

THE CRIMINAL CANNIBAL: EXAMINING THE SIMILARITIES OF CANNIBALISTIC OFFENDERS

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Abstract

Cannibalism is sometimes practiced by particularly violent offenders. This article discusses this behavior as it presents across 26 individual offenders convicted of murder. The similarities examined among these offenders present uniting features within the sample. These features include similar murder methods utilized, parts of the body consumed, and presence of sexual assault and/or necrophilia. Discussion of these similarities concludes that, while there are a variety of similar characteristics, it is necessary to utilize empirical phenomenological interview techniques in order to understand the significance of these behaviors to the individuals practicing them.

Keywords: cannibalism, violent crime, paraphilia, homicide, serial murder



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Introduction

Cannibalism is an ancient behavior, traceable back to modern man's predecessors *Homo antecessor* of some 800,000 years ago and has been studied in the context of numerous cultures (Travis-Henikoff, 2008). Despite its importance in select rituals outside of Western culture (Lindenbaum, 2004), cannibalism has achieved a degree of fascination in the Western world through media such as the *Silence of the Lambs* franchise. Such pieces of media draw public attention to the archetype of a criminal cannibal as an individual who commits a murder and practices cannibalism of the victim's remains. These cannibals are set apart from those one might find in study of the Fore people of Papua New Guinea or the Wari people of rural South America (Travis-Henikoff, 2008), whose cannibalism takes place in the non-criminal, anthropological context of their cultures.

These are not the subjects of this inquiry. While there are no concise definitions of the criminal cannibal to this author's knowledge, a definition which draws from prior attempts to typologize criminal cannibals (Bell, 2003; Giorando et al., 2012; Lindenbaum, 2004; Travis-Henikoff, 2008) has been adapted for this study. As such, the criminal cannibal of the present study has been defined as an individual who knowingly and/or with intention consumes the body (or parts thereof) of an individual who has died at the hands of the offender. Anthropological instances of cultural and/or ritual cannibalism are not included under this label. Criminal cannibals also do not consume the flesh of others out of physiological need, but an internal motivation. As such, this study excludes individuals who had to eat another person's body in a survival situation. The subjects of this study must have preemptively intended to commit their crimes. Finally, the criminal cannibals of this study work in solitude. These subjects are not offenders who work in teams, but are "lone wolves" who act without accomplices. Groups of cannibals, such as the Chicago Rippers and Russia's Alexander and Lyudmila Spesivtsev, while rare, warrant their own indepen-

dent investigation.

The present study will investigate numerous similarities across these offenders' crimes. Finally, this study will make a call for a greater application of empirical phenomenological interview techniques with violent offenders generally, but specifically those with unusual behaviors such as cannibalism. The point will be contested that gaining greater insight into the actual motivations of these individuals, as well as their perceptions of their own behavior, will aid in the understanding of these complex offenders.

Literature Review

Despite the popularity of criminal cannibalism as a subject, attempts to find reliable information on this type of offender are often in vain, as this concentration is still yet to be robustly explored. Even general discussions of cannibalism as a behavior are scarce. Stone (2001) discussed the frequency at which cannibalism appeared among perpetrators of serial sexual homicide, finding that it was practiced by seven of the 98 offenders in his study. Lester and colleagues (2015) revealed that likely 9% of serial killers engage in cannibalism, and that these offenders were more likely than non-cannibals to be brutal in their murders, mentally ill, and have a history of childhood physical abuse, but were less likely to be married and to have had a mentally healthy mother.

While there is a relative lack of information on cannibalism in general, some specific variations of cannibalism have received more attention. For example, clinical vampirism, a subset of cannibalism also known as "Renfield syndrome", involves drinking blood, often as a means to achieve sexual pleasure (Aggrawal, 2009). In the past, the term "clinical vampirism" was used to encompass the consumption of dead flesh as well as blood (Prins, 1985). In addition to this, necrophagy, a variant of cannibalism that involves the consumption of dead flesh, is often found

alongside necrophilia research (Aggrawal, 2009; Aggrawal, 2011). Despite this information about the different presentations of cannibalism, little is known about why these variations specifically manifest.

Though there have been very few inquiries into the act of cannibalism itself, there have been many attempts to typify it. These types are often developed through an anthropological lens and are therefore not always directly applicable in criminological study. Such a system has been developed by Lindenbaum (2004), who organized cannibals by their intent, largely as it is influenced by culture and setting. Her classification system includes eight distinct categories: Survival cannibalism, endocannibalism (e.g., funerary cannibalism), exocannibalism (e.g., wartime cannibalism), medicinal cannibalism, psychopathological cannibalism, auto-cannibalism (or autophagy), sacrificial cannibalism, and innocent cannibalism (Lindenbaum, 2004) also known as “benign cannibalism”, in which the individual does not know they are consuming human flesh (Travis-Henikoff, 2008). Perhaps the most relevant to this study is psychopathological cannibalism, which involves the presence of some kind of severe mental disorder as the cause of the behavior (Lindenbaum, 2004). While this typology overall is extremely useful in anthropological studies, it falls short of recognizing the many behaviors present both under and beyond the “psychopathological cannibal” type.

Bell (2003) put forward a system of categories specifically for criminal cannibals. In this system, there are four unique types of cannibalism: Sexual cannibalism, aggression cannibalism, modern spiritual/ritual cannibalism, and epicurean and nutritional cannibalism. Sexual cannibalism, in which the body is consumed to achieve erotic pleasure (Bell, 2003), is perhaps the most applicable to this study’s subjects, but still fails to completely encompass their behaviors. Most recently, Giordano and colleagues (2012) posited an even more succinct categorization system. As with Lindenbaum (2004) and Bell (2003), Giordano and colleagues’ (2012) classification system

is based on the offenders' motivations and includes the three categories of lust (for sex or power), revenge, and delusion.

While it does not match the current views of the field, it is this author's opinion that typifying cannibalistic offenders is, while superficially useful, ultimately a tedious and subjective pursuit. The case of Richard Chase, an offender with schizophrenia (Biondi & Hecox, 1992), provides a good example of the faults in typifying these offenders. In the Giordano and colleagues (2012) scheme of typifying, Chase is classified as "type 3", or a delusional cannibal. While it is true that Chase was driven by delusions that he needed to drink blood in order to stay alive, it is also true that he certainly was not singularly interested in the preservation of his health. Chase sexually degraded the bodies of his two female victims, mutilating the breasts and uterus of the first and the uterus and anus of the second. He also managed to anally assault the second victim (Biondi & Hecox, 1992). This behavior certainly seems indicative of lust as a motivator as well as delusion.

Of similar problematic status is Jeffrey Dahmer. Dahmer, a serial killer from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was responsible for the deaths of 17 young men and teenagers from 1979-1991 (Schwartz, 1992; Masters, 1993; Newton, 2006). Dahmer is considered a "type one", or a lust cannibal, by the Giordano and colleagues (2012) classification system. However, his case is similarly multifaceted. While Dahmer's motivation for cannibalism clearly had a lust component, as he would often become sexually excited while consuming parts of his victims, it also had a rich symbolism to him (Masters, 1993). Dahmer was quoted saying, "I suppose in an odd way it [cannibalism] made me feel as if they were even more a part of me." (Masters, 1993, p. 278). He felt that eating his victims caused them to "come alive in him" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 199), and that it would make him more powerful. This belief manifested in a sort of symbolic partialism, as he believed that eating the arms and hearts in particular of his victims would make him more powerful

(Purcell & Arrigo, 2006). This belief echoes the classification for the delusional cannibal. As with Chase, an overlap between cannibal “types” occurs here. It could be argued that Dahmer’s beliefs were an extension of his lust--a lust for power in addition to a sexual lust. Even if this is the case, it further reveals classification systems as flawed, as classification is then only a matter of coder opinion and therefore very subjective.

Even if these systems simply aim to classify offenders by their most striking characteristic, they still erase all but the offender’s primary motivation and reduce them and their actions to a one-word class. This is no way to understand the *entirety* of the offender. As such, while classification systems for offenders do exist, they will not be used in the present study.

Methods

The present study endeavored to examine the prevalence of the several similarities across documented cases of criminal cannibalism. Such characteristics included whether the offender was using illicit substances at the time of the crime, whether or not the offender had a psychotic disorder (such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder), whether the offender engaged in necrophilic activities, and whether the offender engaged in sexual assault prior to the victim’s death. The body parts consumed and the murder methods used by the offenders were also examined. In order to explore the level of brutality these offenders display, whether or not the offenders engaged in overkill was discussed. In an attempt to understand what kind of offenders these individuals usually are, it is discussed how many had multiple victims, consistent victim types, and multiple instances of cannibalism. Finally, it was investigated how many of these offenders had documented fixations on cannibalism prior to committing their crimes.

For the purposes of studying such an aberrant group, specific definitions were employed to operationalize otherwise ambiguous terms. As such, a new definition has been developed for the

ambiguous blanket term of “necrophilia”. Historically, the study of paraphilias has yielded multiple classification systems for necrophilia, such as those of Wulffen (1908), Krafft-Ebing (1998), and Jones (1931). Rosman and Resnick’s (1989) classification system is perhaps the most parsimonious of these, seeking to break necrophilic behavior into two groups--that of the genuine or “true” necrophile and that of the pseudonecrophile (perhaps better understood as an opportunistic necrophile). Aggrawal (2011) expanded upon these classification systems through a ten-tiered hierarchy of necrophilia, with Class IX pertaining specifically to homicidal necrophilia, wherein the necrophile is so driven by the urge to engage sexually with the dead that he is willing to go to the lengths of homicide. This class most closely fits the subjects of this study (Aggrawal, 2011). Due to the diversity of actions taken by the individuals in this study, a “catch-all” definition of necrophilia has been tailored. Behaviors included under the general term of necrophilia are as follows: Penetration (penial, digital, oral, fisting, or with a foreign object) of the vagina, anus, or mouth of the corpse; frotteurism; masturbation over or adjacent to the corpse; sexualized degradation and/or mutilation; licking, sucking, and/or biting of the corpse; copulation with the body’s viscera (splanchnophilia); sexualized positioning/posing; sexual gratification achieved from fetishistic tokens, such as body parts, underwear, or jewelry; taking sexualized pictures/videos for later masturbatory use; undressing of the body unnecessary for dismemberment; and sleeping alongside the corpse.

Similarly, the term overkill found itself in a state of ambiguity. For the sake of ease, overkill in this study has been largely summarized by Ressler and colleagues’ (1995) definition, which refers to overkill as “the infliction of more injury than is necessary to kill a person” (p. 55). In addition to this definition, and for the sake of the particular nature of these cases, this definition was extended into the treatment of the body after death as well. The definition of overkill for the present study includes mutilation of the victim’s body during the commission of or shortly follow-

ing the victim's murder, with the desecration of the body going beyond that which is necessary to kill the victim, and (in particular to the topic of cannibalistic offenders) beyond that which is necessary to dismember the body for butchering and/or disposal.

Books, documentaries, news articles, and journal articles for this study were located by searching for sources on cannibalism, serial murder, and violent murder. Through careful examination, relevant sources were selected. The online database PsycINFO and the library website of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte were also utilized in this research, with search terms including "cannibalism", "anthropophagy", "necrophagy", "human", and "cannibal". A list of 77 potential subjects was compiled. Offenders on this list were examined and many were eliminated due to insufficient proof of cannibalism. Ultimately a total of 26 offenders were selected for this study. All of the individuals studied are male. The historical span of these crimes range from 1903 to 2016. Murder method was broken down into four categories by frequency of use. None of the offenders in this study used more than four methods to dispatch victims, though some used the same method multiple times. Simple percentages were used to determine the prevalence of behaviors across these individuals.

Results

Table 1

Similarities across Offenders

| Name | Illicit substances | Psychotic disorder | Confirmed necrophilia | Sexual assault | Overkill | Multiple victims | Consistent victim type | Multiple cannibalized | Prior interest |
|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------|------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Bryan, Peter | | yes | | | yes | yes | yes | | yes |
| Bychkov, Alexander | | | | | yes | yes | yes | yes | |
| Chase, Richard | | yes | yes | | yes | yes | | yes | |
| Chikatilo, Andrei | | | yes | | yes | yes | | yes | yes |
| Clark, Bradfield | | | yes | | yes | | | | |
| Clark, Hadden | | yes | yes | | yes | yes | yes | yes | |
| Dahmer, Jeffrey | | | yes | yes | | yes | yes | yes | |
| Dengiz, Ozgur | | | | | | yes | yes | | yes |
| Denke, Karl | | | | | yes | yes | yes | yes | |
| Dzhumagaliev, Nikolai | | yes | | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | |
| Fentress, Albert | | | | yes | | | | | |
| Fish, Albert | | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Griffiths, Stephen | | | yes | | yes | yes | yes | yes | |
| Harrouff, Austin | | yes | | | yes | yes | | | yes |
| Kemper, Edmund | | | yes | | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Kroll, Joachim | | | yes | yes | | yes | | yes | |
| Meiwes, Armin | | | | | | | | | yes |
| Miyazaki, Tsutomu | | yes | yes | | | yes | yes | | |
| Morley, Anthony | | | | | yes | | | | |
| Oberhansley, Joseph | | | | | yes | yes | yes | | |
| Sagawa, Issei | | | yes | | | | | | yes |
| Sanchez, Otty | | yes | | | yes | | | | |
| Sappington, Marc | yes | yes | | | yes | yes | yes | yes | yes |
| Singleton, Antron | yes | | | | yes | | | | yes |
| Woodmansee, Michael | | | | yes | yes | | | | |
| Yoo, Young-Chul | | | | | yes | yes | yes | yes | |
| Total | 2 | 9 | 11 | 6 | 19 | 18 | 14 | 13 | 10 |
| Percent of total | 7.69 | 34.62 | 42.31 | 23.08 | 73.08 | 69.23 | 53.85 | 50.00 | 38.46 |

Note. This table displays a set of similarities across the offenders in the present study.

As shown in Table 1, of the 26 offenders it was found that only 7.69% (2) used an illicit substance at the time of their crimes. The illicit substance used in both of these cases was phenylclidine, or PCP. Nine, or 34.62%, of the offenders were diagnosed with a disorder that caused psychosis, with 11.54% (3) having insufficient data to make such a determination. Overkill was observed frequently amongst offenders in this study. A total of 73.08% (19) of all offenders displayed this behavior. Eighteen (69.23%) of the subjects had multiple victims. Interestingly, only 38.46% (10) of all offenders are known to have expressed a prior interest in cannibalism as a

concept, activity, or desire. The remaining 61.53% (16) lack sufficient information upon which to draw such conclusions.

Table 2

| <i>Sexual Conduct</i> | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Name | Genitals/ breasts | Necrophilia | Sexual assault |
| Bryan, Peter | | | |
| Bychkov, Alexander | | | |
| Chase, Richard | | yes | |
| Chikatilo, Andrei | yes | yes | |
| Clark, Bradfield | yes | yes | |
| Clark, Hadden | | yes | |
| Dahmer, Jeffrey | | yes | yes |
| Dengiz, Ozgur | | | |
| Denke, Karl | | | |
| Dzhumagaliev, Nikolai | yes | | yes |
| Fentress, Albert | yes | | yes |
| Fish, Albert | yes | yes | yes |
| Griffiths, Stephen | | yes | |
| Harrouff, Austin | | | |
| Kemper, Edmund | | yes | |
| Kroll, Joachim | | yes | yes |
| Meiwes, Armin | yes | | |
| Miyazaki, Tsutomu | | yes | |
| Morley, Anthony | | | |
| Oberhansley, Joseph | | | |
| Sagawa, Issei | yes | yes | |
| Sanchez, Otty | | | |
| Sappington, Marc | | | |
| Singleton, Antron | | | |
| Woodmansee, Michael | | | yes |
| Yoo, Young-Chul | | | |
| Total | 8 | 11 | 6 |
| Percent of total | 30.77 | 42.31 | 23.08 |

Note. This table demonstrates the presence of sexualized conduct in the offenders, as well as the overlap of these behaviors in the individual offenders.

As shown in Table 2, many of the subjects in this study engaged in various sexual acts

with their victims' bodies in addition to consuming sexualized body parts. While a confirmed 42.31% (11) of offenders engaged in necrophilia, only 23.03% (6) engaged in confirmed acts of sexual assault prior to death, and only 11.54% (3) of the total sample engaged in both sexual assault prior to the victim's death and necrophilia. In total, 26.92% (7) of the offenders consumed the genitalia/breasts of their victims, with 57.14% (4) of these also engaging in necrophilia and 28.57% (2) also engaging in sexual assault prior to death.

Table 3

| <i>Body Parts Consumed</i> | | |
|----------------------------|-------|---------|
| Part | Total | Percent |
| Leg | 8 | 30.77 |
| Genitals/breast | 7 | 26.92 |
| Face | 5 | 19.23 |
| Blood | 4 | 15.38 |
| Brain | 4 | 15.38 |
| Arm | 3 | 11.54 |
| Buttocks | 3 | 11.54 |
| Heart | 3 | 11.54 |
| Liver | 3 | 11.54 |
| Hand | 2 | 7.69 |
| Lungs | 2 | 7.69 |
| Belly | 1 | 3.85 |
| Chest | 1 | 3.85 |
| Foot | 1 | 3.85 |
| Kidneys | 1 | 3.85 |
| Unspecified | 9 | 34.62 |

Note. This table demonstrates the rates at which specific parts of the body were consumed by offenders.

Despite the high prevalence of genital/breast consumption, Table 3 shows that these were not the most frequently consumed part of the body. The leg was consumed at the highest frequency at 30.77% (8). Pieces of the face follow, being consumed by 19.23% (5) of offenders. The brain was consumed by 15.38% (4) of the total offenders, as was blood. Other body parts, such

as the chest, belly, arm, hand, foot, and internal organs were consumed at a lower frequency. A considerable 34.62% (9) of the offenders consumed parts of the body that were unspecified.

Table 4

| <i>Murder Method</i> | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|----------|-------------|
| Name | Primary | Secondary | Tertiary | Quaternary |
| Bryan, Peter | bludgeoning | | | |
| Bychkov, Alexander | bludgeoning | stabbing | | |
| Chase, Richard | shooting | | | |
| Chikatilo, Andrei | strangulation | stabbing | | |
| Clark, Bradfield | mutilation | - | - | - |
| Clark, Hadden | stabbing | | | |
| Dahmer, Jeffrey | strangulation | stabbing | beating | |
| Dengiz, Ozgur | shooting | | | |
| Denke, Karl | axing | | | |
| Dzhumagaliev, Nikolai | axing | | | |
| Fentress, Albert | shooting | - | - | - |
| Fish, Albert | strangulation | mutilation | | |
| Griffiths, Stephen | crossbow | stabbing | | |
| Harrouff, Austin | stabbing | | | |
| Kemper, Edmund | shooting | strangulation | stabbing | slit throat |
| Kroll, Joachim | strangulation | | | |
| Meiwes, Armin | stabbing | - | - | - |
| Miyazaki, Tsutomu | strangulation | | | |
| Morley, Anthony | slit throat | - | - | - |
| Oberhansley, Joseph | stabbing | | | |
| Sagawa, Issei | shooting | - | - | - |
| Sanchez, Otty | decapitation | - | - | - |
| Sappington, Marc | stabbing | shooting | | |
| Singleton, Antron | stabbing | - | - | - |
| Woodmansee, Michael | stabbing | - | - | - |
| Yoo, Young-Chul | decapitation | bludgeoning | | |

Note. This table displays the murder methods utilized by offenders. As some offenders killed multiple victims in different ways, the frequency of methods utilized are displayed here.

^a As not all offenders had multiple victims, those who killed only once are designated in columns after the primary column with a dash.

As shown in Table 4, the methods used by offenders to kill their victims were placed in four categories: Primary method, secondary method, tertiary method, and quaternary method. Of the overall offenders, 30.77% (8) had only committed one murder, therefore restricting them to the primary method category. As displayed in Table 5, in the primary and secondary categories stabbing was the most frequently utilized method.

Discussion

The general absence of illicit substance use was of interest, as it demonstrated that this behavior is not usually the result of illegal drugs in the system. Both offenders to have used illicit drugs at the time of their attacks also had previous noted interest in cannibalism. This suggests that they were already intrigued by the subject, and therefore that the drugs likely functioned only to lower their inhibitions rather than as the impetus for their actions.

The majority of offenders in this study were not diagnosed with any mental disorders that may cause psychosis or psychotic episodes. Four of the nine who did have such a diagnosis were also the only recorded individuals in this study who consumed blood specifically, suggesting the presence of clinical vampirism (Prins, 1984). As clinical vampirism is often seen alongside psychotic disorders, this follows (Prins, 1985).

There is a fairly large prevalence of confirmed necrophiles in this study. This behavior is almost twice as prevalent as instances of confirmed sexual assault prior to death. Consumption of the genitalia/breasts of victims was also fairly common among both the necrophile group (36.36%) and the sexual assault group (33.33%). Only one of the 26 total offenders consumed the genitals of his victim without sexually assaulting the victim or engaging in necrophilia with the body--and it should be noted that this individual engaged in consensual sex with his victim prior to their death. These data suggest a potential internal semiosis associated with the consumption of

specific parts of the victims' bodies. This concept has found some recognition by researchers such as Aggrawal (2011), who has identified that almost any part of the body may bring about sexual gratification when consumed. The semiotics of these choices warrants further investigation, as it may shed light on offenders' perceptions of their decisions, as well as their views on sex and intimacy.

Beyond the realm of only sexuality, the symbolism of part consumption can be well-illustrated through examination of some cases. As previously discussed, Dahmer placed particular significance on the hearts and muscular arms of his victims, believing that these parts of the body were imbued with a special life and vitality and would make him more powerful (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006). This suggests that there is a symbolic importance to consumption for these offenders. For example, one of the two individuals to consume the hands of a victim had a severe deformity of his own hands. The significance of the selection of any body part is likely best understood through exploration of the individual offenders' cognitions and perceptions of self and others. It is this author's contention that interview of these offenders is necessary to attain this kind of understanding.

An impressive 73.08% (19) of offenders engaged in overkill of their victims. Some degree of excessive violence is to be expected in cases of cannibalism, as the act itself necessitates the butchering of the victim's body. This supports the finding of Lester and colleagues (2015) that cannibals are more brutal than their non-cannibal peers. Future studies should venture to compare these groups. Of the overall sample of offenders in this study, stabbing was consistently the preferred murder method. The high prevalence of stabbing in these cases functions as further evidence that there is a sexual component to these crimes, as it has been found that stabbing, particularly multiple stabbings, often takes place when a murder is sexually-motivated (Radojević et al., 2013).

Though some of the offenders only had one victim, those who had multiple victims had a consistent victim type 77.78% of the time. They also consumed parts from more than one victim 72.22% of the time, perhaps indicating that cannibalism, if not a motivation for the murders themselves, was at least a desirable outcome for the offender. This may also mean that the introduction of cannibalism to a repeat offender's behavior may be indicative of escalation. Despite this large prevalence of repeat cannibals, only 10 of the 26 overall offenders are documented as having expressed previous interest in cannibalism. The absence of data here is once again significant. Criminal cannibalism is necessarily a very intentional act. Even if murder can be accidental, one must either *want to* or *feel obligated to* engage in cannibalism. Therefore, the lack of information about whether or not individuals expressed an interest in cannibalism prior to their crimes illustrates that there is a lack of information about these individuals' cognitions and motivations.

As has been displayed repeatedly, there exists a considerable deficit of insight into how these offenders think. This author posits that this void could be glutted by using empirical phenomenological interview techniques with these offenders. Such interviewing would encourage the individual to share their perceptions about what they have done and how they felt about it (Skrapek, 2001), and would therefore go far in answering many of the unknowns about offenders of this kind.

Limitations

There are important limitations to the present study. The research gathered for this study comes from a collection of news articles, books, online articles, scholarly journal articles, and documentaries. Such resources, while carefully selected to be as reliable as possible, may exaggerate the facts of these cases due to their sensational nature. It is similarly possible that journalistic reporting may not accurately represent the nuance of some cases and may lack the rigor of scholarly articles. In addition, in some cases certain details of the crimes were not released due to

sealed records. For this reason, the extent of some of the offenders' crimes may not be known to the public, and therefore are not taken into account in the present study.

Cases utilized in this study span over 100 years. During this time, the fields of psychology and criminology have grown and changed. Because of this, some psychiatric diagnoses may not meet current diagnostic standards, as they were issued before the release of the most recent edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

The majority (50.00%) of the offenders in this study are from the United States. This limits the generalizability of these results. Inclusion of cases from more countries should be considered in future studies. In addition, this study does not examine if the country in which the crime is committed has any effect on the characteristics of crimes. It may be of interest to future researchers to examine how trends in this behavior vary by country.

This study lacks a comparison group of non-cannibal violent offenders, and therefore the prevalence of the variables examined are unknown in the violent offender population. The present study also does not delve deeply into demographic breakdown of its sample. Future studies may wish to endeavor more thoroughly into the kinds of individuals who engage in these behaviors rather than exploring only the characteristics of their crimes.

Conclusions

This exploration of criminal cannibalism has revealed similarities across male offenders of this kind. In particular, it examines the sexualized nature of cannibalism and raises questions as to why offenders choose to consume the parts of the body that they do. The high prevalence of overkill among these offenders suggests a level of aggression and hostility.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the limited extant data on criminal cannibalism and attempts to advocate for the utilization of empirical phenomenology in the interview process of

this type of offender. It suggests there may exist internalized symbolism about the consumption of different parts of the body, and that there may be a deeper meaning to criminal cannibalism yet to be explored. Research going forward should endeavor to understand these individuals in the context of their thoughts and feelings on their behaviors. In order to understand the true motivations behind these bizarre acts, it is necessary to qualitatively explore the interior and subjective experiences of these offenders.

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