allowed him to distance himself from his victims, and the true horror of his crimes.

Though the relationships these men did experience differed, i.e., Sagawa had a good relationship with his mother while Dahmer struggled and Amin lacked one altogether, their lack of social bonds is a connecting factor. Neither of these men had what one would consider "traditional" relationships with their parents, and they had little to no social bonds created with friends or in a school or work setting. According to Hirschi (1969), had Dahmer or Amin, or Sagawa been able to form healthy, strong, social bonds at a younger age, and had those bonds carried over into adulthood, they may not have committed their crimes. If they had stronger bonds to society, they may have been more inclined to follow social norms and deny themselves their dark desires.

General Strain Theory

General Strain Theory, coined by Robert Agnew (1992) claims that crime occurs when people are placed under certain conditions that cause stress. Agnew argues that there are three main contributing factors to keep in mind with strain theory: there must be an unsuccessful attempt to achieve some sort of a goal, the absence or revocation of positive stimuli, or the presence of negative stimuli (Agnew, 1992). Agnew (1992) also identifies four reasons why strain can cause someone to commit a criminal act. The first reason is that when someone feels strain, they often feel that is an unfair or unjust strain. The second reason is that strain can feel very detrimental to the person experiencing it. The third is that strain is connected with low

social regulation (which is related to an increased potential to commit crime), and the last reason identified is that strain can encourage or provide a reason for a person to engage in criminal activity as a coping mechanism.

Strain is not specific to any race, gender, or socioeconomic class, and everyone can experience strain (Agnew, 1985). Negative feelings associated with strain, such as frustration, depression, and anger are pinpointed as the driving factor in committing crimes, with men experiencing anger and violence more than women, who more commonly experience depression (Agnew, 1992). Stress can cause negative emotions, and a lack of coping skills to deal with those negative emotions can push one to commit a crime as a coping mechanism (Wickert, 2022b). Sometimes that illegal activity can come in the form of something like drug use or shoplifting, other times it can result in something more severe, like murder and cannibalism; if it provides a positive feeling to the person committing the act, it can help overcome their strain.

As one can imagine, being a political leader would be a very stressful job, no doubt introducing vast amounts of strain into one's life. It is reasonable to assume that Amin would have been under considerable strain for much of his adult life due to his enormous responsibility of running an independent state. Not only was he the leader of Uganda, but he led a very corrupt regime that faced criticism from countries throughout the world (Guweddeko, 2004). The constant corruption and violence he found himself surrounded by served as a form of negative stimuli, with rewards coming from his brutal behavior. As he advanced in the military and gained more power, any positive stimuli he may have had in the form of non-corrupt colleagues disappeared and were instead replaced with negative stimuli. Amin also experienced strain in the form of goal blockage when it came to his advancement in the military; his lack of a proper education was hard for him to overcome at times (Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d.). Though he

was large, and willing to obey commands, which suited him well in the military, he was not known for his intelligence. He had to take his officer test several times before finally passing due to his poor English-speaking abilities, something that frustrated him greatly (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977). Amin's experience of all three types of strain identified by Agnew (1992) could have contributed to his cannibalism.

Issei Sagawa experienced strain almost from his first minute of life after being birthed into the world prematurely. This caused health issues that plagued him for the first few years of his childhood and caused a small stature that would remain with him throughout his life (Vice Meets, 2016). This small size could be seen as a potential goal blockage to Sagawa. Part of his cannibalistic desires came from his want to obtain the traits that Hartevelt possessed: her height, strength, beauty, etc. (Durden Smith, 2003); his consumption of her could have been an attempt to overcome this goal blockage.

Sagawa also suffered from strain in the sense that he knew his thoughts were not normal, yet he felt he couldn't do anything about it, as he felt like an outsider. He was aware of the presence of negative stimuli in his life but was unable to figure out how to cope with these stimuli. At the age of fifteen, Sagawa reached out to a therapist via telephone, admitting that he was having dark and twisted thoughts, however, after the therapist insisted that they meet in person, Sagawa hung up (Morris, 2007). Though Sagawa knew he needed help, he was hesitant to visit someone in person at that time. A while after this phone call, Sagawa admitted to visiting a therapist in person to discuss his desires, however, the therapist was not very supportive, telling him that he was very sick and making him feel bad about himself. Amin never returned to therapy, and nothing came out of this admission (Morris, 2007). The strain of not knowing how to handle his thoughts, and the inability to get help when he did reach out undoubtedly could

cause him to feel stress, adding just another negative emotion he could not process. He lacked positive stimuli in his life, and instead felt great amounts of pressure due to the negative stimuli present.

Jeffrey Dahmer's home life and lack of social life caused him to experience strain as he lived through his parent's tumultuous marriage and then divorce. His home life was rough, which did not offer him much stability, and led to the loss of positive stimuli in his life. His home was not a place where he felt at peace. Another thing Jeffrey Dahmer struggled greatly with was his sexuality; he started feeling homosexual feelings in his teens, and this upset him greatly, this could be a detrimental strain, one that was extremely difficult for Dahmer to process (Durden, 2012). The presence of negative stimuli existed in the form of his classmates who encouraged his bad behavior, laughing when he misbehaved. It also existed, in another form, in the adults in his life who failed to act upon his concerning behavior (Backderf, 2012). Murders committed by Dahmer also caused a unique form of strain, as they were bittersweet; he got a thrill out of the killing, but he also begrudged that it meant the person was no longer with him (Fox & Levin, 2005).

Ultimately, the drastically different lifestyles of these three men lead to very different types of strain, but they all experienced it, nonetheless. From Amin's unique strains he faced as a political leader, to Sagawa's strain as a small loner who struggled to process his violent thoughts, to Dahmer's strains due to his parents' relationship, it's clear that these three men struggled with stressors in their life. All three men experienced the loss of positive stimuli in their lives, the presence of negative stimuli, and difficulty in achieving a goal. According to Agnew's General Strain Theory, if that strain had not existed, or if these men had better outlets for handling their strain, these murders, and resulting cannibalism, could have been prevented. Instead, these men

used their violent actions as a coping mechanism.

Social Learning Theory

According to Richard Akers' (1977) Social Learning Theory, criminal behavior is something that someone learns from the observation of other people. When someone witnesses criminal behavior, and then the reward that is received from criminal behavior outweighs the positive consequence of following the law, it can steer someone toward criminal behavior, when they otherwise may not have engaged in it (1977). The process of changing one's behavior because of watching someone or something else is what is known as "operational conditioning," coined by B.F. Skinner in 1937, and it is the basis of this theory. When one is a witness to negative behavior, and they experience positive stimuli as a result, it makes them want to engage in that negative behavior again (Wickert, 2022a). The presence of consequences, whether they are received, and how they are received are hugely important with social learning theory; without the presence of consequences, deviant behavior is almost encouraged (Akers, 1977).

Akers describes four main concepts that comprise Social Learning Theory: imitation, definitions, differential association, and differential reinforcement (1977). These elements comprise the various ways in which one can take in their social surroundings and have them influence their behaviors. Imitation is just as it suggests, the copying of observed behavior; the likelihood of someone copying one's deviant behaviors depends on several factors, including the outcome of the behavior (reward vs. punishment), and the expected outcome of imitation (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). Definitions refers to whether one approves or disapproves or feels neutral towards certain behavior, and the ability of one's opinion to change over time depending on what rewards or punishments one may witness for good, or bad behavior (Akers, 1977). Differential reinforcement incorporates aspects of operant conditioning, which focuses heavily

on the reward or punishment that one experiences as a result of an action, and the role that the reward or punishment plays when it comes to whether or not the action will be repeated in the future (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010). According to Akers, positive or negative reinforcement can come through social forms, such as stigmatization, or through personal forms, such as euphoria or nausea after committing an act (1977). The fourth concept discussed by Akers, differential association, focuses heavily on the individual's interactions with other people and stresses that relationships that are longer-lasting, of more frequent interactions, or that are seen as being of greater importance by an individual are more likely to influence their behavior (1977). Some people identified as common models are teachers, parents, neighbors, and members of volunteer groups that someone may be a part of (Cullen & Wilcox, 2010).

Though it may seem as if the antisocial nature of these three men would make Akers's (1977) Social Learning Theory a strange one to use for analysis as it has already been indicated that they did not have social relationships or bonds with anyone to learn from. However, his theory offers explanations regarding their prior lack of punishment, and how it made it easier for them to continue their criminal acts. It is also worth noting that they were able to learn from purely observing, and their antisocial nature did not mean that they still could not learn from their social surroundings. Unlike Sutherland, who argued in his 1939 text *Principles of Criminology* that one must have direct social interaction with someone else to be influenced by their behavior and it cannot be done solely from observation, Akers believed that the only necessary thing was someone witnessing someone receiving some form of reward for one's deviant behavior (Akers & Burgess, 1966). This can give someone else the idea that they should engage in the same behavior.

Many of Idi Amin's brutal acts were committed as political acts, done under his strict

leadership. These were not acts that he came up with on his own, instead, they were brutal acts he had learned from spending years of his life surrounded by death and violence in the military; his brutal acts were imitations of those he had seen committed, and positively reinforced by superiors. During war, horrific acts are not just forgiven, but they are also seen as normal (Melady T. & Melady M., 1977). Amin became a very successful soldier, but merely by copying those around him, as opposed to achieving success due to a real sense of military duty. At the end of the day, his top concern was his personal advancement, at the cost of anyone who stood in his way (Haaretz, 2018). The more brutal Amin acted, the further he advanced militarily until he became the leader of Uganda; every promotion served as a positive reinforcement for his negative behavior, thus providing an incentive for his actions to continue. His idea of what became acceptable became so distorted that violence became the norm in his regime. This is an example of differential reinforcement because of the allowance of his brutality, imitation because he learned brutal actions from other leaders, definitions in the sense that his actions became worse and worse over time, and differential association because his social circle consisted of those who acted like him, and who praised his actions.

The childhood games of Issei Sagawa represent a form of social learning, in the sense that the thrill he received from the fake cannibalism was carried over into reality later in his adult years. In playing these games, the excitement he felt emotionally served as a reinforcement that these cannibalistic activities were ones he should continue to pursue, eventually leading to his horrific acts; his cannibalism was a form of imitation. Though he did not witness actual acts of cannibalism to learn from, the concept was introduced into his mind at such an early age that it could have influenced his thinking in later years. He felt a reward in his feelings of happiness, and that reward was one he desired to feel again. This euphoric feeling provides an example of

differential reinforcement in the sense that he wanted to feel that euphoria again.

Issei's behavior was also made possible by the actions of his parents, and the police through differential association. Though he was caught and charged with attempted rape during his first attempt at cannibalism, his father paid his way off, which resulted in no legal repercussions, thus no real punishment for his highly illegal behavior (Suzanne, 2021). Instead, Sagawa was left free to commit crimes again. Sagawa reports that he was unaware of not just the legal repercussions, but the social and emotional repercussions that would come with his actions, saying "there are consequences for killing people, if I had known that, many people would still be alive today" (in an interview with *Vice Meets*, 2016). In his mind, Sagawa was not able to think about the consequences of his actions before he committed them, because he had never really had to face those consequences before, suggesting that his definitions of what may be acceptable and what is not acceptable may be shifting.

Issei Sagawa poses a unique threat in the sense that while his lack of legal repercussions could encourage cannibalism in the future by Sagawa himself, there is an additional risk that others could learn from his behavior, another example of differential association, as well as imitation. Other people may copy his crimes to recreate what he did. In a 2016 interview with *Vice Meets*, Issei's brother Jun indicates that he may also have some dark fantasies, possibly caused by his brother's stimulus, and Jun could be learning negative behaviors from Sagawa.

Jeffrey Dahmer, though not a social teen, saw his only real social interaction come through the form of imitation. His mother was very sick through Dahmer's adolescence, sometimes being on up to twenty different medications at a time. Because of her illnesses, she would shake so badly that she would eventually fall asleep from exhaustion. Dahmer frequently mimicked this shaking at school, a form of imitation, to the delight of his peers (Backderf, 2012).

Their acceptance and encouragement of his bad behavior at school served as a form of differential reinforcement and differential association. His negative behavior was reinforced by their laughter. They referred to themselves as the “Dahmer Fan Club”, but they were anything but (Backderf, 2012).

Jeffrey Dahmer had the ability to evade consequences on more than one occasion, which contributed to his repeated criminal behaviors. He was able to continue torturing, murdering, sexually assaulting, and cannibalizing them men because he had gotten away with it so many times, even when he shouldn't have, a form of differential reinforcement. Authorities could have caught Dahmer several times, and they had him in custody at a younger age, but he was freed back into society where he continued his killing streak (Ressler & Schachtman, 1997). There was even one instance where a victim broke free from Dahmer's apartment, and Dahmer was able to convince the police that this young, abused, crying, scared boy was actually his lover and the police let Dahmer take the boy back to his apartment, where he was later murdered (Fox & Levin, 2005). This ability to commit a crime, then not suffer many consequences resulted in the benefit of the crime outweighing the consequence of getting caught. Dahmer had constant positive reinforcement for his negative behavior.

Learned behavior, though sometimes positive, proved to be dangerous in these instances. According to Akers, had Amin not achieved success due to his brutality, had Sagawa not played pleasure-seeking games that revolved around cannibalism, or had Sagawa or Dahmer been caught earlier on for their crimes, murders and acts of cannibalism could have been avoided. The repetitive reinforcement of their negative behavior allowed Amin, Sagawa, and Dahmer to commit horrible crimes that they may have not committed with different social influences, or with the proper legal repercussions when they had been caught for prior illegal activity. Instead,

their deviant behavior was reinforced through a lack of negative reinforcement.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed three men who will forever be remembered for their horrible crimes against humanity, however, I have taken it a step further in attempting to use mainstream criminology theories to explain the actions of these men. It is not enough to simply look at horrible crimes and study how they have happened, criminologists must identify what actions, events, or traits that occurred in criminals' lives contributed to their criminogenic nature. Identifying what is causing crimes to happen now can make it easier to stop them in the future.

When looking at the devastation these men caused, one can see the importance of understanding why acts such as cannibalism happen so that there can be attempts to stop them in the future. Idi Amin was responsible for the death of so many people in Uganda, and with earlier intervention, it's possible that thousands of lives could have been saved. Dahmer brought pain and suffering not just to his seventeen victims, but also to the families who had to live with the reality of what was done to the bodies of their loved ones, and with earlier legal intervention, many of these murders could have been avoided. Issei Sagawa brought pain to Hartevelt, her family, and himself through his murder and cannibalism, and with proper medical treatment earlier on, it's possible that she could still be alive today. The ability to apply these criminology theories to these various criminals not only proves their validity as theories, but it also allows researchers to identify potential red flags when looking at criminals.

Looking at these case studies, it is apparent that though these three theories differ, and though the lives of these men differ, we can use the same criminology theories to explain the actions of these men. When looking at the case studies all three men lacked the vital social bonds

discussed by Hirschi (1969), they faced great amounts of general strain discussed by Agnew (1989), and their deviant behavior was partially due to the contributions from their social surroundings, suggested by Akers (1977). This is important in the scope of criminology because it allows for early intervention of those who may commit acts of cannibalism. After all, these theories show that we know there are things to look for. Not everyone who lacks social bonds, who has learned deviant behavior, or who is experiencing strain will commit murder, or acts of cannibalism, however, it does mean that it's important to consider these factors when investigating criminals. If someone who has a similar history to Dahmer, or Sagawa gets arrested, perhaps the legal system shouldn't be so quick to release them back into the public, or perhaps if someone who also fits these theories starts to rise to a position of political power, such as Idi Amin, intervention should be taken early on to stop that person from rising to power.

Though all three theories offer insight as to why these men could have engaged in cannibalism, it is important not to limit the analysis of these three men, or any cannibal, to these three theories. Future researchers should continue to investigate these theories, while also broadening the scope of analysis to use other theories as well. Cannibalism itself should be analyzed on a deeper level by criminologists to see if there are enough unique traits involving those who have engaged in cannibalism to create an entirely new theory altogether. The theories used here were chosen because of their mainstream use, and their ability to explain many types of crime, however, that does not mean that cannibalism is explained only by these three theories.

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