

The De-racialization of Milwaukee Cannibal in *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files* (2012)



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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Benozir Alam Aishee', is written over a circular stamp. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the name 'Benozir' on the left, 'Alam' in the middle, and 'Aishee' on the right. The circular stamp is partially obscured by the signature.

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Abstract

The main probe of this paper is to analyze how the re-enactment of real-life events, interviews, and factual events can de-racialize an abhorrent and a purportedly racial serial killer. Jeffrey Dahmer was a homosexual man who because of the shame factor working on his mind, choose the path of eliminating any evidence of his disgraceful acts. However, he was also accused of being a racist because most of his victims had one thing in common; their race (African American). Previous research on Dahmer has shown that he (Dahmer) indeed was a racist and his motives were purely driven by racism and "political correctness" (Barnard, 72). Jeffrey Dahmer, a notorious American serial killer that is documented by Chris James Thompson and Dahmer used multiple techniques to de-racialize him (Dahmer). In my study, I will be showing all those elements used by Thompson, shreds of evidence to support his (Thompson's) claim, and also show what racialized Dahmer and his case in the first place. Based on the possible results of the previous research, and by analyzing the evidence presented in the documentary, the study will try to exhibit how re-enactment plays a vital role in leaving a huge impact on changing perspectives. Therefore, this research will explore and contribute to the growing sector of analyzing documentaries, decoding hidden meanings, understanding cognitive and queer theory, and how not to racialize things that are not racial at all.

Keywords: De-racialization, Re-enactment, Fetish, Racism, Abuse, Societal Pressure, Homosexuality, Serial Killing, Queer Psychology.

Chapter 1: Introduction

What type of person tortures another human to death and feeds on their flesh afterward? Well, some people do and Jeffrey Dahmer was the barbaric, man-eating serial killer in the history of Milwaukee. His acts were horrendous as he used to pick male victims from places, mostly gay bars, by luring them with money, alcohol, or drugs, whatever the person was attracted to. Later he used to perform heart-wrenching tortures like lobotomizing the victims (drilling a hole in their cranium and filling the cavity with fluids like hot water or muriatic acid with the hope of creating a docile intimate partner, while the person was still alive), operating various ritualistic things (positioning their dead body in weird shapes and photographing them), dismembering the victims (keeping the skulls and genitals as a souvenir), storing/ freezing the victim's body parts (a portable freezer was found in his apartment with the severed head, hands, and genitals in it) and lastly devouring on his victims' flesh.

Dahmer was convicted of the murder of 17 men and was sentenced to 937 years in prison. Dahmer was always thought of as a racist as long as he was alive. 14 out of the 17 men he murdered were men of color and their families too were treated badly by the court system during the trial which fueled up the racial politics of Milwaukee. However, Dahmer claimed he was not a racist and never confessed to the fact of hating people of color. However, there are enough pieces of evidence collected by scholars like Ian Barnard who oppose his statement. On contrary, there scholars like Jeffrey M. Jentzen and director Chris James Thompson, who are not driven by emotions but by factual evidence, and believe that Dahmer killing of men of color did not have a racial agenda against the community. Rather, Dahmer was a product of fear of coming out as a homosexual man, alcoholism, and his choice of men (his victims) was merely based on body type and looks (Jentzen).

The Jeffrey Dahmer Files is a documentary directed by Chris James Thompson and to some extent plays a huge role in de-racializing Dahmer as the documentary is based on interviews of people (the homicide detective, the forensic expert, and Dahmer's black neighbor) directly associated with Dahmer and the case, and also re-enacted scenes which had a lot to say about Dahmer's de-racialized but his monstrous mind. But on what accounts do the re-enacted scenario of Jeffrey Dahmer and portrayal of his life in the documentary *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files* play a vital role in de-racializing his character?

This is what we are about to find out below with the in-depth analysis of the re-enacted scenes, interviews, and evidence presented in the documentary that played a vital role in understanding the mind of Dahmer and how everything was organized in a manner of de-racializing him. This study is will identify how impactful re-enactment can be in terms of understanding a real person and his actions also racialization is a huge crime itself, so finding out whether or not any of Dahmer's motives was formed out of the hatred towards the minority will act as a closure (and a step will be taken towards the path of stopping racism and criminal activities associated with it) to stop any further discriminatory behavior towards the marginalized community and causing a disaster in it.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Based on my research topic, "The De-racialization of Milwaukee Cannibal in *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files* (2012)". I have used a qualitative research method. My paper is based on reading and analyzing media texts and research papers. The methodology the article uses is textual as well as a documentary based as the article will provide an analysis of the de-racializing elements present in the visuals and re-enactment in the documentary *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files*. The article also points out what other scholars like Ian Barnard had to say about Dahmer's mind and his "racialized" actions and on what account Dahmer is famously known to be a racist serial killer.

This paper vastly centers on the claim of de-racializing Dahmer and studying how the re-enacted scenes play a part in it. The other theories that are used to describe Dahmer's situation and support the claims of the documentary are Queer theory, psychoanalytic theory, and cognitive theory. The method associates well with this paper because this paper will be purely based on the mental health of Dahmer shown in the re-enacted scenes; a glimpse at the mind of Dahmer and what might have been the reason for a person to act in such a ferocious manner in Chris James Thompson's Documentary.

This paper deals with a research question that circulates around Dahmer's psyche; "how did the re-enacted scenes from the documentary *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files* directed by Chris James Thompson de-racializes Dahmer ". This question deals with Dahmer's mind and fact-based evidence provided in the documentary by presenting reports and interviews of officials and a black neighbor. The paper briefly focuses on the personality of Jeffrey Dahmer and, he himself told about his allegedly racist deeds and how the society and the system itself contributed to

Dahmer becoming a racist. The research will use relevant scholarly articles, documentary (*The Jeffrey Dahmer Files*), YouTube videos, relevant newspaper articles, and interviews of Jeffrey Dahmer to show a different narrative where Dahmer's deeds were judged based on his distorted mind and not racism.

Chapter 3: Literature Review:

At least 17 men were murdered by Jeffrey Dahmer from 1978 to 1991. A serial killer who preyed on African-American men for over a decade, Jeffrey Dahmer enticed men to his house by offering them money and sex, later drug, and killing them with booze mixed with narcotics. Then he used to dismember the bodies and confessed to eating their heart and arm muscles. Once the bodies had been dismembered, he would perform sexual actions with them before storing their skulls and genitals as mementos. His victims were routinely photographed at different points in the murder process so he could remember and replay each deed later. In 1991, Dahmer was arrested and convicted of 16 life sentences. Christopher Scarver, a fellow prisoner, shot and murdered him in 1994.

Dahmer always had problems with alcohol. Dahmer's drinking had spiraled out of control by the date of his first murder. His newly remarried father suggested that he join the Army after he left the Ohio State University after the first term. Late in December 1978, Dahmer joined and was sent to Germany. As his drinking continued to worsen, he was eventually expelled from the Army in early 1981. No other victims are thought to have been taken by Dahmer while serving in

the military, although German officials subsequently looked into probable links between Dahmer and local killings.

Dahmer returned to his native Ohio. Dahmer's father had to send him to Wisconsin to stay with his grandmother when he was jailed for disorderly conduct later that year. But his alcoholism persisted, and the following summer he was arrested for indecent exposure. A second time, in 1986, two boys reported harassment against Dahmer (he was masturbating in front of the boys), and he was jailed once again. He was sentenced to one year of probation.

(Bibliography.com Editors)



Figure: 1 Jeffrey Dahmer

There has always been racism in our culture, and it's impossible to get rid of it from our minds. Getting disgusted of a particular kind because of their ethnicity cannot be changed within seconds because the world has gone through years of colonization. The change of perception that has happened because of such acts (over and over the years) cannot be changed overnight. However, the root cause of racism happens because people identify a particular person based on the color of their skin and not as a person. This process of marginalizing people and the social construction of classifying people as "different" and subjecting them to "unequal treatment" based on their physical appearance is known as racialization (Cared). Understanding racism is very important to understand my study on the documentary *The Files of Jeffrey Dahmer* is a documentary about a man who murdered 14 African American men and Thompson the director of the movie took it in his interest to de-racialize him.

De-racialization is the exact opposite; breaking the norms of society and not marginalizing people in the community based on their physical appearance. For instance; The African American community faces the most amount of racial criticism in their everyday life based on their history of slavery. In past, they were often referred to as the uncivilized "other" who were uncivilized and needed to be put on a leash to be controlled. Like, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* the community was represented in a very humiliating manner where they were represented as an uncivilized man-hunting "others" (Conrad). Such textbooks played a huge role in setting up racialization in the current society.

However, many writers and filmmakers have taken the attempt to de-racializing the kind by introducing them as heroes and not villains. For example, in the book *The Green Mile* written by Stephen King he tries to de-racialize the character of John Coffey who was falsely accused and later executed for raping and murdering two white girls. Coffey was judged based on his

appearance as he was a tall black man with broad shoulders. The policemen were so afraid of his physical appearance that they chained him tight with several shackles to protect themselves from being attacked. However, with time it was seen that Coffey was a kind man with supernatural powers of healing and was present at that particular crime scene only to save the girls. And all the policemen (white) were broken by the execution of Coffey because during his time the prison he did nothing but help others. (Stephen King).

De-racialization is important because if some community is bullied to the extent where they have to repress their thoughts and suddenly have a burst of emotion (which might result in a disaster) can be stopped. For instance; homosexual serial killer Dennis Nilsen was so afraid of being judged and bullied because of his sexuality that his "repressed thoughts" (in his unconscious) made him kill and do horrible things to other people as a "sudden outburst of emotion" (Freud, 97). However, according to Judith Butler gender is not a "natural nor stable element" of human "biological or social identity" rather is achieved (ingrained in the mind) through a series of "matri"/ performative activities like "gestures, actions" etc and bullying them for who they are and what they prefer can cause a series of violent behaviors; in their unconscious mind (Pramaggiore).

A documentary is a type of film that shows the actual facts of an event to the world and gives them near authentic information as some "viewers tend to suspect" that documentaries cannot be trusted as the filmmakers put their ideas into it to make the documentary more exciting. However, documentaries contain interviews of people with cannot be altered so, this claim cannot be justified (Bordwell & Thompson). Documentaries are of two types the common type known as compilation documentary/ Rhetorical type which is solely based on interviews, testimonies of survivors or people associated with the event, "assembling images of the archival

sources", etc. (Bordwell & Thompson). This types of documentary try to create an argument for persuading the readers to open up their minds and watch through a different lens. The other type of documentary is known as a categorical documentary where different people or groups are combined together to organize and talk about their "knowledge about the world" like, scientists discovering a new species or the medical importance of a certain species of flower. (Bordwell & Thompson

In this world where people are acing technology and visuals films and documentaries play a vital role in changing the societal norms and making the world a more liberal place to live for those who are considered as "others" (people of color, people with different sexual preference, etc.). For example; a documentary is the type of film that purports to "present factual information" (Bordwell and Thompson, 110). While doing so the filmmaker might introduce re-enacted (actual scenes which are being shot with little improvisation in lighting and music of the filmmaker to make it more impactful), interviews (to give evidence of the time by introducing the audience directly to people of that time) and actual footage (to increase the credibility of their documentary).

These tools (like re-enactment, original footage, and interview) are used by the filmmaker to "persuade the audience to adopt an opinion about the subject matter" (Bordwell and Thompson, 121). This type of documentary is known as a rhetorical form of documentary and plays with the cognitive of the human mind. According to Robert Stam in his book *Film Theory, An Introduction* Bordwell and Carol argue that cognitivism is a "stance which seeks to understand human thought, emotion, and action" by understanding and having a change of perception by the "process of mental representation and sense of national agency" (Stam, 236). For changing the perception of your audience on a particular thing you need to give them

something which will make them think about the existing perception. That is when re-enacted scenes become handy. For instance; if you are seeing a documentary of a person then you will notice that the filmmaker has picked up particular events of the person's life instead of showing it all.

This is because those particular events play a vital role in understanding a person and are a symbol or representation of something important in that person's life. For instance; in the case of Dahmer the particular life events that were shown by the re-enacted scenes in the documentary *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files* hold important symbols to de-racialize Dahmer, his life, and his motive. Like, showing Dahmer lonely in the scenes adds value to the fact that Dahmer was lonely and different from others. Background music to plays a role in setting the mood for understanding the scene, like when the forensic expert was describing the silence in the building where Dahmer was caught everything went silent from chaos to the sound of heartbeat representing the silence was so reticent that one could hear another person's heartbeat.

Only working on the emotions of others isn't an effective way of changing perception. The credibility of a source comes from the actual evidence one adds to their documentary, like actual footage. Actual footage shows what the situation was like back in the time when the event was occurring. Like, if you watch any world war documentaries you will see actual footage of bombing, fighter jets, soldiers, and people escaping to give you the actual essence of how bad things were back in the time. The interview plays a similar role because when you hear the experience of someone who is closely associated and affected massively in that particular timeline then you get a feeling of that era vividly. Like, the documentary film *Mercury 13* based on women pilots of 1961 features interviews of the pilots and their families, and hearing their experiences makes one feel more close to the actual event and the time. All these things play

with the psychological aspect of the human mind, gives authentic/near authentic experience, and open up a new portal to understanding the hidden meaning of the visual texts.

Chapter 4: Analysis

A: Dahmer being Racialized in Ian Barnard's Paper

On many accounts, Jeffrey Dahmer the Milwaukee cannibal serial killer who was convicted for murdering 17 young men was claimed to be a racist. The very root cause that fueled such a claim (Dahmer being a racist) was because the majority of Dahmer's victims were African Americans. According to Ian Barnard in his paper *The Racialization of Sexuality: The Queer Case of Jeffrey Dahmer* he claimed some commentators believe that Dahmer's actions of "killing as racist" and provide information on why their thinking is shaping up like that (Barnard, 71).

In his paper he mentioned "Dahmer must have hated people of color" or why would Dahmer be involved sexually with someone (Curtis Straughter) who thought of white people as bad and had shown resentment towards them (Barnard, 68). Here, Barnard was talking about Curtis Straughter one of Dahmer's 17 victims. According to Barnard from the evidence he has collected many of Dahmer's victims "held white people with low regards" (Barnard, 68). He further goes explaining the claim by introducing an interview with Straughter's friend Anne E.

Schwartz who claims that she was confused and had a hard time believing that Straughter was Dahmer's victim as he (Curtis Straughter) had "open hostility towards white men" and that disgust would never allow Straughter to indulge in consensual intercourse with a white man (Barnard, 68). Straughter according to his friends did not have consent to be sexually involved with Dahmer and this resentment has led Dahmer's mind to be racialized. This hatred he had towards the men of color caused him to lure them "to his home only because he hated them and wanted to kill them" (Barnard, 68).

Dahmer denied every time (while the investigation was going on and in multiple interviews) that his actions were never racist and that he never had an agenda against men of color. However, Barnard in his paper argues that either Dahmer was unaware of his racialized mind or he was "lying" successfully (Barnard, 72). He (Dahmer) might in his mind have been enthusiastic and was "interested in political correctness" and all his murders were driven by this motive of racialized "political correctness" (Barnard, 72).

Some people who knew Dahmer and had a close relationship with him (Dahmer) were interviewed and they claimed that Dahmer "seemed to hate black people" particularly gay men of color. He was often seen using racial slurs against people of color. This statement can be further elaborated by a story posted by Preston entitled Preston's Story on an online media platform known as Protect Our Defenders. Preston was assigned to train Dahmer by the platoon sergeant and upon completion of Dahmer's training Preston will be sent to the board for promotion. However, while training their vehicle broke and as it was "towed to the train station" they had to wait and complete their regular field exercise (Preston). During that time frame from the units to the training camp, Preston has witnessed Dahmer using "racial epithets" and slurs (Preston). He (Preston) also mentions that Dahmer thought `` he was better than everybody else" (Preston).

Later in his story claims that during the period when he and Dahmer had been alone and isolated Dahmer assaulted him by keeping him under the influence of drugs but he was not sure to take action against Dahmer because he (Preston) was not fully conscious. He vaguely remembered the assault. However, he is sure of the fact that Dahmer was a "very racist individual" (Preston).

Even Dahmer's mother thought that race of the victim was an issue and he (Dahmer) was "actively thinking of race" when he chose his victims (Barnard 72). Alongside being African American most of Dahmer's victims were poor and vulnerable. This is why he could pick up victims from streets or gay pubs, lure them using money or alcohol, and later murder them. And he got away with the murders because most of his victims had a history of petty crimes and drugs. This had set up "institutional racism" among the class itself (Barnard 72).

According to Barnard racism was not only in Dahmer's mind but rather a part of the entire society back in the 90s and Dahmer's entire murder spree was fueled by that. In his confession to Pat Kennedy (Investigator of Dahmer's Case) he admitted to the fact that while killing, he felt the power and control over his victim. However, there was a certain incident that shows that not only Dahmer but many people of the 90's society promoted racism. This incident of Konarack Sinthasomaphon. Sinthasomaphon was a 14-year-old Laotian American child who was held captive, tortured, and later murdered by Dahmer. But at some point, he (Sinthasomaphon) ran away from the captivity of Dahmer and went to the Milwaukee police station but the police instead of investigating the scenario the Laotian boy was sided with the white serial killer who told them the boy was his 19-year-old lover and the gay couple had a brawl. And according to Jeffrey M. Jentzen, this insensitivity of the officer toward the minor community led to Dahmer's escape from the arrest and later "only added to the chaos of the disaster" that Dahmer has caused (Jentzen).

Putting Sinthasomaphon in the claws of Dahmer wasn't the last of the racialized activity from the Milwaukee police and officials. On several occasions during the trials, the families of the victims had reportedly been receiving disrespectful behavior from the court system, and Dahmer despite committing such horrendous crimes was treated with protection and was even offered cigarettes in his cell as if he was a victim himself. Things got so heated up that director Jeannetta Robinson of the social service agency had joined the complaint that was issued against the system for mistreating the victims' families. The complaint was entitled "the final atrocity" and Robinson joined in after she counseled the families of Dahmer's victims. She also pointed out the fact that there was only 1 black jury member out of 13 and the rest were white. She further argued that 2 jurors can be dismissed as alternates after that no one will be there to speak for the African American community and white people will not be able to understand the intense situations of the victims as they did not "go to bed" or got eaten up by Dahmer (Landsberg). The speculation about Dahmer being a racist, receiving unfair treatment, and the protest of the black community had escalated so much in that time, that defense lawyer Gerald Boyle had to indicate in his opening statement that Dahmer wasn't a racist and had an obsession with "body form, not a color" (Landsberg).

According to Barnard, it is hard to determine what drives Dahmer into killing so many people (homophobia or racism) because both these two communities were marginalized in the 90s. But the fact that Dahmer was a white male and "14 of the 17 victims" were men of color and the families of the victims were badly treated for being a part of the black community the case automatically gets "racially overdetermined" (Barnard 87).

B: De-Racialization of Dahmer in Chris James Thompson's Documentary

De-racialization of the Milwaukee serial killer was witnessed in the documentary by Chris James Thompson *The Files of Jeffrey Dahmer*. Dahmer in many narratives was described as a homophobic and a racist "Milwaukee Monster" (Montaldo, 2019). Thompson did not directly impose his thoughts about Dahmer on the audience but with small details in the re-enactment of the actual scenario, visuals, and the actual interview of his black neighbor Pamela Bass (where she talked about her relationship with Dahmer) he opened up this whole new area for people to re-think about Dahmer's activity and the racist tag put on him.

In the Re-enactment of the actual events that had happened back in the 90s, Thompson had indeed used many metaphors and symbols to introduce a new perspective to his audience regarding Dahmer's racist mind without altering the actual incidents too much. If one clearly observes the documentary from the beginning and has the intention of connecting the dots displayed by the re-enacted visuals they will find a clear answer that all the scenarios were carefully designed for people to have a glimpse at Dahmer's mind. The scenes were not merely chosen to display Dahmer and entertain the audience.

The documentary begins with a decent-looking man in his 30s looking for pet fishes in a pet shop where he is informed that if he fails to properly feed the gold fishes then the fishes will attack each other and the living goldfishes will feed on the dead ones. Here we kind of get a hint of cannibalism which Dahmer was accused of as the same species will be feeding off each other when put in desperate situations.

This scene was further elaborated when Dahmer went back home with his fishes. Firstly, the choice of the color of gold fishes is worth pointing out as one of the two fishes had a white

pattern and the other one had a dark pattern on the body. This choice of the fishes might actually reflect Dahmer and his choice of partners (men in color). Secondly, Dahmer puts the fishes in the fish tank in a very weird manner. In this very big fish tank, he keeps the fishes confined in a closed plastic bag. Dahmer was previously informed that if not fed properly the fishes will attack and devour one another and Dahmer keeping them confined in a plastic bag and smiling shows that he wanted the fishes to be hungry and attack each other. Thompson might have used the fishes as a representation of Jeffrey Dahmer and his partners. As far as I could decode, the director wanted to show that the fish tank is a vast society and Dahmer wanted to isolate his partner and himself from the society, and if the partners cannot feed their love for each other then one should kill the other (as described by the shopkeeper) and feed off each other.



Figure 2: Dahmer staring at the fishes.

The color choice of fishes is notable. As choosing the fishes according to Dahmer and his choice of men was not a coincidence. As mentioned in his paper *Micro Disasters: The Case of Serial Killer Jeffrey Dahmer*; written by the forensic expert of Dahmer's case Jeffrey M. Jentzen that Dahmer had a certain body type. From the autopsy findings and studying Dahmer's psychology, he concluded that "Dahmer had a fetish and desire for a certain body type" and his killings that were portrayed as a negative agenda towards the African American community was an assumption (2017, Jentzen). When things round-up around the type of Dahmer's victims then Jentzen (the forensic expert of Dahmer's case) has got a lot of evidence to support the psychological traits of Dahmer.

According to Jentzen, with time Dahmer had gotten more desperate and out of control which resulted in him getting caught. Most of Dahmer's victims were black people (who themselves did not have a good reputation for either being involved with drugs or petty crimes) and no one, nor the police nor their families were looking out for them much because of their association with crime. Such a choice of victims is the trait of an organized serial killer. Dahmer in other words was very calm, composed and vividly knew about his nefarious actions. Dahmer was calm and composed, has received harsh training in life (army training) he knew well where to pick up his victims from (gay bars), he kept souvenirs (like the genitals, skulls, and bones) and photographed the victim (taking polaroid pictures of the victim's body before, after and during different stages of dismembering) and had a well-planned storage system for either storing or disposing of the body.

All these traits point out Dahmer being an organized serial killer. For instance: if we compare Dahmer's traits with another organized serial killer of 1978 named Dennis Nilsen then the resemblance in the trait of their murders is uncanny. Nilsen had confessed to murdering 17

young men (no men of color but a certain type) and storing them under floor boards, burning them in bonfires dismembering them, and dumping them. Nilsen too was very calm and composed, served 11 years in British Army (points out at rough physical and mental training), picked up men from local gay bars, used to photograph and video record his victims, use to perform a special ritual with them by using talcum powder all over their bodies and stand by the mirror to watch their (victims) naked body. Nilsen was not charged with cannibalism but he was accused of necrophilia. Now, the reason the comparison of the two is presented is that this evidence acts as confirmation that both of them were organized serial killers as their traits match but this also confirms that organized serial killers have a fascination over a certain body type (for Nilsen it was young men and for Dahmer, it was African American male) and this has nothing to do with racism.

Thompson in his documentary tries to blame the loneliness, alcohol, and insecurity of being judged by the people as the society back then was in denial of homosexual people as the key reasons for Dahmer's action and not racism. On multiple accounts, throughout the documentary, Dahmer was shown lonely. For instance, there was this specific part where Dahmer was in a carnival at night sitting alone in a parking spot drinking beer and looking at the happy carnival from the opposite side of the net, while the rest of the world was enjoying themselves with their family and partners. This shows how lonely he was in the real world and was a prisoner in his own mind as he could not express his actual self to others. In all other accounts, he was spotted alone drinking beer and walking against the tide which in this case might represent that even if the rest of the world is moving in one direction Dahmer was moving in the other direction. He was "different" from the rest but alone.

Alcohol consumption was also shown throughout the documentary as Dahmer was seen buying alcohol and drinking beer multiple times. However, the one incident that struck me was when Dahmer went into a supermarket to buy some chemicals (muriatic acid). When he went to the shop initially he was playing video games. Moments before this visual was shown Thompson has shown the interview of Pat Kennedy (Dahmer's investigator) where he told that Dahmer believed that there was a higher power "god or the devil"; higher and more powerful than Dahmer. Also, Dahmer had a history with alcohol and Pat Kennedy thought that alcohol has something to do with Dahmer's grisly actions (Kennedy).

Now, the scene was organized like that, that Dahmer was playing video games like a child and after a while, he ended up buying 6 boxes of chemicals to commit the monstrosity. However, from this transition from playing video games and buying chemicals for criminal purposes, there was a scene where the shopkeeper was walking down an aisle of alcohol with a bottle of wine in his hand. In this case, Thompson was probably trying to show that Dahmer in the beginning was innocent but "the higher power" took him down the aisle of alcohol (which was the root cause of the devilry he has committed), and then after passing the aisle (consumption of alcohol), the innocent Dahmer had become this monster who was buying these chemicals to torture living people. This scene probably represents Dahmer's journey from being innocuous to a demon.

The insecurity of being homosexual at that time also plays a huge part in the making of the monster Dahmer was. Dahmer took one of his victims (an African American male) to a motel (ended up killing him there). However, when the receptionist asks Dahmer that does he want to book a room for 1 or 2 with hastily replies 2 because he didn't want to be judged by the

receptionist for being homosexual. Even in the ending Thompson has shown Dahmer being a lonely person as he sat at an isolated place drinking beer all alone.



Figure3: Dahmer in a carnival (all alone).

Other than that, to de-racialize Dahmer, Thompson has multiple times shown Dahmer in buses around black people, and nowhere it was shown that he used any sort of resentment of any type towards the community as Dahmer was always comfortable around them and never showed any disgust towards them. For example: in the scene shown below Dahmer calmly sat along with the two black men in the bus with a blue barrel and did not show any disgust towards them rather the men were confused and felt uncomfortable and were looking at him.



Figure 4: Dahmer sitting in the bus with black people

Another key aspect of de-racializing Dahmer in his documentary was Thompson deliberately interviewing Pamela Bass who was Dahmer's neighbor and a woman of color. In order to de-racialize Dahmer, Thompson wanted to show Dahmer's behavior towards her black neighbor and the friendship he had with her. According to Pamela Bass in her interview, she introduced that Jeffrey Dahmer was "kind-hearted and shared what he had" with others. It is to be noted that Dahmer was living in a Black neighborhood as the place was close to his work and was affordable (Bass). Bass quoted in her interview that Dahmer was "kinda friendly" but also "kinda introvert" but he always used to talk to bass and she befriended him due to his kindness (Bass). They became so good of friends that every other day they used to hang out in Dahmer's apartment and Dahmer used to give her little gifts (he gave her many things including a red couch). She too used to prepare food for Dahmer and used to give him snacks, sandwiches, etc. while he was rushing to work.



Figure 5: Pamela Bass talking about her relationship with Dahmer (00:10:01)

Bass addressed Jeffrey Dahmer as Jeff. It is a very common human trait that the person you feel comfortable with or is a good friend you address them with nicknames. This also shows that even after so many years in passing and knowing the monstrous truth about Dahmer, Bass considered him a person and not a monster by addressing him with his nickname. Pamela Bass also testifies that initially she never thought Dahmer has done anything and somebody has set him up. This is what Pamela Bass stated in the 2012 documentary "I can't believe he has done something to someone else. It can't be". She further stated that the only person Dahmer wanted to meet when put behind the bar was her but she was so angry with him at the moment for "using" her and doing such hideous crimes that she lost faith in friendship, lost her house (as it was demolished) and scarring her for life with his devilry that she denied to meet him. However, when she was serving her time in jail for breaking traffic rules she saw a news article where she learned that Dahmer was beaten to death by another prisoner; she cried. She cried like a baby and every other person rejoiced on the death of the "Milwaukee Monster " as she lost a friend and

that friend no matter what he did had a life and no one has the right to rejoice in his death. This type of relationship towards a black woman in a black neighborhood acts as evidence that Dahmer did not hate people of color and as stated earlier he had a desire for a certain body type of men of color and Thompson used these things to de-racialize Dahmer.

Even the detective grew a friendly relationship with Dahmer over the shortest period of time as they both addressed each other with nicknames and he admitted to feeling empathetic towards Dahmer. He closely saw Dahmer being afraid of being judged by others when he wanted his own cell upon arrest. While Dahmer was testifying the first thing he did before confessing his crimes was "Pat (Pat Kennedy the investigator) you will hate me after hearing this" (Kennedy, 2012). He feared being hated and judged. This further contributes to the claims that he wasn't a Racist but a human who was very afraid to come out about his actual desire with the dread of being criticized for being "different than others". Even Jentzen in his paper after constructing Dahmer's psychology stated that "frustration with his sexual immaturity and continual rejection... sadistic sexual behavior characteristic of the psychopathology of a serial killer" (Jentzen). All these shreds of evidence prove that Dahmer wasn't a racist but wanted to create the perfect partner by lobotomizing him from the fear of rejection and being judged and Thompson tactically used them as a tool for de-racializing Dahmer.

C: The Different Perceptions

Both Ian Barnard and Chris James Thompson had a very different points of view on Dahmer's case and have strong points about their claims. Here, I am mentioning and comparing both of their takes with evidence on Dahmer's case for my readers to clearly establish their opinion on whether Dahmer had a racialized mind or not. Ian Barnard clearly states in his paper

that he is not picking any sides but is just directing the two narratives that are out there for the cannibal serial killer. However, in his paper with all the evidence he has provided, it can be seen that he has somewhat sided with the fact with Dahmer is a racist, and many of his victims were tortured and killed purely out of hatred that has formed within him (Dahmer) because of his racialized mind. The mention of Curtis Straughter (one of Dahmer's victims) and his disparaging attitude towards white men is the point that should be noted. According to Straughter's friends and family, he could never indulge with a white man (like Dahmer) willingly because of his (Straughter) mindset, and Dahmer must have forcefully taken him in or must have drugged him previously. However, forcefully taking someone into his custody and avoiding the public eye back in the time was tough as there weren't many homosexual couples out in the public and if both Dahmer and Straughter had racial tension between one another then none of them would have surrendered easily.

Barnard further claims that Dahmer might have been lying the entire time about his racialized "murderous desires" and his agenda of "political correctness" (Barnard 72). However, every factual data on the case (even Pat Kennedy the investigator of the case) indicates that Dahmer had full devotion and cooperation in solving the case, identification of the victims, and never pleaded not guilty for what he has done; points out Dahmer's consciousness of stopping his monstrous deeds. Even in court the only time he spoke without interrogation was to apologize for his unforgivable actions and he hated no one whatever his actions were he is sorry for them and is relieved that he is being put behind the bars and a stop is put on his hideously gruesome murdering spree. Now the question arises why would someone who has confessed to everything he was accused of denying the fact that he was a racist? Barnard in his paper mentions that Dahmer's case was "whiteness in the arena" and the verdict was probably biased which can be

true in some accounts because only one out of the 13 jurors belong to the African American community and according to the court rule decisions of 2 jurors can be dismissed. Now, if the situation rose like Dahmer hasn't confessed to his crimes then the white jurors might have sided with him which could result in a never-ending vicious murderous cycle. This is because once in his murdering cycle Dahmer was very near to getting caught (when a 14-year-old Konarack Sinthasomaphon escaped and went to the police) but escaped because of his manipulating techniques and racialized mind of the officers who believed in white Dahmer and not the minor.

The behavior of the court system towards the victims of the families and Dahmer despite the accuser receiving special treatment (smoking in jail) fueled up the claim of Dahmer being a racist as he was the one who had chosen to dismember 14 men of color. It is easy to blame things on others in cases like Jeffrey Dahmer where "everybody was mad at somebody else" (Barnard 87). Barnard also accuses Dahmer of using racial slurs and demeaning people of color. The validity of this claim of Barnard comes from Preston. Preston was an individual who served the army and trained Dahmer. His story published in an online portal claimed that Dahmer was a "racist individual" and used bad words against black people whenever he was drunk. However, this story of Preston becomes equivocal when Pamela Bass talks about her friendship with Dahmer in the documentary. Jentzen has mentioned in his paper that Dahmer's case was a micro disaster and such a disaster can cause "long-lasting and crippling effects to a community or a nation" and blaming the wrong on someone might give the individuals some mental peace away from the trauma that Dahmer has caused (Jentzen).

Chris James Thompson had a different approach to Dahmer's racialized actions. In his documentary *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files*, he tried to give his audience a raw experience of Dahmer's mind which he tried to establish with the help of visuals, re-enacted scenes of the

actual events that might have taken place, and the interviews of those who closely knew Dahmer. The first thing that should be taken into consideration is Dahmer's neighbor Pamela Bass. As mentioned earlier in the paper Bass shared a dynamic equation with Dahmer and she never realized what Dahmer was doing in the apartment they used to hang out in until he was arrested for the accusations. To Bass Dahmer was introverted yet friendly and kind and she could never believe that there was this man-eating devious monster hidden behind the shell of a kind innocent-looking man. However, introducing Bass to the documentary was one of Thompson's de-racializing Dahmer techniques. Once the audience saw how Dahmer behaved with a black friend will automatically break the barrier of racialization he was accused of.

Another tool he used to de-radicalize Dahmer was the re-enacted scenes of the documentary. In the documentary, a particular scene was shown where Dahmer was stealing a male mannequin from a clothing store. But out of so many things why would Dahmer steal a (male) mannequin from the store? His mannequin probably represents Dahmer's preference for his partner. Yes, from the hands and feet visible in the scene it can be seen that the mannequin wasn't a man of color however, Dahmer had another quality he wanted to be there in his partner; docile and quiet so that he could gain full control over them. The mannequin was a thing that couldn't speak and oppose any of Dahmer's actions. This is exactly what he wanted to create by performing a lobotomy on his victims. Dahmer after being presented with the autopsy reports confessed to injecting different liquid mixtures in his victims' cranium so that he can brainwash the person and keep him alive in a "zombie-like" state; uncomplaining and totally submissive (Kennedy).



Figure 6: Dahmer stealing mannequin

Not once in the documentary's re-enacted scenarios or in the interviews of the close associates did the viewers get a glimpse of Dahmer's racialized mind. Because all shown in the documentary was Dahmer being quiet, "kind" and concerned about being judged. Even during the investigation and after the trial he was sorry for his deplorable activities (Bass). An interview of Dahmer posted by 'Insides Edition' features a conversation of Dahmer with a journalist. Upon being asked whether his actions were driven by racialized motives or not Dahmer answered that it was never driven by anything out of hatred but the fetish of having power over the "best looking young men" (Dahmer). There are other words in the interview that are worth noting as they support Thompson's take on de-racializing Dahmer. For instance; when the reporter asked Dahmer why he photographed his victims then he replied that he wanted to admire their bodies and remember "their physical beauty" (Dahmer). After being asked about cannibalism Dahmer answered that ate away the hearts and arm muscles to keep his partners alive in him. He wouldn't

use words like "best looking" men, "physical beauty" and making the victims a part of him in the interviews if he hated the African American community so much (Dahmer). His obsession over his partners won't go so much that he would carry the "mummified head" of the partner to work just to be close to forgetting the danger of being caught (Dahmer). Dahmer also mentions blacking out while beating his 2nd victim to death in a hotel room. Dahmer describes the event both in his interrogation and in his interview with Inside Edition. He says that he doesn't remember killing the man because he passed out and the next morning he woke up and saw the man dead beside him with severe bruises and a broken rib. These blackouts can be justified by Freudian psychoanalysis, that the action that happens in our subconscious mind can be forgotten after the sudden outburst of emotion passes away. This also justifies him not feeling any "empathy" or "remorse" towards his victims because he didn't and that is one of the traits possessed by all serial killers; the lack of "basic human emotion" (Schechter and Everitt, 69).

After analyzing the documentary *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files*, I strongly believe that Dahmer was not a racist. His evil deeds were all driven by the fetish he had towards the particular body type of African American men. White people always had a fascination and fetish toward black body type (whether they admit it or not.) For instance; Sarah Baartman. She was a woman of color and famous for exhibiting her (African American body) in a show named "Freak show" her body was paraded around the city under her stage name "Hottentot Venus" and "crowd was invited to look at her large buttocks" Parkinson. Even after she died in 1815, her performance continued for years as her organs, genitals, and skeleton were on display at the Paris museum till 1974. I am no one to judge Dahmer and whether his actions were racialized or not. But I believe in the factual evidence, re-enacted scenes, interviews, and statements that were presented in the documentary *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files*, by Dahmer himself, his lawyers,

investigators, and forensic experts (who were also featured in the interview). Dahmer's crimes were horrendous and have done unspeakable damage to hundreds and thousands of people. However, racism is a huge crime on its own. Combining it with Dahmer's actions doesn't make it any better. Rather, it acts as an escape path for all other racists out there. Directing a case in another direction is a very bad idea.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Jeffrey Dahmer was Milwaukee's most notorious man-eater and serial murderer. His actions were heinous, as he would lure men from gay bars with the promise of money, drink, or drugs, according to what they were interested in. To make them more likable, he would later subject them to horrific acts of torture, such as lobotomizing, performing ritualistic acts, dismembering, and stifling their cries. Dahmer was sentenced to 937 years in prison for the murder of 17 victims. As long as Dahmer was alive, he was seen as a racist. These actions inflamed racial tensions in Milwaukee. Dahmer, on the other hand, maintained that he was not a racist and never admitted to disliking people of color. Scholars like Ian Barnard have gathered enough information to refute his claim. Contrary to popular belief, researchers like Jeffrey M. Jentzen and filmmaker Chris James Thompson feel that Dahmer's motive for murdering persons of color was not racially motivated violence towards the black community as others have claimed.

In some ways, Chris James Thompson's documentary, *The Jeffrey Dahmer Files*, plays a significant role in de-racializing Dahmer, as it is based on interviews with people who were directly involved in the case and who had a lot to say about Dahmer's de-racialized mind, as well

as re-enactments of scenes that were discussed in my analysis, says the same that Dahmer's killing was not motivated by racial agenda.

What we'll learn in this paper by analyzing the documentary is that the re-enactment scenes, interviews, and facts are shown in the documentary that helped us comprehend Dahmer's thoughts were not racialized and how everything was structured in a way that de-racialized him. To understand Dahmer's actions, this paper examined how effective re-enactment can be in terms of understanding a real person and his actions.

My study will possibly help others to capture the hidden meaning of a media text which was not directly told by the filmmaker but is there for the audience to capture and analyze further.

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