

The Influence of Society in Forming the Serial Killer`s Mind in the Series ‘Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story (2022)’

تأثير المجتمع في تكوين عقل القاتل المتسلسل في مسلسل "دامر-وحش: قصة جيفري دامر (2022)"

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Abstract:

This study explores the effect of society in forming the mind of the serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer by revealing its psychological influence on the conducts of the individual. This research aims to answer the question how Jeffrey Dahmer transforms from an innocent child to a criminal by focusing on the social influences in his childhood. One of the main purposes that stands behind this inquiry is exploring the mind of this serial killer in his early life, who is an archetype that has not received enough attention in studying it from different perspectives. What is common is accusing the offender as the only guilty person; however, this paper aims to study the criminal from another perspective. This research digs deep in the childhood of the character to explore what exists behind violence. The main suggested hypothesis is that social institutions are involved in Jeffrey Dahmer`s transformation into a killer by creating psychological issues in his childhood. This hypothesis is investigated through qualitative content analysis, in which psychoanalytic theory is chosen to study the character`s mind. The research is based on deconstructing the series` scenes and analyzing them by using cinematography techniques, thematic analysis, and symbolism. Conducting this research is for the aim of promoting awareness about the effect of social institutions. The study results in revealing valuable information about the impact of social abuse that goes unnoticed in relationships. Jeffrey Dahmer is evidence of the failure of society in keeping humane atmosphere in the interaction between individuals.

Keywords: individual, childhood, psychoanalytic, society, cinematography.

ملخص:

تستكشف هذه الدراسة تأثير المجتمع في تكوين عقل السفاح جيفري دامر من خلال الكشف عن تأثيره النفسي على سلوك الفرد. يهدف هذا البحث للإجابة على سؤال كيف يتحول جيفري دامر من طفل بريء إلى مجرم من خلال التركيز على التأثيرات الاجتماعية في طفولته. أحد الاهداف الرئيسية التي تقف وراء هذا البحث هو استكشاف عقل هذا القاتل المتسلسل في بدايات حياته، والذي يعد موضوعا لم يحظ باهتمام كافٍ في دراسته من وجهات نظر مختلفة. الشائع هو اتهام الجاني بأنه المذنّب الوحيد، ولكن هذا العمل يدرس المجرم من منظور آخر دون التقليل من أفعاله القاسية. يتعمق هذا البحث في طفولة الشخصية لاستكشاف ما يقف وراء العنف. الفرضية الرئيسية المقترحة هي أن المؤسسات الاجتماعية

متورطة في تحول جيفري دامر إلى قاتل متسلسل من خلال خلق مشاكل نفسية في طفولته. يتم التحقيق في هذه الفرضية من خلال تحليل المحتوى، حيث يتم اختيار نهج التحليل النفسي لدراسة الشخصية. يعتمد البحث على تفكيك مشاهد المسلسل وتحليلها باستخدام تقنيات التصوير السينمائي والرمزية. يهدف إجراء هذا البحث إلى نشر الوعي حول تأثير المؤسسات الاجتماعية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يطمح البحث إلى زعزعة أيديولوجية تجريم الشخص المدان الوحيد الظاهر باعتباره الظالم الوحيد في الموقف. نتج عن الدراسة الكشف عن الكثير من المعلومات حول تأثير الإساءة الاجتماعية التي تمر دون أن يلاحظها أحد في العلاقات. جيفري دامر دليل على فشل المجتمع في الحفاظ على الجو الإنساني في التفاعل بين الأفراد.

كلمات مفتاحية: الفرد، مرحلة الطفولة، التحليل النفسي، المجتمع، تصوير سينمائي.

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Introduction:

The successful media production of the true story of the American serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer through Netflix has not exposed the cruelty of murdering as much as revealing the failure of society in this postmodern age. This media production titled 'Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story' (Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan, 2022) is an American biographical crime drama limited series co-created by Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan, which premiered on Netflix on September 21, 2022. According to several journals, the series, constituted of ten episodes, is regarded as one of the most successful works aired on Netflix up to now. This is confidently stated as today's statistics have become more accurate with the spread of conventional cable TV streaming platforms like Netflix. To explain this, the editor Quinn Hough, a senior writer at the Screen Rant media website, claims that Netflix delivers its content digitally through subscription streaming service all over the world, which permits tracking the viewership statistics much more accurately than broadcast television (Hough, 2022). This offers better data transparency through measuring the total watched hours on the platform. Marco Vito Oddo is another journalist who writes for Collider, which is an entertainment website and a company that focuses on film industry, television series, and video games, states: 'one of the best ways to measure a series' success is to take the total hours viewed and divide it by the series' total runtime. That way, we can better understand how many households tuned in for a show'. In the case of this series, he claims that the show has 496 million hours watched in two weeks (Oddo, 2022). Dividing that by the series' 8.8 hours runtime, it means 56 million households, Netflix accounts shared by people who live together. In fact, the work that is praised by audience and critics' positive reviews owes its success to several factors. However, the power is in showing how an innocent child transforms to a serial murderer who practices dismemberment, necrophilia, and cannibalism as the result of social influences. The transformation of this character is studied through psychoanalytic approach for the aim of analyzing how members of society influence the mind of the individual and therefore changing his thoughts and acts.

The main inquiry of this study is answering the question how Jeffrey Dahmer transforms from an innocent child to a criminal. This leads to the formation of other sub-questions starting by what are the influencing factors that cause the psychological and mental changes of this character. What drives him to kill other people? What leads Jeffrey to perform awful practices to the dead corpses? What are the possible solutions that may occur to stop such an act? The questions reflect the purposes of conducting this research: one of them is exploring the childhood of this serial killer. The latter is regarded an archetype that has not received enough attention in studying it from different perspectives. What is usually known is accusing the offender as the only guilty person in this situation; what about trying to investigate what and/or who are the other guilty persons and institutions? Without undermining, the evilness of his crimes and the aggressive offences charged against him, this research explores what stands behind this violence. What has brought Jeffrey Dahmer to such a state of being? This is also an explanatory research, since it has intended to explain the reasons of the character's becoming a criminal throughout the story as well as drawing the correlations between the studied concepts. The study suggests hypotheses for the stated research questions, which need to be investigated through analytical theories. The main hypothesis is that social institutions are involved in Jeffrey Dahmer's transformation into a serial killer. In addition, the research suggests that psychological issues exist behind the motives of murdering. Not handling the hardship of these problems has exacerbated the state of mind of the character and has derived him to develop extreme violent acts. The initial view for the proposed solution is not underestimating the powerful influence

of society as well as dealing with psychological problems before its harmful development. Conducting this research is for the aim of promoting awareness about the effect of the social institution. Another aim is unsettling if not changing the stereotypes or commonsense ideologies of criminalizing the only apparent convicted criminal as the sole wrongdoer in the whole situation. Moreover, evoking the humanness sense in understanding the other different kinds of individuals by taking a close look on their lives' circumstances and personal motives including psychological disturbances, which is part of the significance of this study.

The sort of questioning in this study position the research in a qualitative content analysis that is defined as a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research is particularly useful to learn inductively about a social phenomenon from the perspective of individuals and small groups. It allows us to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, people, or artifacts, build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life, or to study the meanings embedded in texts (Leavy, 2017). This approach values people's subjective experiences and meaning making processes. Out of this kind of analysis, the study chooses psychoanalytic theory to answer the research principal inquiry along with its sub-questions that involves tracing the psychological changes of the anti-hero Jeffrey. In other words, this research relates the surrounding societal behaviors during Dahmer's childhood with the resulted psychological changes of his mind. The study attempts to understand the influence of society in creating aspects of criminality that appear later in other stages of his life through understanding his mind as a child. Here, the analysis depends on the views of several sociologists and psychoanalytic theorists such as Sigmund Freud.

This theoretical framework requires an appropriate methodological plan to approach the research inquires. This is paramount for ensuring reliable and valid results that address the aims and objectives. The methodology is founded on taking the series' scenes to focus on its explicit content as well as digging deep to process the implicit data that requires interpretation. Extracting data leads the process of research to another phase: organizing and classifying the collected data into categories that represent the studied themes such as the social and the psychological factors. This is referred to as coding data that comes before the interpretation process that identifies the existed concepts and relate it to each other, which is in a way relational analysis. Submerging in the analysis of the coded data enables the formulation of results. Here, one can produce an interpretation based on the founded proofs using different strategies.

The theoretical framework of the study includes several schools of thought that create its paradigm. This includes postmodernism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction that overlap with each other in investigating the discourses that normalize dominant ideology. Patricia Leavy explains, 'Those lines of thinking that become so "taken-for-granted" that people may fail to realize that they are power-laden discourses' (Leavy, 2017). This concern for challenging dominant ideology leads the path of this investigation to tackle different research areas developing an interdisciplinary study that intersects between sociology and psychology as well as other fields. In Leavy's book 'Research Design', the writer states that Jacques Derrida, a pioneer in post-structuralism, has promoted a strategy of critical deconstruction as a way to break down unities to expose what has been rendered invisible (Leavy, 2017). This is similar to Poststructuralist method in focusing on breaking down unified narratives to see how dominant ideology works. These theories are applied to media production as well as language, which are constructive for the research in providing analytical insight into human thought and discourse.

The material of this work is the recent produced work titled *Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story (2022)* explores the development of the character Dahmer throughout his childhood. The producers' faithful and professional portrayal of the killer's true story deals with different sides of the story; however, it concentrates more on how Dahmer becomes a monster, which has not been the focus of the crime series and movies before. The audience is not attracted by cannibalism as much as astonished from watching a different side of the criminal; knowing more about how he becomes a killer. From this point, the series deals with the harmful society and its destructive effects to the character. Without neglecting his criminal acts, the work shows the way that has enabled him to escape the police forces for a long time and continue killing gay men and people of color. The successful TV work does not exclude his horrifying acts from the screen such as cannibalism, necrophilia, and dismemberment. The closure of his story is arresting him for killing at least 17 people between the years of 1978 and 1991. This makes him one of the deadliest serial killers in U.S. history, known as the Milwaukee cannibal. This role is performed by Evan Peters who is on the top of the series' cast that gathers talented actors. One of them is Niecy Nash who stars as Dahmer's neighbor Glenda Cleveland, the first one who tried to get the attention of the police. Besides, the cast includes Richard Jenkins, Penelope Ann Miller, Molly Ringwald, Michael Learned, Colin Ford, and Shaun J. Brown. As far as the film analysis is concerned, this study uses the cinematography techniques as tools to deconstruct the scenes for the thematic and the linguistic analysis. Symbolism is also employed to extract the hidden meanings projected through the series' scenes.

1. Review of Literature:

The series '*Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story (2022)*' encompasses large subject area that includes biographical drama, true crime thriller anthology and psychology because it is a true story that groups different dimensions. Dealing with the psychological development of a criminal during his childhood has been the interest of researchers, critics and several TV and cinema directors. Stephen J. Giannangelo, special agent and criminal psychologist, has produced a famous book titled *Real-Life Monsters, A Psychological Examination of the Serial Murderer* (Giannangelo, 2012). This work presents an in-depth psychological analysis of the development of the serial killer personality including Dahmer. The author shows that the serial murders have been exposed during their childhood to clinical, psychological, societal influences that have created foundation for violent behavior.

An exquisite approach to the psychology of criminals studying Dahmer is dealt by the United Kingdom's top experts including Ray Bull, Claire Cooke, Ruth Hatcher and many others in a book titled *Criminal Psychology* (Bull, Claire Cooke, Hatcher, Wood, & Grant, 2016). It demonstrates how understanding the mind can be a key tool in the fight against criminality. This work directly examines the criminal behaviors as reactions to lived experiences that have to be taken under microscopic lenses. The authors provide the needed research methods and theories underpinning modern criminal psychology. Furthermore, the mind of the criminal is studied from another influencing factor: society. This is well examined through Donna Youngs's book *Crime and Society* that reveals other layers of the killer's complex mind in showing the behaviors created by social experiences (Youngs D. , 2018). This work takes this subject to another level that questions the environment of the criminal starting from family as the first institution. Youngs (2018) suggests that social institutions do not perform professional and adequate handling of individual's experienced issues in an early stage. Not just by studying the case of Jeffrey Dahmer but also other criminals, she

proves that failure of communication at the level of societal interaction is one of the main reasons behind the creation of the criminal mind.

Concerning Ryan Murphy's produced recent Netflix series, it has attracted the attention of critics, directors, and producers which has led to its several award nominations. The series was present at the 80th Golden Globe Awards where it was nominated for the best limited or anthology series or television film as well as other categories. In this ceremony, Evan Peters has won the award for best actor in his leading performance as Jeffrey Dahmer. Journalists from different media companies have conducted interviews with the series' director and cast such as the journalist Kayla Cobb. She writes in the Decider, website created by The *New York Post* newspaper, 'the show isn't just well directed, written, and acted. It is rewriting what a crime drama can look like if we stop glorifying murderers and start focusing more on systematic failures (Cobb, 2022).' This new Netflix series has been the subject of the BBC editors Helen Bushby & Ian Youngs. The latter expresses their criticism in showing how the work maintains the balanced focus on the criminal as well as the victims. In their critique, they praise the well-grounded production that reflects the ineptitude of the police and the damage that Dahmer left in his wake (Youngs, 2022). In short, the recent produced literature and media in this subject area requires further study to cover the existed research gaps in investigating the case of the criminal Jeffrey Dahmer in relation with the influence of society during his childhood.

1. The Childhood's Influencing Social Factors in the Creation of the Serial Killer's Mind

1.1 The Effects of Jeffrey Dahmer's Troubled Family

In the case of the series' protagonist, the term family loses its meaning when his parents are most of the time absent or more focused on their selfish lives; as a result, they neglect their child who grows developing unstable personality. Through the screen, the directors portray the parents as busy persons interested in creating a life that does not encompass their child enough. In the case of the father, he is immersed in his job that requires being distanced from home for days. Achieving one's personal and professional success on the cost of the children's physical and psychological health is not considered a responsible act that reflects parenthood. The parent's absence is one of the reasons of diminishing the solidity of the family unit; however, missing a parent because of the long hours of work is not the only reason. As far as the mother is concerned, she is depicted as uncaring person who is ignorant about the important duties and values of motherhood. She does not know how to be a mother because she has not been convinced and prepared for the experience of pregnancy, birth giving, and upbringing a child. Through several scenes, she is shown as a person who struggles with her unstable psychological state that leads her to gradually being addicted to painkillers that ultimately culminates to drug consumption. Having distanced parent is not as harmful as growing up under the care of a mother who suffers from drug addiction that is considered as one of the stronger factors that stand behind the children's neglect. This media production also deals with another destroying phenomenon founded in Dahmer's family house which is the troubling relationship of the married couple, husband and wife. This damages the relationship of parents, father and mother, who lose their sense of responsibility towards their children and become busy with their personal conflicts. This may culminates to divorce: the destruction of the family unit, which is exactly what happens with Jeffrey Dahmer at the age of 17years old. The separation of his parents leaves him as a lonely lost adolescent

traumatized by the destruction of his family. He is abandoned by both of his parents who carried on their lives separately leaving their son alone to figure out his way.

One of the traumatizing events that happens in the childhood of the protagonist is his mother's attempt of suicide that leaves grained painful memories in his mind. This damaging affect is studied by Nathaniel Branden who is a Canadian–American psychotherapist and writer known for his work in the psychology of self-esteem. He argues in his well-known work *Six Pillars of Self-Esteem* (1995), 'the greater a child's terror, and the earlier it is experienced, the harder it becomes to develop a strong and healthy sense of self' (Branden, 1995). As stated by this psychotherapist, experiencing a terrifying incident during childhood affects the stable healthy development of one's self, which is unfortunately the case of Dahmer. This event has transformed the character leaving enormous ravages in the psychology of this child. This is cinematically produced through an emotional dramatic scene where Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan manifest their talents in bringing their vision of the event to reality. The scene starts at (03.28) from the second episode when little Jeff goes back from school and enters the house finding his little baby brother crying alone. He continues making his way in the house silently looking for his mother who seems absent. He goes to her room where he finds her lying on bed looking as a dead body. This shot timed at (04.26) reflects skillful use of cinematographic techniques in the visual storytelling. The image of facing Dahmer who tries to touch the body of his mother conveys several meanings besides its straightforward reality. This technique is a powerful storytelling tool that is based on implying hidden coded messages. The used visual design in constructing the frame is evidently not accidental. Every element of color and shadow is there for a purpose, and its part in the visual and storytelling scheme has been carefully thought out. (Brown, 2016)

Concerning lighting, it is an important aspect that not only shapes the mood of the scene but can also be used symbolically. In this scene, a table lamp is used as a low-key lighting source that creates Warm soft light in the room. It is positioned in its entrance on a cupboard, on the right of the characters. The producers use a medium close up shot that takes the mother's body lying in the front, from the head to the waist, and the child at the back. The camera's lenses catches the diffused sidelight on the mother's left half face revealing her numbed beautiful facial features and burring the other right half in the shadows. This type of lighting creates strong contrast between light and shadow generating a dramatic and intense atmosphere full of mystery. Additionally, this contrast between shadow and light symbolizes the struggle between life and death inside the character's body which is tumbling down due to an overdose of drugs. Jeff touches her cold face with his little finger figuring out her critical state that needs help. He tries to manage his fear and call immediately the ambulance, which is a clever, courageous, and humane act by a little lonely child. He saves his mother's life who returns from hospital to continue her neglecting treatment that ends up with abandoning him at the age of 17 after getting divorced. What can be expected from such an inhumane and brutal treatment to a little child is becoming an unstable adult if not a monster.

Concerning the used colors of the scene, the cinematographers set gloomy sad tone by using light dark green, brown, and black. Without going deep in the psychology of colors, they symbolize insecurity and melancholy. Though the film is produced with colors, it reflects them in a dark way, which is a style called 'color noir' or desaturation. Colors seem to be drained out of their natural effect to the eyes, which is a technique used by cinematographers who take away the richness of colors for special effects according to a published article in Flick Side website titled *How Films Use Color to Tell A Story* (Sarkar, 2021)

Figure N° 1. The Mother's Suicide Attempt



Source: *Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* series: Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan, 2022, episode 2nd, (04.26)

The scene's powerful dramatic effect brings audience close to the damaged psychological state of the child who is influenced by his familial issues. In fact, the institution of family is responsible for the emotional oppression of Dahmer. According to Jack Rosewood, in his book titled *Edmund Kemper: The True Story of The Co-ed Killer* (2015), he states: 'children can either develop deep-seeded rage or create for themselves a fantasy world where everything is perfect, and they are essentially the kings of their self-made castle' (Rosewood, 2015). According to criminologists who have worked on Jeffrey Dahmer's real story, this person has created a self-made world for himself in his chaotic life that he could not change or control. This need for control has been clearly revealed much later in a conversation with Dahmer inserted in Jack Rosewood's book, Dahmer says: 'After I left the home, that's when I started wanting to create my own little world, where I was the one who had complete control,' Dahmer added on his saying, "I just took it way too far." (Rosewood, 2015)

1.2 Exposing Jeffrey Dahmer to Inappropriate Activity During Childhood

This scene is framed in a garage where Dahmer and his father dissect a body of a dead raccoon, which reflects the only hobby shared with his father through the series episodes. The filmmakers position the camera behind the backs of the characters to create a third person point of view (POV), audience, which is a key tool of visual storytelling. (Brown, 2016) Once the camera position is set, there is still a decision to be made, which is that of how much of view is to be included. This is achieved by using lens selection that catches the view of Dahmer and his Father sitting next to a table side by side. They seem to be undergoing scientific experience of biology by cutting the animal's stomach with a sharp knife and extracting its internal organs. Through wide angle, the producers include the garage's material equipment, the dead body, and the actors while excluding the rest. The lens perspective portray these objects and characters to the human view by showing the developing father and son relationship between them. The chosen perception of the movement from the lens is heightened which expands the space that shows the objects distant and much smaller. This makes audience concentrating on the characters who seem close to the viewer's eyes and notice their intimate relationship. This directionality is a key element of visual weight in narrowing down the focus of audience to the central studied themes. (Brown, 2016)



Source: *Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* series: Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan, 2022, episode 2nd, (14.53)

The characters face each other discussing the experiment which makes them in a symmetrical position around the dead animal as an axis directed to the audience's view. Performing this experiment during night in the dark garage is a horrifying experience especially for a little child. The place is lightened by only a desk lamp concentrated on the animal's body. However, Dahmer does not seem afraid from cutting the animal's skin, touching the intestines, and holding the heart. Despite the dangerousness of this experiment, Dahmer seems enjoying this task because it is the only activity shared with his father. This becomes an interesting hobby in the protagonist's childhood that has permitted him developing close relationship with his father by spending time searching for dead thrown animals on roads. Then, they take them to the garage to perform a biological experiment discovering the details of the animal's anatomy. Regardless of developing a close father-son relationship during childhood, the hobby has created an inclination to perform violent practices to dead animals by using risky tools. This kind of acts has been accepted and then developed in the mind of the character to reach a state in his adulthood when he kills male individuals after failing in developing social relationships with women. As a desperate way to keep people close to him, he commits horrible practices such as dismemberment, necrophilia, and cannibalism to the murdered men that are kept in his house.

Harold Schechter, an American true crime writer who specializes in serial killers, writes: "Animal torture isn't a stage. It's a rehearsal," (Rosewood, 2015) studies has shown that most of serial killers started torturing animals from a young age. The series' antihero is educated to perform this cruel way on dead animal bodies. Jack Rosewood writes in his book Edmund Kemper: The True Story of The Co-ed Killer, 'The child becomes sociopathic because the normal development of the concepts of right and wrong and empathy towards others is retarded because the child's emotional and social development occurs within his self-centered fantasies.' (Rosewood, 2015). Further in his work, the writer argues, 'A person can do no wrong in his own world and the pain of others is of no consequence when the purpose of the fantasy world is to satisfy the needs of one person' (Rosewood, 2015). The scholar's claims explain the deep effect of the social and psychological development of the child that grows with untreated issues within his mind.

1.3 The Social Influences in School:

In school, like other students, Dahmer expresses his empathy towards his teacher by offering her a present. This happens in one of the scenes of the second episode where the director constructs a powerful frame, which is the still image that composes the complete moving picture. As Blain Brown explains it: 'selecting the frame is the fundamental act of filmmaking; as filmmakers, we must direct the audience's attention: "look here, now look at this, now over here..." Choosing the frame is a matter of conveying the story, but it is also a question of composition, rhythm, and perspective.' (Brown, 2016) This research takes the shot timed at (06:50), after the two first entering students to the class put red apples on the teacher's desk whereas Dahmer delightfully puts a bottle that contains a living tadpoles swimming in water.

Figure N° 3. The Strange Present



Source: *Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story* series: Ryan Murphy and Ian Brennan, 2022, episode 2nd, (06.48)

The camera moves to show both of the students and teacher's reactions which are captured through wide angle. By using a medium shot, audience can notice all the characters' reactions including the students' sarcastic glances, the teacher's unpleasant look, Dahmer's happy face who seems unaware about their response. Then, the director moves the camera to the position of little Dahmer, which places the audience in the situation of this character. Here, the director cleverly uses low angle that has an efficient effect explained by Blain Brown: 'With low angles, the subject tends to dominate us. If the subject is a character, that actor will seem more powerful and dominant. Any time the actor being viewed is meant to be menacing or frightening to the character' (Brown, 2016). This shows the teacher as a frightening and dominant force to this child. In Polar Pro filters filmmaking website, Carly San Filippo defines this technique: 'A low-angle shot is when the camera is positioned low on the vertical axis, below the level of the eye line, and looks up at an object or subject above.' (Filippo, 2020) Concerning its function, Filippo argues 'This camera angle evokes a psychological effect by making the subject above, in which the camera is angled at, looks strong and powerful. In addition, the use of a low angle shot can make the 'hero' of your film seem vulnerable and causes the viewer to have a relatable feeling to a character that usually seems unstoppable.' (Filippo, 2020) This filmmaking technique brings the character Dahmer closer to the audience; therefore, he moves their sensibility. The latter is reinforced through a short dialogue between the teacher and Dahmer about this weird present. The teacher says, 'Jeff, what is that?' The camera moves to take high shot showing Dahmer as vulnerable little child looking up with a wide smile to the teacher.

After Jeff's innocent answer: 'they are tadpoles, for you', The teacher does not thank him in the same way she does with the other students.

The director concentrates on a shot that holds a powerful symbolic meaning. The camera focuses on two red apples, a bottle of tadpoles, a pen holder organized on a teacher's desk that separates the teacher from the students. Here, the choice of each item, position, color is made for reason to target certain connotations and symbolism. To succeed in filming this shot, the director uses a close up shot to put the audience in front of the teacher's desk to see the details of the presented organized objects that convey the themes of the movie. The filmmaker evokes the emotional state by using close up shot that reveals details or/ and information about objects of the film's setting. (Filippo, 2020)

It is exquisite to pay attention to the visual balance of the elements that are included in this frame because they hold symbolic value to the storytelling. According to Blair, balance is an important part of the visual composition of the scene in which every element has a visual weight. Achieving balance depends on the right organization of the used objects that construct the scene. Such balance is based on its size, but it is also affected by its position in the frame, its color, movement, and the subject matter itself. This studied shot is composed of two identical fruits, red apples, given by Dahmer's class peers. This may show how they conform to the social standards known by society because they both think about the same present. Additionally, in an article published in Symbolism and Metaphor website titled Red Apple Symbolism & Meaning, The red apple has been used for its symbolism in many pop culture references. A commonly known version of this is in the Disney film, Snow White. The witch offers Snow White a poisoned apple, which she eats and soon falls into a deep sleep. (Jessica, 2020) This signifies the harmful treatment of society compared to a poisoning fruit. On the contrary, Dahmer offers a different weird gift, a bottle of living tadpoles, amphibian aquatic animals that transform to frogs. His choice reflects a different mindset that thinks about offering a living moving creature, which is kept for the appreciation of its natural animal features not consumption like apples.

According to another article published in Symbolism and Metaphor website, tadpole is a symbol of transformation. In German classical literature, The Frog Prince tale from Brothers Grimm fairytales (1812) reflects this animal as a prince enchanted by a witch's spell and cannot return to the normal human form. However, when a princess befriends him, she manages to remove this spell by kissing the animal, which allows the prince to return to his human form. (Chris, 2020) In this series' episode, the tadpole animal represent little Jeff who is in a complicated state due to his family problems, and he aspires for help just like the princess' kiss to be like other kids enjoying a normal childhood. The shot also shows a penholder full of colored pencils that carries symbolic significance. Since the object is generally founded on desks for writing and coloring, it is then used in institutions and specifically in schools. Thus, this may symbolize the authority of human being through the educational system. The positions of the penholder and the red apples are also significant because they are placed on the left and the right of Dahmer's offered bottle, which makes it trapped between these objects. Its confined position is increased by the teacher's standing behind it and the students in front of it. The bottle may symbolize Dahmer who seems a character that suffers from being trapped by social abuse and non-protective system of education. The bullying class peers humiliate Dahmer who actually needs to find understanding children that may help him to develop social relationships like partnership and friendship. As far as the educational institution is concerned, the teacher, an educational employee, does not seem to care for the student who approaches her through a different

way than others; which is in fact a signal for his psychological problems created from his familial instability. The school does not have employees who take care of the psychological state of children. In a report submitted by Heather Sandstrom and Sandra Huerta, the researchers claim, 'Children's early experiences shape who they are and affect lifelong health and learning.' They explain more this statement by saying; 'children need safe and stable housing, adequate and nutritious food, access to medical care, secure relationships with adult caregivers, nurturing and responsive parenting, and high-quality learning opportunities at home, in child care settings, and in school. (Huerta, 2013)' From this quote, it is deduced that Dahmer experiences harmful social treatment in his childhood from his environment including his school peers and teacher, which creates psychological damages that may last for a long time. The growing effect is shown through his reaction in the following produced scene.

At the end of the session, the teacher gives the offered bottle to Dahmer's class peer who mocks of his choice of present, which exacerbates the situation. When the protagonist finds the gift in the hands of the student who makes fun of him with his friends, he does not accept what he sees. He yells saying that the present is for his teacher, and it does not belong to them. One of the students surprisingly say, 'she gave it to me!' Here, the directors invest their cinematographic talents to produce an emotional scene that reflects Dahmer's first tantrum, which is defined as 'disruptive or undesirable behavior of emotional outbursts displayed in response to unmet needs or desires, or an inability to control emotions stemming from frustration or difficulty expressing the particular need or desire' (Zifan & Gharibzadeh, 2006). They use a close shot to show the changed details of Dahmer's face from a smiling shiny face to a red furious one. They concentrate on showing his raging temper by increasing the voice of his breathing that gets quicker and shallower rapidly escalating for explosion. He starts screaming 'no, no' shocked by his teacher's wrongdoing and his classmates' sarcasm. What happens in the scene is that he follows the student who has been given the bottle and sneaks to his house to bring the bottle and take it to the river. In fact, this signals the state of losing self-control and eradicating the limits of the right accepted behavioral conducts towards others. What is expected is that he puts the tadpoles back to the river, but he kills them in a strange way. He puts motor oil inside the bottle to pollute their space of living, which deoxygenates the water thereby the tadpoles die through suffocation. In short, the experienced tantrum in this scene proves the existence of repressed emotions in the unconscious of the little boy who tries to look for empathy outside his home, but he is answered by rejection from the teacher and the bullying school peers.

This scene reveals his endured psychological issues at this stage of life, which affect the formation of his identity as an adult. Concerning the experienced bullying, psychological problems are common after being bullied, and include internalizing problems such as depression, anxiety, as well as self -harming behavior (Kidger, et al., 2015). For Dahmer's repressed emotions, psychoanalytic theorists suggest that repression plays a role in distorting an individual's reality, which may then lead to neurosis and dysfunction (De Timary, Heenen-Wolff, & Philippot, 2011). Freudian psychoanalytic views the essence of repression as 'turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the consciousness' (Boag, 2018). It is seen as a sort of an unconscious defense mechanism that may have further implications when the repressed emotions are not faced in the conscious. Sigmund Freud divides the mind into three levels: the conscious, preconscious, and unconsciousness. In this theory, the unconscious is linked to the unaware mental processes of individuals. In psychoanalytic terms, the unconscious does not include all that is not conscious, but rather that which is actively repressed from conscious thought. (Smith, 2010) The consciousness, in simple words, is the awareness of internal and external existence (Jaynes, 2000). Concerning the

preconscious level, it consists of thoughts that are unconscious at a particular moment, but are not repressed, which means that they are available for recall and easily capable of becoming conscious (Freud, 1984). Through this psychoanalyst view, the unconscious is seen as a repository for different ideas, wishes, and desires that may be socially unacceptable. This reservoir also includes traumatic memories and painful emotions that are put out of mind by the mechanism of repression (Smith, 2010). After clarifying these psychoanalytic concepts, it becomes evident that little Dahmer experiences repressed harmful emotions in his unconscious mind as a result of the social conducts around him. In fact, enduring such an emotional status has a direct and profound influence on physical and mental health (Patel & Patel, February 2019).

Experiencing social abuse in school has led Dahmer to lose hope in this institution including its employees and his class peers that have harmed his psychological state affecting his personality development. Thinking about offering the teacher such a present proves his desperate endeavor to attract the attention and moves the emotions of this person. In other words, he may look for a mother in this individual. He makes considerable efforts in going to the river and collecting those tadpoles and putting them in a bottle full of water and give it to his teacher, but all what he receives is rejection. The protagonist of this study does not seem to develop any kind of partnership or friendship at school. The series shows Dahmer as an alienated child who does not share activities with others. This case is caused by parental alienation, which is a form of emotional child abuse (Lewis, 2013). The potential impact of this abuse on a child's life can be devastating. The effects are well documented in the work of the professor Edward Kruk; he states, 'low self-esteem and self-hatred, lack of trust, depression, and substance abuse and other forms of addiction are widespread, as children lose the capacity to give and accept love from a parent' (Kruk, 2011). These effects are reflected in the characteristics of little Jeffrey Dahmer who becomes estranged from his mother who is blamed by the father in the destruction of the family bound. In this high conflict divorce, Dahmer identifies with his father who tries to fulfill his emotional childhood needs when this child strives for a mother. However, after the subversive experience with the teacher, the child loses hope not only in forming relationships with others but he also rejects the presence of female in his life. According to Jack Rosewood's book Edmund Kemper: The True Story of The Co-ed Killer, 'The child becomes sociopathic because the normal development of the concepts of right and wrong and empathy towards others is retarded because the child's emotional and social development occurs within his chaotic mind' (Rosewood, 2015). As a result, many abused children hope that growing up will bring escape from this state.

2. Approaching the Criminal Character through his Childhood Psychological Development

2.1. The Psychological Issues Created by Society

Understanding the creation of the criminal mind is a complex task that requires close study of his childhood including his social development, which has a powerful effect on his psychology as an adult. Clive R.Hollin defines Criminology: 'it is an integrated approach to the study of crime, in which the elements of other disciplines are used to develop theories and explanations for the phenomenon of crime.' (R.Hollin, 1989) The development of this approach owes its success in deciphering the secrets of crime to the discipline of psychology. Clive R.Hollin stresses the importance of psychology though at the same time he claims: 'it cannot provide all the answers but, once again, I believe it has a contribution to make... in terms of its methodology and by the

application of some of its own database and theory'. The created psychological instability in the childhood of the protagonist has reflected characteristics that are particularly relevant to that of a serial killer. 'many offenders share childhoods colored with demonstrations of behavior consistent with criteria for conduct disorder, such as using weapons, physical cruelty to people and animals, forced sexual activity, and fire setting'. (R.Hollin, 1989)

In his book *Real-Life Monsters A Psychological Examination of the Serial Murderer* (2012), the criminologist Stephen Giannangelo offers an original theory of the origins and development of the serial murderer, he argues that the Key elements shared by the sociopath or the antisocial personality, and the serial killer are a failure to conform to social norms. (Giannangelo, 2012) This is noticed in several scenes throughout the childhood of Dahmer whose acts are seen as weird by his teacher, school peers, and even his mother. This criminologist also mentions other characteristics which are physical aggressiveness and lack of regard for the truth; they are the result of Dahmer's wrong parenting. Dahmer has never shown aggressiveness towards people or living animals during his childhood; however, he has been indirectly introduced to perform inappropriate hobby; dissecting dead animals. This has generated a character who is not afraid to use dangerous weapons and perform harmful practices to others. In addition, not accepting the fact of being rejected by both of his parents has led Dahmer to be violent against the people who reject or leave him alone. They generally end up killed and stored in his refrigerator as a way of keeping them close to him, which is shown in later episodes. In the mentioned book, Stephen Giannangelo studies lack of remorse and empathy where he states: 'Remorse is reported by some serial killers after commission of some crimes, but never to the point of changing their behavior or seeking help, such as Dodd, Nilsen, Dahmer, Bundy, and others.' (Giannangelo, 2012) Dahmer has always been a character that strives for an outside source of empathy, since he has been deprived of this feeling from his parents especially his mother. In her book, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Judith Lewis Herman claims, 'the task of early adulthood -establishing independence and intimacy-burdened by major impairments in self-care, in cognition and in memory, in identity, and in the capacity to form stable relationships. He is still a prisoner of his childhood; attempting to create a new life, he reencounters the trauma.' (Herman, 1997) This shows the tremendous aftermath of troubled childhood.

2.2. Understanding Jeffrey Dahmer Criminal Character through Edmund Kemper's Similar Story

Taking an example of another serial killer may reveal a lot about the effect of society. Edmund Kemper, known as Co-ed Killer and Co-ed Butcher, is an American serial killer who committed several crimes during the 1970s in California State. He murdered six college students before killing his mother, her best friend, and his paternal grandparents. He is noted for his height of 2.06 m and his intellect, possessing an IQ of 145. Most of his murders included necrophilia, with occasional incidents of rape. (Rosewood, 2015) His story has many similarities with Dahmer's. Kemper says, in one of his interviews, 'My frustration. My inability to communicate socially, sexually. I was not impotent. I was scared to death of failing in male-female relationships.' (Rosewood, 2015).

Dahmer was killed in prison, and he had not the chance to talk about his criminal life enough; nevertheless, kemper, living prisoner, openly talked about the nature of his crimes at the end of one of his interviews, known as *Murder: No Apparent Motive*. He says, 'There's somebody out there that

is watching this and hasn't done that—hasn't killed people, and wants to, and rages inside and struggles with that feeling, or is so sure they have it under control.' Here, Kemper stops and then carry on saying, 'They need to talk to somebody about it. Trust somebody enough to sit down and talk about something that isn't a crime; thinking that way isn't a crime. Doing it isn't just a crime; it's a horrible thing. It doesn't know when to stop' (Rosewood, 2015). This shows the criminal's need for social and psychological care that may change his mindset. In Jack Rosewood's book, he talks about Kemper's years of imprisonment in which he has been denied parole, the release of a prisoner temporarily or permanently before the completion of a sentence, on the promise of good behavior. In his 1988 trial hearing, he said, 'Society is not ready in any shape or form for me. I can't fault them for that.' Prosecutor Ariadne Symons said, "We don't care how much of a model prisoner he is because of the enormity of his crimes' (Rosewood, 2015). However, Kemper is hopeful to get parole in his next hearing eligible in 2024. Through Kemper's story, it is deduced that the social abuse experienced in childhood is an underestimated issue. It ends with murdered victims, unstable prisoned criminal, destroyed families. The born of the criminal is the result of its failure in maintaining humane treatment to others.

Conclusion:

Studying the impact of society on the character Jeffrey Dahmer has resulted in showing the cruel unreversed psychological issues that form a troubled childhood generating a mentality of a serial killer. This research answers its main inquiry through deconstructing the series' scenes that has shown how Dahmer transforms from an innocent child to a criminal. Then, applying psychological concepts on the founded data, and thus forming conclusions about the development of the character throughout his early life. Little Jeff has undergone a tough experience of childhood that has created psychological issues caused by social abuse. Analyzing the scenes has revealed the effect of the uncaring parents, the mistreatment of the teacher, and the bullying of the class peers demonstrated in the psychological suffering of the child. The influencing factors are embodied in society that shows inhuman behavior in the relationships existed in family, school, and outdoor. Individuals seem careless in their interaction. In other words, each individual focuses on achieving certain goals out of the experienced relationship without considering its effects on the other person. The harmful psychological reaction of the person may not appear on the surface, the conscious mind, but it develops inside the mind, the unconsciousness, of the individual without dealing with it. This makes the situation worse because the accumulation of such effects may develop to psychological disorders. The latter are hard to recover from them through an easy therapy. The radical mental changes of this character have happened because of the psychological disorders. Dahmer shows emotional unstable personality characterized by a long-term pattern of unstable interpersonal relationships, distorted sense of self and strong emotional reactions, which are known as a psychological psychosis: borderline personality disorder. (Disorder, 2022) His suffering encompasses the feeling of being rejected by everybody in the society that drives him to commit awful acts. Jeffrey Dahmer is an evidence of the failure of society in keeping humane atmosphere in the interaction between individuals. This is why this research aims to foster compassion in dealing with children because no one knows what is in the mind of the little creature. Keeping an open mind in understanding other's attitudes is paramount in founding successful coexistence in a civilized society. Dealing with psychological issues from the beginning helps in achieving rapid recovery because one should not underestimate the psychological health and its complex effects on one's life. This may reduce the criminal behaviors noticed in this age.

Analyzing the series' scenes through deconstructing its elements and extracting its purposes in the frame have revealed the filmmakers' skillful vision in portraying the character of Jeffrey Dahmer. The directors successfully affected audience by using the close-up shot in showing the details of objects like the bottle of the tadpoles as well as subjects such as the face of the protagonist's mother. The right choice of shots is constructive in building scenes that reflect the themes of the work in a convincing way to audience. This makes the hidden sides of the character of Dahmer clear enough to know more about his issues and motives. The visual balance achieved in framing the scenes has created a comfortable experience while watching the episodes and assimilating the hidden meanings. Besides, the symbolism of colors has directed the sensations of audience in sympathizing with the hard childhood experience of little Jeff. At the end, the talented use of the cinematographic techniques has contributed in demonstrating the secrets behind the transformation of little Dahmer to a serial killer nicknamed as a monster.

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