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## Our Obsession With Serial Killers: A Jeffrey Dahmer Media Analysis

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OUR OBSESSION WITH SERIAL KILLERS: A JEFFREY DAHMER MEDIA  
ANALYSIS

by

Aysia Hall

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the  
University Honors Program

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Department of Arts & Sciences  
The University of South Dakota  
May 2025

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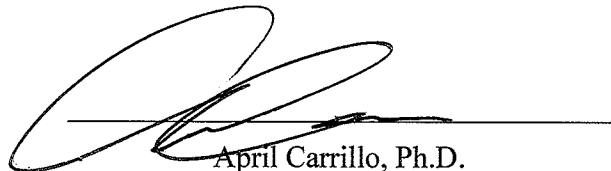
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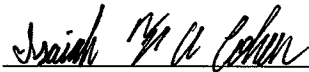
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## **Abstract**

Social media platforms have developed a new form of true crime media. This paper aims to discuss media portrayals of Jeffrey Dahmer on the Netflix series “Dahmer - Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story,” YouTube, and other forms of new true crime media, while specifically analyzing videos from TikTok. The goal is to demonstrate why this type of media is created, explain why society chooses to view this type of media, and signify what changes have been made across true crime media to satisfy society’s needs of entertainment. By viewing TikTok’s about Dahmer and his case, three portrayal elements are found - informational, dark humor, and sexualization/romanticism. The concern with this new media is that it takes away the seriousness of Dahmer’s case, provides little information or sympathy for his victims and their families, and reaches wide audiences - young or old - to find Dahmer’s case in a positive and romanticized lens.

*Key Words: Jeffrey Dahmer, True Crime, TikTok, YouTube, Informational, Dark Humor, Sexualization, Romanticism*

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## **Introduction**

The nation with the most elaborate mass media - the United States - has also produced the most serial killers of any nation in the world. Serial killers are one of the mainstays of American popular culture (Roy, 2002) and obsession with them is on the rise as individuals are exposed to more ways to consume true crime media. True crime refers to “content about violent, nonfictional events that have specific characteristics that make it popular as entertainment” (Gray, 2023, p. 1). The stories of serial killers can satisfy urges to acknowledge and “fix” a problem as well as a fixation on the negative feelings associated with killing, the fear of being a victim of a serial killer, and the fascination with serial killer psychology (Bonn, 2017; Roy, 2002).

As access to social media has increased, people are more exposed to true crime, serial killers continue to be popular, and many are considered celebrities or at least given that status. For instance, trial of serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer began on January 30, 1992, and the case gained immediate attention from the news media who were present everyday alongside swarms of people arriving at the courthouse (Kettler, 2022). However, even more than 30 years later, true crime podcasts, TV shows, movies, and other media outlets have continued to discuss and even reenact the gruesome acts of Dahmer. His upbringing, murders, court hearings, trial, and other factors of his life can be found at the touch of a button or tap of a remote. Recently, one such example was released in 2022, entitled, “Dahmer - Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story.” At its release, the multi-episode biopic was one of the top-watched series on Netflix with over one billion hours in viewing time.

In the aftermath of the series, there were multiple YouTube and TikTok videos exploring his case seemingly in response to its popularity (Sarian, 2022; SoftASMR 2022). YouTube is a free video sharing website that allows individuals easy access to online videos which has been

around since 2005, while TikTok is a new social media platform that allows individuals to share and discover short-form videos ranging from 1 second to 10 minutes. Individuals utilize these applications to participate in current social media trends, share all kinds of information, and indulge in their creativeness. Influencers on social media took Dahmer's story and combined it with current trends such as ASMR, makeup tutorials, and fan cams. ASMR refers to autonomous sensory meridian response, which is a tingling feeling one generates in their skull and down their spine following hearing and touching sensations depicted on the video (Guy-Evans, 2023, p. 1). These sensations include small sounds such as whispering, crunching, squishing, blowing, tapping, writing, and typing. Likewise, makeup tutorial influencers show their makeup products such as foundation, concealer, bronzer, highlighter, eyeshadow, eyeliner, etc. on cameras, instructing the viewers on how to recreate their looks. These tutorials also provide information on what benefits the products hold, where they can be purchased, and what order they need to be applied in (Jeffries, 2011, p. 59).

Another trend that is popular among TikTok users is the creation of FanCams. Here, users take scenes from the documentary or pictures of videos of Dahmer himself and share them on social media. This allows users to gain traction to their pages because it is original work and likely images or videos the public has not seen yet. Doing this, creators sexualize Dahmer and his killings, inform viewers of Dahmer's upbringing, life of crime, and trial while indulging in dark humor. These videos receive hundreds of thousands of views and are easily accessible to viewers of all ages. In combination of these types of video formats (ASMR, makeup tutorial, and fancams) they are able to tell heinous stories and acts while simultaneously involving oneself in an activity that attracts viewers' attention and allows influencers to gain traction to their pages.

By exploring the true crime media of Jeffrey Dahmer, conclusions can be drawn about how his case has been influential in true crime broadcasts and how society has reacted to it.



Social media has created a twist on reviewing the case by retelling the story while enacting trends such as makeup application and ASMR. However, TikTok in particular has its own unique inappropriate approach by creators making content that downplays the severity of his crimes while also sometimes sexualizing Dahmer. By analyzing select TikToks, this paper will engage in an explanation on the creation of these videos, why they are being watched, and how these findings reflect societal reactions to the Dahmer case as a whole. As comparable videos increase, more and more viewers will continue to explore and analyze Dahmer's case. The exploration and interest of serial killers will not go away anytime soon, and true crime will continue to thrive in American culture, which may ultimately result in this new media portraying serial killing in new, romanticized light. So, rather than portraying them as especially heinous, they are instead glorified.

### **Review of Literature**

True crime has been around for decades as news broadcastings, word-of-mouth communication, and other media forms (Schechter, 2012, p. 7). The main focus of true crime is to elaborate private trouble into public issues (Sacco, 2006, p. 29). In other words, the crimes portrayed in true crime media are personal and private issues shared as public troubles and worries. There is a notable distinction between the differences of true crime media in the form of print and electronic, elite and popular, and throughout the media marketplace (Sacco, 2006, p. 29-30). When released in print, true crime media is exposed to a limited number of viewers. With current social media, easy accessibility to the internet, and growing technology, news stories and other true crime broadcasts can be found with a few key words and the touch of a button. The popularity of true crime refers to how often this media is viewed, which is calculated as viewers tap on links, stay focused on videos or articles for a notable time, and perform actions such as liking and commenting on the broadcasts or posts. With physical printing of true crime

media, these logistics are unable to be calculated, as there is no data or investigation on how many paper copies of media are read by viewers. The ease of digital true crime allows editors and other authors to elaborate fast and efficiently to wide audiences.

Yet, there have been documented issues with true crime depictions, as authors and directors behind true crime media can come off as opinionated and biased (Simpson, 2008, p. 278). For example, the Netflix series depicted mainly the upbringing of Dahmer, when he was actively murdering people, his life in prison, entirely focusing on the man in a glamorous way. In doing this, the series, like many forms of true crime lack adequate information to view the entire case which requires nuance and respect for those who have been killed. Instead in American culture they are akin to rockstars (Simpson, 2008, p. 279) and Dahmer is an example of this. However, there are other forms of media, such as the news article by Lucy Cocoran titled “Jeffrey Dahmer had Seventeen Male Victims – Here’s What You Should Know About Them” (2023), puts the spotlight on the victims, which tells an entirely different story. Here, Cocoran describes each of Dahmer’s victims in detail – their name, age, year they were killed by Dahmer, and how their killing played out – designed in a way to shed light on the victims. She prefaces all descriptions of the victims by highlighting the impact these killings had on each of their family members.

Even after his conviction of the murders of Steven Hicks, Steven Tuomi, James Doxtator, Edward Smith, Oliver Lacy, Matt Turner, Raymond Smith, Richard Guerrero, Ernest Miller, David Thomas, Joseph Bradehoft, Curtis Straughter, Errol Lindsey, Anthony Hughs, Konerak Sinthasomphone, Anthony Lee Sears, and Jeremiah Weinberger, Dahmer still had a large following. Despite the fact that the prosecution presented evidence of his crimes such as intercourse with corpses, cannibalism, and lobotomies to non-consenting people to create living sex slaves (Kettler, 2022), Dahmer was met with many letters from men and women around the

world. These letters revolved around understanding why Dahmer committed these killings, religious individuals attempting to convert Dahmer to Christianity, and fanatics who were in love with Dahmer. Love letters were sent from not only gay men but also straight women who were convinced Dahmer would fall for them (Blair, 2022). Some of these letters would include cash and coupons Dahmer could use in the prison. Others would include pictures of individuals and sometimes their families to try Dahmer to write back (Blair, 2022). Many of these letters were taken by family members, as Dahmer was only allowed a few letters in his cell. But his infamy was not long lived as he was beaten to death on November 28, 1994, at Wisconsin's Columbia Correctional Institution (Kettler, 2022).

As previously mentioned, the show "Dahmer - Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story" broke from tradition of most documentaries and played out similarly to a regular TV series. Instead of the typical old-style tapes, police camera investigations, and historical videos, the producers included actors and actresses to play the roles of Dahmer and the people he viciously murdered. The show also portrayed in detail how he met the victims, lured them into his home, murdered them and then photographed and dismembered their bodies. Further, the trial episodes were directly presented as it happened in real life, from presentation of evidence to testimony from families. Tough moments for families which were first broadcast on television were then recreated for the series, such as the testimony of Rita Isbell. She is a sister to one of Dahmer's victims and charged Dahmer during her victim impact statement at trial. This highly emotional moment, with her words used as the script was done again for the benefit of the series, regardless of the effect on people like Rita, who are still alive.

After production of this series, Dahmer gained attention throughout social media in a second life of popularity once again. The debut of the Dahmer Netflix series featuring Evan Peters also seemingly caused viewers to confuse their fascination or attractiveness to Peters with

Dahmer himself. With our natural instinct of associating attractiveness with honesty, there is no surprise that casting attractive actors to the serial killer role causes women and other viewers to look at the character in a romantic and sexualized way. While Peters role was not intended to come off as attractive, many women on TikTok express lust and thirst for his role in the series (Schroeder, 2022). This is due to the attraction of Peters as he plays other roles, and this has been seen previously with Zach Efron's role of Ted Bundy. By depicting serial killers as intelligent, complex, and interesting, and casting an attractive actor to play them in a series, a sense of appeal is given to viewers (Smith, 2022).

And while this could come from Gerber's (2022) assertion that fear associated with watching the series fulfills the thrill of being frightened in a controlled environment (p.11) in combination with current social media trends, this fascination has altered into sexualization and romanticism. So, new media outlets such as YouTube and TikTok allow for faster, easier, and more communicational videos to be posted which encouraged the romanticism and sexualization of Dahmer. Society continues to redefine what is appropriate to share on public platforms (Sacco, 2006, p. 31). As new social media apps are produced, more and more communicational, less-serious, content will be shared to the public masses.

Even without the sexualization, as previously mentioned, less serious content, such as when creators engage in trends like makeup application and ASMR to discuss various subjects including true crime, also alarmingly disarms viewers about the subject matter. For instance, influencer Bailey Sarian maintains a generous following that stays intrigued with her series "Mystery and Makeup Monday" (2022). In one of her videos, she depicts her thoughts and ideas of Jeffrey Dahmer, speaks on Jeffrey's upbringing, his killings, and his experience in prison. While doing this, she applies her own makeup, tells viewers what type of makeup she is wearing,

and demonstrates and explains the application process. This video received over 26 million views, and these views increased tremendously after the Netflix series came out.

Sarian applies her makeup, describes the products she is using, tells viewers where these products can be purchased, and promotes her line of makeup products to gain the attraction of viewers. While doing this, Sarian tells the story of Dahmer, his upbringing, life of crime, and conviction. Likewise, the creator SoftASMR indulges in whispering, tapping, squishing, and crunching as she depicts Dahmer's case and she focused more on his killings. She received 188k views (Soft ASMR, 2022). By whispering Dahmer's case while applying sound that may allow audience members experience ASMR, creators satisfy the wants of the audience's curiosities in combination with a video format that is advertised as relaxing and soothing. These videos demonstrate a changing media society as indulging in trends with the combination of telling serial killer stories is deemed popular, and this is exemplified further through the social media platform TikTok.

For this paper specifically, the focus on TikTok videos is to exemplify societal reaction to the Dahmer case which allows aid in understanding that the media is changing their view on the case entirely. Rather than media depicting Dahmer in a negative light, new media shows Dahmer in a lightly informational, heavily humored, and sexualized/romanticized light. The informational videos used to analyze Dahmer's case, upbringing, and mentality were met with comments of curiosity of how Dahmer's story played out, disgust of Dahmer's acts (50shadesofkip, 2022), and interest in where Dahmer resided or lured his victims (Chicoswave1, 2022). While many of the creators and much of the audience obtain an understanding that what Dahmer did was gruesome and heinous, videos in reference to the humor, sexualization, and romanticism analyzed above mock Dahmer as well as his victims. Within the comment sections of these videos, viewers are half and half on whether this type of media is appropriate to

produce. Some audience members find this type of media appalling, stating that it takes away from the victims and their families (Wilkins, 2022a), idolizes Dahmer in an inappropriate way (Vhzz.ae, 2023), and reiterates that sexualizing Peters should not be associated with sexualizing Dahmer (The\_mannii, 2022). Others indulge in the mockery, humor, and enlightenment of these videos by commenting with laughter (Wilkins, 2022b), giving praise to edits created by Dahmer (Vhzz.ae, 2023), and making jokes about Dahmer's demeanor (Wilkins 2022a). Analyzing these videos in a qualitative approach allows for ample investigation on how Dahmer is portrayed in new media.

## **Methods**

To perform a media analysis, I selected videos from new social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok to demonstrate current social media trends in regard to the Jeffrey Dahmer case I chose the Dahmer case because he has been the most popular serial killer story within the media in the past decade and has maintained the most societal impact, reaction, and interaction. My media analysis is performed by examining and evaluating multiple types of media to identify what would be best to exemplify the diverse types of themes occurring within such postings online (Purvis, 2006). Using this qualitative approach, I systematically sorted through hundreds of videos to find the most prevalent themes being informational, dark humor, and sexualization/romanticism. I used the keywords of "Jeffrey Dahmer" and "Jeffrey Dahmer news" to the TikTok search feature to provide myself with the most success on finding informational videos. I also employed such language as "Jeffrey Dahmer sexualization," "Jeffrey Dahmer romanticism," and "Jeffrey Dahmer humor" into the search engines and more videos revolved around these themes were presented. To find the most relevant videos to demonstrate these themes, I chose to only view videos that were created around the time the Netflix documentary was released, which limited my viewing to videos created in 2022 and 2023. Not only does this

method allow for the most up-to-date reflection of Dahmer but it also demonstrates the popular form of depiction in new media.

I need to disclose the personal distinctions I hold while conducting this research. I am a female aged 20 years old with an ethnic background of Asian and White. My identity as a woman pursuing an undergraduate degree allows me to look at this media in a scholarly aspect, which allows me to understand the common themes found of informational, dark humor, and sexualization/romanticism. Looking at this media with my background in mind, I found much of this media to be disturbing, dehumanizing, and off-putting. For individuals to indulge in the creations of obsession, mockery, and sexualization of a serial killer is nothing short of objectionable disregard to the viewers of this content, the victims of Dahmer's crimes, and the families of those who were affected by Dahmer's doings.

One limitation of this analysis is that this research is based on my own personal algorithm of TikTok videos, which does not account for the algorithms of other individuals. This research also maintains a focus on Jeffrey Dahmer, which means that it does not define or dictate that other serial killers are portrayed this way in the media. Therefore, this research cannot make the generalization that all serial killers are portrayed as sexualized and romanticized in this new media. Another limitation of this research is that there is no gender issue addressed; this is not to take away from the fact that female serial killers are also present in the media. These limitations are important to address to ensure that there are no faulty generalizations or conclusions to be made.

## **Analysis**

The TikToks selected for this analysis are meant to represent the spectrum of representations of Dahmer, which represent themes in true crime both present when he was first

convicted and now in modern social media. The three subsections of portrayal – informational, dark humor, and romanticism/sexualization - summarize what type of new media is present regarding Dahmer's case. Informational videos describe the upbringing of Dahmer, where Dahmer committed his killings and resided, and offer mockery of "defeating" Dahmer. Dark humor videos focus mainly on Dahmer's cannibalism, his mannerisms, and his acts for luring his victims. Videos that indulge in the sexualization and romanticism of Dahmer focus on scenes of the documentary showing Dahmer committing sexual acts, edits of Dahmer in the documentary that are perceived as attractive and lightening, and demonstrations of students dressing as Dahmer to school.

### *Informational*

Informational videos depicted in social media aim to explain Dahmer's case. Here, people share information such as how the entire case played out, seek out locations where Jeffrey Dahmer resided or committed killings, and show displays of Dahmer's belongings. The motive behind these postings can be explained by social media keeping up with what is currently popular. Performing these trends while telling the story of Dahmer catches the audience's attention and maintains their attention throughout the video. These videos are merely storytelling and informational, but they receive thousands to millions of views due to individuals maintaining curiosity of the case and being entertained by the trend that is being acted upon. Society continues to watch these videos because our "construction and lionization of the serial killer as a cultural figure reflects Americans' unconscious – but deeply held – fears about human nature, power, and sexuality" (USA Today, 2006, p. 11). The overall fear associated with serial killers and their stories – unconscious or not – explains why society continues to spread and seek information on these stories.



The distinction between merely sharing information about Dahmer to obsession over Dahmer is apparent in how and what information is released. Obsession is described as an individual being so indulged in someone or something that it preoccupies their mind frequently (Brock et al, 2024, p. 1). For example, spreading information about the victims of the case, how the case played out, and interviewing Dahmer do not demonstrate obsession with the case entirely. On the other hand, informational videos that seek out the locations of where Dahmer resided and committed his killings can be considered obsessional behavior. The impulse to seek out where Dahmer chose to sexually assault, murder, and commit cannibalism as well as share these findings demonstrates obsession from the creator. Watching and enjoying videos of these sorts proves viewers to indulge in obsessional behavior as well.

TikTok accounts create their usernames under Dahmer's name, spread "never known before" information, and scope out the locations of where Dahmer resided. TikTok creator *chicoswave1* toured Milwaukee, Wisconsin and created a video of all the spots Dahmer used for his killings. He shows Dahmer's grandma's house, the Wall Street Stock Bar where Dahmer chose his victims, the Ambassador Hotel where Dahmer would lure his victims, and the now empty lot where Dahmer's apartment once stood. In the video, the only place he walks into is the Ambassador Hotel, where he shows the lobby. This video received 627.8 thousand views, 58.7 likes, 599 comments, and 5908 saves (*Chicoswave1*, 2022).

Another video created by *theacelogan* demonstrates how to "defeat" Dahmer. Here, two individuals act out the scenario Dahmer used on many of his victims – drugging and attempting to engage with them. One man was dressed as Dahmer and the other was an African American individual acting as one of the victims. They recreate Dahmer drugging the victim, and the video cuts to the victim choosing through his Minecraft inventory – a gallon of milk and punching gloves. This Minecraft inventory is associated with the Minecraft game, where the inventory is

easily accessible and shows boxes of items that are able to be used. The victim drinks the milk and punches Dahmer, causing Dahmer to fall. Dahmer then offers the victim a “pork sandwich,” and the victim eats it. The victim feels uneasy, and Dahmer admits that it was the victim’s genitals. This video received 10.6 million views, 1.6 million likes, 5176 comments, and 143.6 thousand saves (Theacelogan, 2022).

The creator 50shadesofkip released a “never seen before” interview of Jeffrey Dahmer. This interview is produced by Inside Edition, and it speaks on Dahmer’s rituals as he prepared his victims. He states that he would go to clubs to lure his victims and have the sleeping pill mixture already prepared. He then goes on to say, “the person would drink it, go to sleep, and that is when they would be strangled” (50shadesofkip, 2022, 00:37-00:43). Him and the interviewer then speak about the movie *The Exorcist* was also a part of his “ritual,” and how his impulses of killing were too strong to ignore. Dahmer claims in the interview that he started experiencing obsessive thoughts when he was 15 or 16 years old. He claims that these obsessions and fantasies were “sexual fantasies of control, power, complete dominance, and they became reality” (50shadesofkip, 2022, 02:18-02:24). The interviewer then goes on to speak about how these fantasies are spoken by Dahmer in a “matter of fact” way, proving that none of his actions have touched him. Dahmer then speaks about his cannibalism tactics, stating that he enjoyed the hearts and biceps of his victims because they make him feel like he was a part of them. He continues by talking about inducing a “zombie-like state” to his victims by pouring diluted acid and hot water into their brains. The interviewer asks Dahmer if he were someone who could be stopped or helped, and Dahmer says no. He claims, “going with this compulsion, it was the only thing that gave me any satisfaction” (50shadesofkip, 2022, 03:48-04:00). Dahmer then admits that he kept one of his victims' heads in a work locker to flaunt it due to the compulsions. The interview finalizes with real-life footage of Dahmer during the trial and describes his upbringing

and previous crimes. This video received 12.9 million views, 1 million likes, 5997 comments, and 85.5 thousand saves. (50shadesofkip, 2022).

While these informational videos vary from storytelling to impulsive information, the creation of these videos are to alleviate the fear associated with serial killing. The conscious minds of individuals seek to find answers to the unknown. By sharing videos of Dahmer's locations, demonstrating what it would be like to defeat Dahmer, and showing interviews with Dahmer, these creators ease the minds of viewers as they gain more information on their fear of Dahmer himself and his acts. Obsessional aspects of Dahmer are apparent in the video describing the locations of where he lured his victims and murdered them as well as the video identifying how to "defeat" Dahmer. These videos demonstrate that Dahmer and his case are at the forefront of their mind and the result is sharing their findings or thoughts. Sharing interviews with Dahmer is simply sharing information to alleviate the fear associated with the unknowns of Dahmer. These informational videos aim to either spread unknown findings or indulge in what can be described as obsessive behavior of Dahmer's case.

### ***Dark Humor***

Dark humor is spread throughout social media regarding Jeffrey Dahmer. TikTok videos and meme websites share this humor to alleviate and mock the fear associated with serial killing. Because the killings and gruesome acts of Dahmer are socially, temporally, and hypothetically distant from those that were not involved in the case at all, it is easier and more likely for these creators and their audience to find humor in his acts (McGraw et al, 2012, p. 1216). Individuals indulging in this humor are socially distant from the case; meaning that they have no relation to Dahmer himself nor his victims and their families. Temporal relation is not apparent for these creators and viewers either, as the case originated over 30 years ago. Because the acts of Dahmer are not personally associated and more a figure of thought for the creators and influencers,

hypothetical relation is not apparent either. This lack of relation allows for humor to be present, as the seriousness of the case is displaced.

Society may indulge in humor to cope with the fear they experience when interacting with Dahmer's case. Using humor as a coping strategy to relieve tension, increase liking, and help manage emotion in awkward or threatening situations is common (Francis, 1994, p. 147-148). When viewing and evaluating the heinous acts of Dahmer, society indulges in fear of their own lives. By using humor as their coping strategy by making jokes, creating humorous videos, or viewing the case in an unserious way, these fears can be alleviated. This type of coping mechanism provides relief and alters viewers' perspective of the potential threat (Francis, 1994, p. 152). Rather than view Dahmer's case as heinous and gruesome, the humor allows society to view his case as insignificant and frivolous. TikTok users also utilize the social platform to make comedic videos – and some of these videos involve extremely dark humor. The creator n1ckwilkins has a video titled “POV: Jeffrey Dahmer has a roommate;” Here, Wilkins and a friend of his dressed as Dahmer are looking into the refrigerator. Wilkins asks “Dahmer” what “hairy buttcheeks” are doing in the fridge. The friend dressed as Dahmer states that they are looking at pork chops. This video refers to the victims' body parts Dahmer would keep in his refrigerator. This video received 14 million views, 2.3 million likes, 13 thousand comments, and 214.1 thousand saves (N1ckwilkins, 2022).

TikTok creator Oliver Wilkins has a similar physique as Dahmer, and he uses this to his advantage in his videos. In one of his videos titled “POV You ask Jeffrey Dahmer for a Drink,” he hands the person holding the camera a beverage that is filled with what appears to be oil, mayo, water, lemon, dirt, and a corn cob. The person holding the camera asks Wilkins about what is floating within the drink. Wilkins, dressed as Dahmer, states that it is likely dish soap and enables him to drink it. This video received 12.4 million views, 1.4 million likes, 6483

comments, and 147.7 thousand saves (Wilkins, 2022a). In another video of Wilkins titled “Jeffrey Dahmer’s terrible apology gifts be like,” Wilkins dresses as Dahmer and hands his friend a piece of corn. The friend acts uninterested, and Wilkins enacts in the behaviors of Dahmer by leaning back, stating “ahhh, come on,” and “you’re just like my mam” (Wilkins, 2022b). This video received 1.2 million views, 93 thousand likes, 665 comments, and 8353 saves.

Humorous videos of Dahmer are designed for society to find Dahmer’s inhumanity and heinous acts in a light and laughable way. Doing so, these videos take away the negativity of Dahmer’s case to alleviate the fears associated with it. Using humor as a coping mechanism is common, and it is demonstrated through these videos by making fun of Dahmer’s cannibalism, mannerisms, and sayings. By elevating these acts and showing them to be humorous, viewers disregard the true murdering, sexual assault, and cannibalistic acts of Dahmer.

### *Sexualization/ Romanticism*

The Netflix Series “Dahmer – Monster: The Jeffrey Dahmer Story” was released in 2022 – over 30 years since Dahmer was caught with Evan Peters as cast as the lead. This choice seemed purposeful, as Peters was already an idolized subject, as he gained much following for his multiple roles in “American Horror Story” from 2011 to 2021, with multiple difficult roles in horror-eque settings. Because this series is focused on Dahmer, his upbringing, and his killings, using Peters as the main character has caused the prior idolization of Peters to be portrayed onto Dahmer and his killings. This is shown through social media videos that sexualize Peters role as Dahmer in the series. While sexualization and romanticism are similar, there is a notable distinction in their differences. So, in sexualization content, Dahmer is designed to appear physically attractive and sexual to viewers, and romanticism content shows the “soft side” of

Dahmer such as him doing day-to-day things and showing emotion and sympathy to portray him in a positive light.

Another TikTok creator, ltagad\_2, shares a video that shows a student in high school dressed as Dahmer for the school day. Here, the audience views the student dressed as Dahmer looking at the camera, smirking, and acting as Dahmer dancing as he did at clubs in the documentary. The student behind him in the video reacts with laughter and smiles. This video received 11.1 million views, 1.5 million likes, 11 comments due to the creator limiting access to mutual friends, and 131 thousand saves. (Ltagad\_2, 2022).

TikTok creator the\_mannii has been known for creating sexualized edits; in one of his videos, he takes a clip from the series showing Peters thrusting in the midst of a sexual act. Following this, the creator combines an edit of himself in a wig, drooling, and captioned the video with “girls and gays” (The\_mannii, 2022). This is one example of the many videos that entail sexualized edits of Peters playing Dahmer. Likewise, TikTok creator vhzz.ae posted an edit of Peters in the Netflix series. Here, they combined different scenes of the series in a way that makes Peters appear attractive and sexualized which include Peters rolling his eyes, staring into the camera, eating, and dancing. The combination of all these acts with certain editing makes Peters romanticized, but while he is playing the role of Jeffrey Dahmer. The background of these scenes is a song mashup of “Bloody Mary” by Lady Gaga, which is a song describing the crucifixion of Jesus and the love he spread in the world, plays in the background. This video received 506.3 thousand views, 23.5 thousand likes, 189 comments, and 5772 saves (Vhzz.ae, 2023).

Sexualized edits and romanticized videos of Dahmer portray him in an attractive and celebratory light. The sexualization of Dahmer is shown in the form of edits that depict scenes of the documentary where Dahmer is perceived as attractive. These edits provide background music

speaking on romance, which enables viewers to see these acts and associate them with the romantic background. When discovering romanticized videos of Dahmer, viewers are met with Dahmer being shown in a normalized and natural light. In some videos, Dahmer is seen doing day-to-day activities and proving human normalcy by showing emotions such as sympathy and empathy. In other romanticized videos, individuals are found dressing as Dahmer to school. While these aspects differ, the romanticism in both is that they are normalizing Dahmer and his case to the public.

Overall, these selected works are meant to show that media focused on Dahmer demonstrates that his case is not taken as seriously as it should be. Informational videos provide the most respectable and factual deployment of Dahmer's case, but these formats which prioritize trends can take away from the significance of Dahmer's case. Media that makes mockery and humor of Dahmer's case are performed to alleviate the fear associated with the act of serial killing, and these videos can make viewers take Dahmer's case as unimportant or uninfluential. Videos that create sexualized edits and shine Dahmer in a romanticized light enable viewers to see Dahmer as an idolized subject, which takes away from not only the atrocious acts committed by Dahmer but also his victims and their stories. The importance of analysis of this type of media is to shine an old problem in a new light. True crime media depiction prior to new, easily accessible media focused primarily on factual evidence, important news updates, and advocacy for the public. New media now allows creators and viewers of all ages to dismiss the seriousness of serial killer cases and display them in an inappropriate light.

### **Discussion**

The importance of this analysis is to identify the impact of new true crime media on societal reaction to serial killers. Dahmer's case is a prime example of this, as his case has been broadcast in an idolized light in the new media. Doing this, influencers and creators take away

the seriousness of the case entirely. By creating media that idolizes, romanticizes, sexualizes, and mocks Dahmer and his acts, individuals dismiss the stories of his victims and fail to think of the horrendous criminal acts Dahmer reflects. This further demonstrates how new media can completely alter perspectives on consequential and serious topics. It is important to note how media society and culture continue to grow and change as the use of technology and social media increases. While this new media allows for more users to reach broader audiences, the content and ideas behind this media should be considered when the overall idea behind the content is despicable, fearful, and dehumanizing.

The relation of this new media and true crime lies within the content created.

Traditionally, true crime came in the form of documentaries, books, news broadcastings, and news articles that focused on the facts of cases and spread awareness to societal audiences. With this new media, these violent acts are emphasized as a form of entertainment for viewers. While this new media is in relation to traditional true crime by spreading information and awareness, the new media focuses on entertaining social media viewers and keeping up with societal trends. Doing this, new media takes the aspects of traditional true crime media—telling of violent nonfictional stories, informing society of dangers to be aware of, and providing proven facts to society—and enhances the violent aspects of true crime and changes the way this information is told to comply to social trends and personal fascination.

With TikTok being the newest social media app to gain much traction, it is important to analyze how this platform is used. In Dahmer's case, the reflection he receives on this app is like celebrity treatment. With this, all the spotlight is on Dahmer, his upbringing, his crimes, and his time as a convict. There is little reflection on the victim of Dahmer's crimes, which is where most of the case should be focused. Societal interest in the hatred of Dahmer and the violence of



his acts permit users to glamorize the type of media that focuses on how his crimes were played out versus how influential and heavily impactful his crimes were to the victims and their families. Enacting in trends while discussing Dahmer's case, creating sexualized and romanticized edits, and making fun of Dahmer shows that media society has shifted their perspective of the case that originated over thirty years ago. When comparing original true crime media on Dahmer such as newspaper articles, journal entries, and other paper-printed discussions, the media focus was proving Dahmer to be a monster, emphasizing that his acts were inhumane and spreading awareness to the public. The new media demonstrates idolization, enlightenment, and entertainment in his acts. This new depiction of true crime is influential in how media societies views have been shifted.

One factor that arises from this new media depiction of Dahmer that should be studied is the influence this media has on social psyches. After viewing Dahmer filling his fridge full of human heads, performing lobotomies on young men, and committing sexual acts to dead corpses, individuals may increase their anxieties. This may result in checking locks multiple times before going to bed, refusing to leave the house, believing every white van is driven by a serial killer, etc. With Dahmer being a pedophile and scene of this being available in the new media, individuals may lay awake at night thinking about how their children could become victim to similar acts of what Dahmer has done. This can result in not allowing their children or themselves to see people that they typically never have issues with (friends, family, coworkers, school friends) due to the anxiety and mistrust that results from viewing this type of media.

Another crucial factor to note is the widespread audience that this true crime media is available to. TikTok is a popular app for younger viewers, which means that the younger audiences can fall onto the sexualization, romanticism, and humorous videos of Dahmer and

neglect the disgusting and inhumane acts that were committed by him. Doing this, these young viewers are met with initial fascination with Dahmer and continue the societal trend of idolizing Dahmer in a celebratory light. With social media being another form of entertainment, income, and pastime for individuals of all ages, true crime media like those analyzed in Dahmer's case will continue to grow. This demonstrates a societal cultural change in the media, emphasizing that trends – even if inhumane, disturbing, and gruesome – reach wide audiences of all age types, backgrounds, and values. The accessibility to this type of media should generate concern for future study. The videos demonstrated within the analysis prove to be no longer than one minute long. Keeping these videos short allows viewers to retain this information easily and fast. Individuals can view this information by simply scrolling through their phones, sitting on the toilet, driving, preparing dinner, on their breaks at work, or any other few minutes of time individuals must spare on social media. The media showing scenes in the documentary of Dahmer's gruesome acts of drilling holes into heads, sexually harassing victims - some even children, and chopping up his victims' bodies is not media that should be readily accessible to the public with one simple scroll on their "For You Page," which is the customized explore page for individuals on TikTok. Edits of Dahmer sexually thrusting with romantic music in the background should not be coming across cell phone screens for viewers of any age. The fact that thousands to millions of individuals have come across videos of these sorts proves that access to the inappropriateness is too easily accessible.

## **Conclusion**

Societal reaction and interaction with true crime media will not stop soon. As new media in the form of social media apps and platforms continue to shine light on serial killers, society will continue to stay indulged with the hatred and violence committed by these killers. By

analyzing Jeffrey Dahmer's case, identification of informational, humorous, and sexual/romanticized videos are apparent and dominate new media such as TikTok and YouTube. These videos depict Dahmer in a celebratory and idolized light, which results in this media being broadcast further. Reasoning as to why society chooses to watch, admire, and indulge themselves in true crime series and media can be explained by the fear associated with killing, the curiosity of how serial killers come to be, and the thrill of entertainment. The hatred feelings towards a serial killer as well as the violent acts of the serial killer provide society with entertainment that satisfies their needs. The concern is that this new media perspective takes away from the seriousness of Dahmer's case and the influence and impact Dahmer had on his victims and their families.

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